

CULTURAL STUDIES/PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE:  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY, PEDAGOGY AND CULTURAL CRITIQUE

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I've just finished reading Ian Hunter's new book Rethinking the school: Subjectivity, bureaucracy, criticism  
IanHunter, Rethinking the school: Subjectivity, bureaucracy, criticism. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994.

Hunter's essay is certainly provocative. Focussing on liberal and Marxist dialectical theory, the two principled positions critical intellectuals have brought to bear on the school system, Hunter argues that we have come to a "crisis" of critical authority in education. Educational critique, whether liberal or Marxist, has had little discernible impact on thought about, or the reform of, education throughout its development in Western societies, he claims. According to Hunter, both positions are underpinned by the same image, that of the self<sup>™</sup>reflecting, self@realizing moral agent ("the completely developed person") and critical intellectuals operating from either principled position can't come close to educational reality. They always come up with a "gap" @ that is, the school system always "fails" to measure up to their ideals such as democracy and equality. Hunter deploys Foucauldian "genealogy" ("more fertile plains", he thinks, than the "thin air" of "pure" theory [p.17,18]) to make the argument that, in the historical conditions in which the Western school system came into existence, the ideal of "the complete development of the person" was not part of the story and that the school ought not be measured against what it was never intended to be (or, in Hunter's words, what we should be on about is describing "the church not as a failed cathedral but as a church" [p.3]).

However, Hunter's argument goes, if the game of "pure theory" has had little impact on the education system, it nevertheless has had the effect of locating "the critical intellectual" in a prestigious position through the moral authority of his/her "principled insight". The "radical educator" enters Hunter's narrative at this point as an instance of the critical intellectual working within Marxist critical theory and engaged in a "dialectical pedagogy" founded in principled positions such as "democratic freedom" and "emancipatory authority". He claims that, while we don't have a "frank genealogy" of the radical educator (is he suggesting some dishonesty here?), this figure "seems to be the product of no definite social organization and no particular history".

But Hunter hasn't looked very far. From a very selective reading of Giroux's work and little reference to other work in the field, including feminist and "antiracist" pedagogy, lesbian and gay work, or the work of Raymond Williams and Paulo Freire in adult education in very different historical and cultural contexts, Hunter concludes that "the genealogy" of "the radical educator" lies, not within Marxism, but with the pastoral teacher of the C19. Her "characteristic attributes" are "the pastoral confidant" and the "oppositional intellectual" (p.79). Her game is Christianity's "shepherd@flock game" with its distinctive articulation of surveillance and self@examination. Citing two examples, Hunter reduces critical pedagogy to a "two@stage pedagogy". In the first, he represents the '60's progressive English teacher as someone who

got his kids to engage in self@expression and then self@correction.

And second, he misrepresents what Giroux has called a "political, theoretical self analyzing practice" through which the subject rearticulates his/her position in social reality, by renaming this an "introspective exercise, through which students learn to problematize themselves." (p.79) "On the one hand," Hunter writes, "this pedagogy requires teachers to open the classroom to 'student experience', to establish the freedom and intimacy necessary for students to open up and be themselves" and, on the other hand, having "succeeded in eliciting the student's true identity, it is the teacher's task to manage a process of self@problematization and transformation, through the introduction of norms that students are disposed to accept as coming from within" (p.80). This allows teachers to correct instances of moral "incompetence" such as racism or sexism. Note Hunter's use of the term 'competency' in relation to morality. In Australia, the right wing competency movement claims the possibility of "cultural competency". What this means is another question. But, Hunter asks, do radical educators who attempt "to correct", say, a sexist act, do so in a democratic manner, or, is it "nothing less than an exercise of pedagogical discipline by a specially trained cadre of moral professionals"? (p.26) If this is the case, then "transformative intellectuals" may be acting in a "dangerously self@deluding" manner and "drifting into moral grandiloquence and political fantasy" (p.30)

He concludes that there's no difference between "today's radical pedagogy" ("today's" being the '60's or the '90's) and that of C19 pastoral technicians. Intimate student@teacher relations and the moral surveillance of "apprentice citizens" lie at the heart of each. Hunter's resolution of the problem is that we must free ourselves of the "spell of educational principle", and, in

particular, the spell of the self-reflective and self-realising subject.

While there are important points made in Hunter's critique and one's which I agree with I think he's right, for instance, to point to a "crisis" of critical authority in education (my summation not his), he's right to argue that there's not much difference between the liberal and Marxist positions (though this insight is hardly new), and he's also right to point to the vacuous philosophical notion of critical self-reflection that so much education thinking turns on in this country I nevertheless, I don't think Hunter has adequately represented the "crisis" of critical authority in education. His modernist theoretical allegiances are too evident. Talk of a "gap" between theory and practice (which presumably has to be closed) smacks of old worn-out debates of the '70's and '80's. His gesture towards unprincipled critique in order to "develop a far more pluralistic and supple bearing towards the ethical and organizational reality of the school" (p.164) is, I believe, insufficiently informed by contemporary feminist and cultural critiques around 'the political', 'positions' and difference (Hunter's 'plurality'). Indeed, urging us to overcome "the spell of principle" in order to treat the school "for what it is" not for what we'd like it to be seems not only to be a return to modernist ideas of representation ('telling it like it is') but also a potentially de-politicizing (read 'conservative') move. And, in the context of this paper, I especially want to point to what I believe is Hunter's serious misrepresentation of radical pedagogy.

