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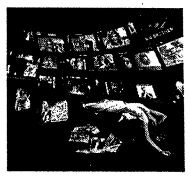

Article

Cultural studies and critical literacies

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Abstract

This article introduces a special issue on the topic of 'Cultural Studies and Critical Literacies'. The collection of articles is related to the central theme of the inaugural Summer Institute of the Association for Cultural Studies: to explore the implications of studying literacy by combining perspectives from cultural studies and (critical) literacy studies. Furthermore, with this issue we want to map current trends in cultural studies by sharing and extending some of the discussions that took place at the Institute with the larger cultural studies community. In this introductory article, we will start by revisiting some of the work done at the intersection of literacy studies and cultural studies to set the scene for our collection of articles that focuses on different contemporary 'uses' of literacy.

Keywords

critical literacies, cultural studies, (new) literacy studies

> [C]ultural studies has important implications for thinking about critical literacy …
>
> (Lawrence Grossberg, in Wright, 2000)

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The collection of articles in this special issue is drawn from the inaugural Summer Institute of the Association for Cultural Studies held in July 2011 at the Department of Educational Studies of Ghent University in Belgium. The theme of the Institute was 'Critical Literacies' and the aim was to explore the implications of studying literacy from a cultural studies perspective. The traditional notions of literacy have been challenged by developments such as digitization, globalization and multiculturalism. During the Summer Institute these challenges were questioned and discussed from a critical perspective, working at the intersection of cultural studies and education. The discussions during the Institute started from the expansion of the notion of a singular literacy to *multiliteracies* and focused on what this shift implies for media literacy, digital literacy, (cross-)cultural literacy, academic literacy, corporal literacy. The Institute aimed to provide an intensive, extensive and rewarding pedagogical experience for postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers who had the opportunity to spend the week discussing and learning from presentations, lectures, workshops and seminars delivered by keynote speakers and an international staff of leading cultural studies scholars from around the world. The Institute was held in the tradition of the Crossroads conference, bringing together participants from a wide range of disciplines to explore what it means to conduct cultural studies. There was participation from researchers and artists working in disciplines such as cultural studies, cultural anthropology, film studies, media studies, literary theory and criticism, discourse analysis, new literacy studies, educational studies and rhetorical criticism.

With this special issue we want to map current trends in cultural studies by sharing and extending some of the discussions that took place at the Institute with the larger cultural studies community. Therefore, we have collected three papers by keynote speakers at the Institute, one paper by faculty staff and one paper by a participant that offer discussions of research projects in relation to the overall theme of the Institute and this special issue. With the Institute as a 'pedagogical' project in general, and with this theme issue about critical literacies in particular, we hope to further the work on *cultural studies in/as education* (Maton and Wright, 2002; Wright and Maton, 2004) and *cultural studies of education* (Grossberg in Wright, 2000). In a previous special issue of the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Karl Maton and Handel Wright aimed not only to return the attention of cultural studies to education, 'but also to re-turn the focus of cultural studies to its own educational formations and contexts' (2002: 379). They referred to the fact that British cultural studies emerged 'in the heath of adult education' and that education was a prominent part of early cultural studies work conducted at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Maton and Wright (2002) problematized the way that cultural studies, for a long time, had largely 'neglected' its educational origins. Over the past two decades there has been a growing body of work on education and literacy in cultural studies (Buckingham and Sefton-Greene, 1994; Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2004; Giroux and Shannon, 1997; Hartley, 2011; Hartley et al., 2008; Maton and Wright, 2002; Wright and Maton, 2004). In this introductory article, we will start by revisiting some of the work done 'at the intersection' of education, literacy and cultural studies to set the scene for our collection of articles.

New literacy, new literacies and multiliteracies

New literacy studies focuses on literacy as an engagement with language in specific educational contexts (Gee, 1996; Graff, 2003; Lankshear, 1997; Lea and Street, 1998; Willinsky, 1990). From this perspective, literacy acquisition is approached as a process of socialization situated in the context of the power structures of society and institutions. This led to myriad studies on the situated nature of literacy inside and outside of educational institutions from sociological (Barton and Hamilton, 1998), ethnographic (Lillis and Scott, 2007) and linguistic (Hyland, 2005) perspectives. Situating literacy in the context of the power structures of society and institutions raises important questions: Whose literacies are dominant? Why are some literacies marginalized? What should we teach our students? What exactly do we mean by *we*? The concept of literacy inevitably implies a focus on how human beings use symbols to construct and negotiate meaning. This leads to the major question:

> How have we been shaped by the words we use and encounter? If language use is one social force constructing us ('symbolic action' as Kenneth Burke … argued), how can we use and teach oppositional discourses so as to remake ourselves and our culture? (Shor, 1999: §2)

A critical perspective on literacy therefore implies an important shift:

> *literacy* is understood as social action through language use that develops us as agents inside larger culture, while *critical literacy* is understood as 'part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations'… (Shor, 1999: §3)

The notion of literacy has also been challenged by technological developments, which urge us to continuously revisit our assumptions about literacy and what it implies to add the adjective 'critical' to it. Traditional approaches to literacy are increasingly challenged both by technological developments and by its 'situatedness' within power structures. In *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourse*, James Gee (1996) described literacy as a whole way of being in the world. People have to learn to use different kinds of literacies in society and so become members of different language and discourse communities. From this perspective, literacy is said to be *constructed* or *negotiated* in interactions that are framed in cultural models or schemes. The work of Gee and others is referred to as the 'social turn' within literacy studies whereby literacy is no longer described as a neutral and individual cognitive or technical skill, but rather as a 'socially situated practice'.

With the concept of *multiliteracies* the New London Group (1996) aimed to connect technological developments with the 'social turn' in literacy studies, emphasizing not only a multitude of cultures, but also a multitude of text forms and discourses. Indeed, since the beginning of the 1990s there has been an increased problematization of 'autonomous' thinking about literacy and a growing focus on myriad different literacy practices that led to many publications that have added the plural 'literacies' to their titles (Gee, 1996; Lankshear, 1997; Street, 1995). In an effort to address the question of 'where we are' and 'how we got there' in literacy studies, Gee (2010) summarizes *new literacy studies* as the 'endeavor that proposed to study literacy as a sociocultural achievement', *new literacies studies* as an 'area that studies new "literacies" – new types of literacy beyond print literacy', and *new media literacy studies* as 'an area related to an older concern with media literacy regarding the ways in which people give meaning and get meaning from various media' (Gee, 2010: 9). All these developments gave rise to a whole lexicon of new terms within literacy research: situated literacies (Barton et al., 2000), city literacies

(Gregory and Williams, 2000), global literacies (Hawiser and Selfe, 2000), multicultural literacies (Taylor and Hoechsmann, 2012), silicon literacies (Snyder, 2002), hip-hop literacies (Richardson, 2006), etc.

Cultural studies and the 'uses' of literacy

Although new literacy studies and cultural studies seem to be two distinct academic communities, there was an important relationship between the study of literacy and the emergence of cultural studies in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, with a focus on the importance of popular and everyday culture and a critical perspective on elitist culture. Richard Hoggart, the first director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, has been described as a 'theorist' of literacy and as a founder of cultural studies (Hartley, 2011: 38). Specifically his work *The Uses of Literacy* caused an important shift in thinking about literacy by focusing on 'what ordinary people did with it as part of everyday culture, rather than as an instrumental skill for business, civic or religious purposes' (Hartley, 2011: 2). Hoggart argued that there are *other ways of being in the world*, thereby moving away from the assumption that the tastes of intellectuals are necessarily a standard for everyone else. Hoggart thus defined critical literacy as 'a form of popular engagement with popular media' (Hartley, 2011: 4). This implied that 'anyone motivated by the desire to promote "critical" literacy and intellectual emancipation for all had better come to terms with ... the means people use to express themselves as well as the media they like' (Hartley, 2011: 4). This perspective was not *anti*-intellectual per se, but emphasized that there are 'other' ways of coming to wisdom. Furthermore, at the root of this perspective is the belief that 'popular culture can be self-correcting, whether in taste-formation, political progressivism or the emancipation of the imagination' (Hartley, 2011: 8).