I want to suggest that his overall metaphor of pastoral pedagogy and his idea of a two-step pedagogy are both reductive and naive. Moreover, in relation to radical pedagogy, it seems Hunter has fallen into his own trap, the practice of abstraction and "world flight" of which he has accused every other critical intellectual. To be sure, what we do need in relation to critical pedagogies is more of "the real". We need more detailed accounts of its current practices in various contexts (e.g. adult and tertiary education in different subject areas) and we need continuing analyses of its contemporary articulation with Cultural studies. Hunter hasn't delivered us this.

#### CULTURAL STUDIES / PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

The discourses and practices of critical pedagogy are undergoing change and in the contemporary post-colonial Australian scene there are exciting new possibilities for practical-theoretical work. A recent development is the rearticulation of Cultural studies and pedagogical practice. For the most part no link has been made in the proliferation of Cultural studies publications over the last few years between Cultural studies and pedagogical practice. For

instance, in the large collection Cultural Studies (Grossberg, Nelson & Treichler, Routledge, 1992), there is no attention to this relationship that I can find apart from brief comments made by bell hooks and a reference to Carolyn Steedman's remark that what was missing in the accounts of the history of "British" cultural studies was how it had been shaped by teachers and taught as much as by theoretical questions. Lorraine Johnson@Riordan, Cultural Studies/ Pedagogical Practice. Unpublished Phd dissertation, City University of New York, 1993.

And at the same time, while Cultural Studies is well established in specific sites and in particular tertiary institutions in Australia (for instance, in communications, media and literary studies), and while there continues to be a lot of debate about Cultural Studies (for example, in the Higher Education Supplement in The Australian. See, for example, Keith Windshuttle, "History must prevail against challenge of Cultural Studies", The Australian, Higher Education Supplement, Wednesday, November 23, 1994, pp.32,33. and in journals like Arena. See, for instance, Arena Magazine, no.9, Feb/March, 1994, pp.12,13, there seems to have been little interest in education circles in the Cultural Studies movement generally, or, specifically, in bringing together Cultural studies and pedagogy and Education studies/research and Cultural studies. However, Raymond Williams continues to haunt Cultural studies work and in a couple of recent publications, and in the book I'm working on, there is, I think, an exciting recoupling of Cultural studies and pedagogy which, in turn, has implications for revisioning Education research/studies, the theme of this conference. I'll make reference to one of these: Larry Grossberg's introduction to Between Borders, "Bringin' It All Back Home @ Pedagogy and Cultural Studies".

Lawrence Grossberg, "Introduction: Bringin' It All Back Home @ Pedagogy and Cultural Studies" in Henry A. Giroux & Peter McLaren (eds) Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies. New York & London: Routledge, 1994. Grossberg argues that pedagogy is "one of the most pressing, promising, and paradoxical sites of cultural studies to have emerged recently" (p.2). He recalls Raymond Williams first made the connection when teaching adult education ("that notably

unprivileged sector"). According to Williams Raymond Williams, "The Future of Cultural Studies" in Raymond Williams, The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists. London: Verso, 1989., the idea of Cultural Studies began in education and, specifically, in adult working™class courses/classrooms rather than in the University. It's easy enough to make a link here with Freire's critical pedagogy in the

Brazilian context. But what interested Williams was the possibility of a confrontation between students' knowledges (and Williams was particularly interested in "world" travelling students with whom he identified) and the knowledge of the disciplines and the consequent necessity to move beyond disciplinary boundaries. And he also raised the question of the importance of Cultural Studies in a particular "educational conjuncture" (p.3). A particular formation produced different definitions of the Cultural Studies project.