As Alvermann (2011) clearly shows, there has been a growing body of work that can be situated at the intersection of literacy studies and cultural studies. In the last decade of the 20th century educational researchers started from earlier work in cultural studies that focused on audiences and their everyday uses of popular culture to explore young people's literacy by studying the intersections between popular culture and pedagogy (e.g. Alvermann et al., 1999; Beavis, 1998; Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994; Moje, 2000). This was elaborated upon at the beginning of the 21st century by studies of young people's uses of digital technologies (e.g. Ito and Okabe, 2005; Merchant, 2001; Squire, 2008). Indeed, 'a proliferation of popular culture texts available in different formats across multiple media platforms, and a new literacies perspective on theorizing reading and writing as social practices, have linked the research on popular culture and literacy' (Alvermann, 2011: 548).

It is clear that both cultural studies and new literacy studies focus on the complexity of our contemporary society and teach us that culture and literacy have exploded into many different *high* and *low* cultural practices that are all worth studying, precisely by problematizing the distinction between *high* and *low* (for an overview see Soetaert et al., 2004; Verdoodt, 2004; Verdoodt et al., 2010; for an extended discussion about cultural studies and critical literacies see Luke et al., 2004; Niall, 2008). Cultural studies and new literacy studies confronted us with a more pluralistic, democratic definition of cultural literacy, and emphasized that culture is 'ordinary' and a 'whole way of life' (Rodman, 2010; Williams, 1993 [1958]). The New London Group (1996) criticized the idea that literacy often only refers to reading and writing (with the book as the most important medium) and introduced the concept of *multiliteracies* to refer to different kinds of literacies related to different kinds of contexts, media and networks. Hoggart's work on the 'uses' of literacy can be related to the concept of literacy as a tool: to participate in a specific interpretive community we need a particular literacy or an *identity toolkit*. This metaphor implies we also have to pay attention to the *cultural tools* (signs, symbols, artifacts) by and through which we create meaning (Vygotsky in Wertsch, 1998). With this special issue we aim to revisit what we can learn from cultural studies about different contemporary uses of the tools of literacy. In what follows we will introduce the different contributions in this issue starting from the different possible *uses* of literacy that they explore.

The *uses* of media literacies

In her contribution to this special issue, Joke Hermes approaches the concept of critical literacies by stressing the importance of *affect* for studying and assessing media literacy, and she elaborates on what this can imply for revisiting audience studies as a major methodology within cultural media studies and literacy studies. Indeed, exploring critical literacies from the perspective of cultural studies also raises important methodological issues. Joke Hermes argues that audience studies is no longer the vibrant research field it was in its 1980s and early 1990s heyday. When it comes to the media, cultural studies as a whole has a more balanced interest in production, audiences and texts. Hermes claims that audience studies still has to bear the older insult that they are a populist field that celebrates rather than interrogates everyday media culture, and she wonders if critical literacy can be a framework for re-establishing the critical credibility of audience studies or if it would burden this field with its implied notions of standards, distinction and cultural exclusion. From the perspective of audience studies she thus tackles the question of whether (critical) literacy could be the concept to reconnect audience studies to critical media studies, and help it move away out of its current more descriptive zone and counter the not-altogether-true but influential reproach that audience studies tends to uncritically celebrate popular culture rather than take a critical position in relation to everyday media culture. Her contribution discusses recent work with youth audiences to inquire into the possibilities of using critical literacy and to 'slay the dragon of populism'. Joke Hermes makes a strong case for accepting the domain of affect, merging appreciation and criticism, and embedding critical literacy in cultural studies' ongoing interest in the construction of (cultural) citizenship.

As stated above, Richard Hoggart argued that 'critical' literacy should be a form of popular engagement with popular media. Hartley et al. (2008: 63), however, claim that currently 'critical literacy' with regards to media is 'not imagined as learning how to navigate the networks and gain mastery of these applications. It is, instead, a kind of 'ideology watch'". However, it is imperative that 'critical' should not always focus on the 'bad' or 'ideological' aspects of media in relation to literacy and schooling. Hermes argues that whereas literacy should be a tool that affords the reader and the television viewer real added pleasure, it is often misunderstood as a means to shield oneself from the possible contempt of others for being uncritical or dim-witted when it comes to the

media. She claims, however, that an audience researcher needs to understand literacy and the meaning of media texts across context, as lived and used in a highly diverse set of groups, communities and contexts. Only then will audience research be able to come to new insights and theorization of how meaning, power and pleasure produce us as a certain type of recipient or subject that, in turn, uses both *affective* and *analytical* means to create itself under conditions that are not of our own making.

The *uses* of digital literacies

Whereas Joke Hermes grounds her discussion in traditional audience studies and focuses on the 'old living room television set' – thereby making a case for television as a 'mattering medium' – there is also a need to focus also on the fact that the decentralized media landscape has increasingly become a participatory *convergence culture*. This convergence culture is defined by Jenkins as 'the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want' (2006: 2). Indeed, we need to turn our focus to the uses of *digital* literacies:

> with the popularization of online media in affluent economies, we need to extend the notion of 'media literacy' beyond the defensive notion of 'critical reading' and 'media literacy' as taught in schools, towards what ought to be called 'digital literacy' – a form of hands-on productive expression, taught by and within the milieu in which it is deployed, using multi-platform devices to 'write' as well as 'read' electronic media. (Hartley, 2011: 21)

This implies that the 'Hoggart question' for the era of the internet should also focus on the cultural and non-instrumental uses of multimedia and digital literacy.

One important consequence of the emerging convergence culture and decentralized media landscape is that the increased cutting, pasting and re-mixing of information and content problematizes traditional conceptions of intellectual properties. In their contribution, John Willinsky and Johanne Provençal state that the realm of *intellectual property* typically is absent from considerations of critical literacy for the 'new information age', and argue that it is vital for a concept of intellectual property to be included in approaches to critical literacy, where it has otherwise been largely absent. Furthermore, they argue that intellectual property rights have become increasingly crucial to issues of access to knowledge today. In particular, they state, critical literacy should be a place where such *rights to know* come under scrutiny, with a focus on how those rights are associated with learning (and teaching).

Taking a historical perspective on literacy and learning into account, Willinsky and Provençal consider two examples from the medieval and monastic formation of intellectual property in the West to demonstrate how a cultural history of the concept of intellectual properties can illustrate the special and distinct status of learning in the production and circulation of intellectual properties. They argue that if we are to appreciate why we might expect a certain class of intellectual property, closely associated with the production of knowledge in institutions such as universities, then we need to appreciate how this

sense of public good has long been a part of the educational history of the West. Specifically, they focus on the role of two 8th-century monastics, Bede (at the twin monasteries of Wearmouth-Jarrow) and Alcuin of York (in the court of Charlemagne and as abbot at Tours). These cases are considered as historical precedents for an opening up of literacy and learning that is relevant to concerns in our contemporary digital era. Willinsky and Provençal claim that the transformation of reading and producing texts in medieval monasteries provides both parallels and insights for understanding how digital realities and possibilities, such as *open access* to research and the formation of *Wikipedia* and carry forward long-established tensions between an opening up of literacy (and learning) and a cloistered literacy (and learning) that is placed at a remove from the world.

The new digital convergence culture – often situated in 'popular' uses of media – also has important consequences for the production of knowledge in institutions such as universities. One of the important sources for knowledge production within universities still is offered by PhD research and its related dissertation. In her contribution, Janneke Adema – one of the Institute's participant-attendees – explores how a cultural studies perspective can be used to critically analyse practices of conducting research within the (digital) humanities. She uses the case study of a PhD dissertation currently in process, which is set up as both a theoretical and practical intervention into existing discourses surrounding the dominant form of formal communication within the humanities: the scholarly monograph. Adema discusses the methodology of *critical praxis* as an integral part of the research project, as well as an important step in developing academic or research literacy through actively engaging in the production of communicative norms and practices.

Envisioning the book as a site of struggle over new forms and systems of communication within academia, Adema argues for alternative ways of approaching the traditional monograph in an experimental manner. By making use of digital platforms, tools and (social) media (WordPress, Zotero, Twitter, Mediawiki, Sophie) to share, remix and update the research as it evolves, her aim is to develop a digital, open and collaborative research practice, offering a practical critique of the dominant structures and practices of producing, distributing and governing research results. She thus argues for the empowering potential of both critically analysing and actively engaging with the dominant norms underlying communication in the humanities, and with the structures that make up and determine academic literacy and the established and accepted practices herein. By arguing for a potential new future for scholarly communication based on accessibility, sharing, process and change, Adema makes a case for new ways of engaging a critical praxis that is more speculatory, open-ended and experimental.

The *uses* of cultural literacies

During the past few decades we have seen a growing interest in popular culture in education and literacy studies. In their contribution Kris Rutten and An van Dienderen address the concept of *critical literacies* by analysing how symbolic representations within subcultures can be understood as an engagement with specific literacy practices. For some time now, cultural studies researchers with an interest in literacy have depended upon ethnographic methods to document how members of subcultural communities mobilize

literacy practices to achieve critical ends (Cintron, 1998; Mahiri, 1998; Moje, 2000). But the extent to which ethnography actually grants researchers access to subcultural perspectives on literacy has come into question. At the same time, literacy studies researchers with an interest in culture have increasingly turned to (popular) literacy narratives – novels, plays and films – for critically assessing or engaging with the *myths* or *templates* about literacy that circulate in (popular) culture at large. From an ethnographic perspective, these literacy narratives are often approached as stories that document 'rites de passage', as individuals discover and embrace particular cultural identities and reject others.

In their article, Rutten and van. Dienderen aim to problematize and thematize the ethnographic perspective on literacy in general, and subculture as a situated literacy practice in particular, by critically assessing contemporary art practices that focus on the representation of subcultural identities. With this contribution they aim to further the work within literacy studies that takes the 'detour of culture' to critically assess the situated nature of literacy practices. As Mortensen (2012) convincingly argues, there is 'a tendency in literacy studies – call it a disciplinary "disposition" or "attitude" – to claim ownership of the question: Does literacy have consequences, and if so, what are they?' They concur that 'there is nothing intrinsically bad about asserting disciplinary expertise ... except when we fail to see that others outside of [these] disciplinary and institutional spaces are also engaged in discerning, even theorizing, what literacy is and what it does'. Rutten and van. Dienderen explore how the 'ethnographic turn in contemporary art' helps to 'denaturalize and make strange what [we] have learned and mastered' – which is the New London Group's (1996: 86) programmatic statement for literacy studies – but at the same time they underscore the necessity to focus on the power and politics of these representational practices. Specifically, they explore the particularities of what an ethnographic perspective might entail (or not) for studying literacy in relation to art practices by focusing on the work of contemporary artist Nikki S. Lee.

The *uses* of academic literacies

As stated at the outset, the aim of this special issue is to introduce literacy as an engagement within specific contexts of human practice, thereby situating literacy in the context of the power structures of society and institutions. This implies that we also need to critically assess the institutionalization of cultural studies as a discipline in relation to (radically) different contexts. In their work on the educational contexts in which cultural studies has been developing, Wright and Maton (2004) state that institutionalization can be seen both as an opportunity and as a problem. It is an opportunity because, as part of an institutional context, the work being done in 'the name' of cultural studies can become more visible and can also create and legitimize the necessary resources for 'doing' cultural studies work. However, this institutionalization also has the danger of limiting the scope of what 'doing' cultural studies implies. The question is – in short – 'can cultural studies change education from within or will being within education change cultural studies? Can cultural studies really be ... an institutional revolutionary?' (Maton and Wright, 2002: 386).

Problematizing that cultural studies is institutionalized largely as a western discipline, Tomaselli and Mboti take a critical stance in their contribution to explore how 'doing'

cultural studies can be revisited as an engagement in a vocation or a practice, arguing that *knowing how* is conceptually distinct from *knowing that*. By confronting the work of cultural studies within the African context, Tomaselli and Mboti raise the following questions: How does cultural studies travel, and in what ways is it, in its application, literate or illiterate? What is the nature of this (il)literacy? What does 'the post' mean in non-western societies, where development periodizations are scrambled caricatures of overlapping and simultaneous pre-modernity, modernity and postmodernity? What kinds of relevance does cultural studies have in these kinds of contexts? What happens when northern scholars traipse around Africa force-feeding/force-doing Africans their imported theories? Why are Africans exported to study in the North expected to study Africa from Euro perspectives, rather than casting an African's eye on Europeans themselves? Why do *They* get to study us, but we don't get to study *Them*? Who are the unusuals in this world?

Tomaselli and Mboti thus question whether the 'perspective' of cultural studies itself is a literate or an illiterate framework for generating knowledge about very pressing social problems and they argue that cultural studies should be 'doing' more than laying claim to all sorts of things. For Tomaselli and Mboti, cultural studies should embrace both theorizing *and* performative acts, and they make a claim for cultural studies to be 'messy': researchers need to get dirty and not be afraid to mess their well-manicured theories in their efforts to address Africa's problems. By engaging with debates about cultural studies' relevance for non-western societies, Tomaselli and Mboti add another layer to the notion of 'critical' literacies and call into question the status quo. They offer an an international version of the cultural and educational divide Jonathan Kozol (1991) referred to as constituting 'savage inequalities'. From this perspective, critical literacy can be an important pedagogy for those who are morally disturbed by these 'savage inequalities' and for those who wish to act against the violence of imposed hierarchy and forced hunger (Shor, 1999: §19).

Cultural studies and critical literacies

What did we learn from cultural studies about education in general and literacy in particular? As Soetaert et al. (2004: 157) argue: 'Probably that cultural memory is always mediated in representation as delegation or as description.' On the one hand we are confronted with the question of 'who has the right to represent whom in instances in which it is considered necessary to delegate to a reduced number of "representers" the voice and power of decision of an entire group' (da Silva, 1999: 9). On the other hand we need to address the question of 'how different cultural and social groups are portrayed in the different forms of cultural inscription: in the discourse and images through which a culture represents the social world' (da Silva, 1999: 9). Both questions are necessarily related:

> Those who are delegated to speak and act in name of an other (representation as delegation) govern, in a way, the process of presentation and description of the other (representation as description). He who speaks for the other controls the forms of speaking about the other. (da Silva, 1999: 9)

In our view, cultural studies and new literacy studies make a plea for the fact that literacy and its related educational practices ought to reflect the pluralistic nature of culture and society. From an educational perspective, discussions about what should be on the curriculum or should be taught can be represented as a series of interactions between diverse cultures and through a series of 'border contacts' between, for example western and non-western culture, elitist ('high') and popular ('low') culture, textual and audio-visual culture. Such a pedagogical perspective should be an essential ingredient of our teaching because it makes us conscious of not only *what* and *how* we teach but also *why*. Richard Hoggart argued that critical literacy ought to be 'emancipationist, to allow for independent thought and participation', which implies that 'critical' popular readers might turn into activists or novelists. In an era in which 'participation' is an inherent feature of literacy itself, Hartley argues that it might be necessary to ask even more ambitious questions than those posed by the desire to educate a 'critically' literate population. For Hartley (2011: 38), the contemporary uses of Richard Hoggart urge us to investigate what ought to be hoped for in the currently unfolding phase, with its 'subsequent acceleration of celebrity culture, the "economy of attention" (Lanham, 2006) and peer-to-peer or DIY creative content-creation using digital technologies'.

Indeed, Lanham described the new economy that defies standard economic analysis not only as an information-based economy but as an *attention economy*. If we describe economics as the study of the allocation of scarce resources, we should become aware that the concept *information economy* is problematic because the growing availability of information on a variety of media platforms, creates a new scarcity. In the new economy of attention, the manipulation of attention is a basic skill. This, of course, also implies a critical engagement with, as well as on behalf of these *attention structures*. Lanham (2006: 26) states that 'in a world where stuff, and what we think about stuff are often at odds', education should make you comfortable with a bi-stable grasp of the world. A world, indeed, 'that is confronted with political, economical and religious differences on a global scale' (Zappen, 2009: 297). This could be an important contribution from cultural studies for education and for exploring contemporary uses of literacy, making teachers, pupils (and citizens) comfortable with such a bi-stable grasp on the world. As Grossberg argues, 'maybe cultural studies would teach the teachers not to assume any simple distinction between high and popular culture, and not to take for granted their own economy of value judgements' (in Wright, 2000: 24). He also claims that cultural studies might teach teachers that popular culture is the organization of power within a whole way of life rather than a set of aesthetic objects, and that it would teach them that the search for effect is always a more difficult path to follow than the one they might have imagined.

Exploring the educational perspective in and of cultural studies, Giroux (1999) introduced the notion of border pedagogies that:

> demonstrate the importance of a multicentric perspective that allows teachers, cultural workers, and students to not only recognize the multilayered and contradictory ideologies that construct their own identities but to also analyze how the differences within and between various groups can expand the potential of human life and democratic possibilities. (Giroux, 1999: 175)

Soetaert et al. (2004) linked the concept of borderland with a central concept introduced by M.L. Pratt from the perspective of critical literacies: the contact zone. Pratt (1991) argues that the contact zone can be a space to break down the marginalization of the non-dominant literacy/culture as a space where 'cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other'. The contact zone could be close to the 'Third Space' of Homi Bhabha: a space for 'enunciation of cultural difference' (Bhabha, 1995: 206). Whether conceptualized as contact zones, a third space or the borderland, in such zones we can problematize and thematize our representations and redefine our objects of study. The aim of the ACS Summer Institute was indeed to create such a contact zone by bringing different disciplinary perspectives together to problematize contemporary 'uses' of a range of different 'literacies'. Our hope is that the Institute can keep evolving and developing in the future as a contact zone, as an experiment with and an exercise in cultural studies *praxis*.

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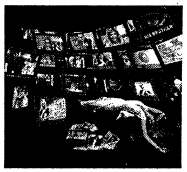

Article

Sleeping with the enemy: Audience studies and critical literacy

Joke Hermes
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Abstract
Audience studies is not the vibrant field it was in its 1980s and early 1990s heyday. Cultural studies today has a more balanced interest in production, audiences and texts. A renewed focus in audience studies on everyday meaning production, identity and relations of power could benefit from recent developments. Theorization of power especially has benefited from recent work on governmentality. In accord with recent work on 'affect', there is an opportunity for renewed vitality and urgency. Was audience studies damaged beyond repair by the charge that it is a populist field that celebrates rather than interrogates everyday media culture? Could a concept such as cultural literacy provide a bridge to help re-establish the critical credibility of audience studies or would it burden this field with its implied notions of standards, distinction and cultural exclusion? The article discusses recent work with youth audiences to inquire into the possibilities of 'critical literacy'. It proposes taking up questions and insights raised by affect theory, to merge appreciation, criticism and understanding of the forces that drive (the possibility of) change, and to embed critical literacy in cultural studies' ongoing interest in the construction of (cultural) citizenship.

Keywords
affect, audience studies, citizenship, critical literacy, media literacy, populism

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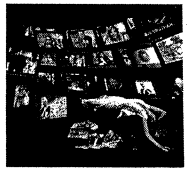

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