This I'll return to later. Crossingover between Cultural Studies and pedagogy, Grossberg comes up with a "pedagogy of articulation" which, amongst other things, refuses to assume the world can be known in advance, does not demand conformity with Marxist ideas of liberation or resistance (but makes more modest claims) and begins with the formations of "the popular" in which students are located rather than with textbooks. The teacher is not the ethical model of authority but it is here that critical pedagogical practice "is inevitably transformed from a reflective and distant relation to both the subjects and objects of our authority to an active and passionate articulation". (p.19; my emphasis)

#### CULTURAL STUDIES /PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE IN POSTCOLONIAL TIMES

This year I've been working at the conjuncture of Communication studies, Cultural studies and education. The transmission model of communication and of teaching is, of course, alive and well in the Information age. But, at the same time, the articulation of culture and communication, of Cultural studies and Communication studies has provided a strong counter@attack and I'm arguing that similar links must be made with some urgency in education theory, research and teacher training. This means acknowledging that information is not the same as knowledge, that teaching has to do with the politics of representation, and that, as teachers, we bring our own "readings" into the classroom, and the specificities of our identities to bear on our practices. And students "read" cultural texts in multiple ways from the complexity of their own experiences, memories and meanings. I say this because teachers and educational researchers on the whole haven't been particularly interested in how the cultural texts of the classroom get mediated, used or refused. These ideas, of course, immediately undermine the traditional authority of the teacher which is itself based in the transmission model. And it also challenges some of the claims that have been made both by and about the presumed authority of radical teachers. I include Hunter's (mis)representation of radical pedagogy in the latter.

I want to suggest that this rearticulation of Cultural studies and pedagogy in the contemporary post@colonial Australian scene may be particularly productive if we also articulate feminist and

post™colonial discourses and practices with Cultural studies. What I'm suggesting, in part, as a way to re@work the discourses of critical pedagogy, is a de@colonizing pedagogy which foregrounds questions of epistemology and knowledge production and their moral, ethical and political implications in these post@colonial times. To work on

colonial and colonizing representations, and on questions of identity, culture and nation, is a pressing issue in contemporary times in Australia. And this raises questions about the politics of location and identity of both the teacher and researcher as well as questions about representation, subjectivity, experience and their relation to knowledge production. For me, autobiographical speaking/writing in adult classrooms is one strategy I use in my de@colonizing pedagogy.

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS CULTURAL CRITIQUE AND POSSIBILITY

I've borrowed the idea of "autobiography as cultural critique" from Nancy Miller's *Getting Personal* (1991). But whereas Miller used "criticism", I prefer "critique", but note, I'm adding "and possibility". We don't want critique without ideas for change. And whereas Miller's interest was in the "crisis" of critical authority in literature (and James Clifford's work which seems to have influenced Miller @ Clifford and Marcus wrote of "ethnography as cultural critique" See James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture: The*

*Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. has been to do with the "crisis" of ethnographic authority in anthropology), my concern is the "crisis" of critical authority in education that Hunter has raised. Nancy Miller has written of the need to reclaim selves and culture in literary criticism. I'm arguing for the need to do this in pedagogy and education research.

I should say briefly what I don't mean by the autobiographical work I do in adult/tertiary classrooms. I don't mean autobiography in the traditional sense, the project of heroization, the chronicle of Man, the writing of his white Western life as a monument for future memory. Nor am I working within the idea of autobiography as "confession" In *The History of Sexuality* (vol.1) (1980) Foucault wrote that:

"The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence...of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console." (p.61) Confession, according to Foucault, has taken the form of autobiographical narratives,

amongst others. I want to separate myself from any sort of confessional with its religious and psychoanalytic overtones. Freud's psychoanalysis was an attempt to reinscribe the procedures of confession into a field of scientifically acceptable procedures. The confessor (like the anthropological ethnographer in the field and some education researchers who claim only they know the truth of the classroom) was the master of the truth. Only he could decipher it or the writing of lives for the purpose of surveillance, as Foucault has described

Foucault has argued that those who led abnormal lives, the madman, the patient, the prisoner, were increasingly described, in the C18, for the purpose of surveillance and Hunter has taken up. I am working somewhere in the tradition Frigga Haug described in the book *Female Sexualization*. Frigga Haug, ed.

*Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of*

Memory. Trans. by E. Carter. London: Verso, 1987. But whereas Haug rejected the term

'autobiography' because it was a modernist form based on untenable theoretical presuppositions like linearity and the notion of 'a whole life', I've retained it to re@name a fragmented approach to

the "memory work" she talks about.

I'm reluctant to call this "postmodern" autobiography, since Judith Butler and others have posed a big question mark around what "is" postmodern! But the kind of autobiography I have in mind has a different politics and a different aesthetic to the modernist form. Autobiography in the work I do boils down to a collage, a collection of fragments of memories.

To work autobiographically is to reclaim experience, memory, identity, subjectivity and, of course, story telling as fundamental categories in the production of knowledge. And contrary to Hunter's argument, to work autobiographically in the adult classroom, as I've been suggesting, has to be understood within a "politics of engagement" rather than as a "politics of the personal/confessional" (Giroux, 1992, p.158). This implies a rearticulation of "the personal", the political, culture and theory making. It's too simple to say "the personal is political". And from the point of view of contemporary cultural theory, the personal is implicated in, not separate from, culture.

I use autobiographical fragments as cultural scripts(texts), and in doing this I'm marking a shift from the male dominated Cultural studies terrain of "the popular" and "the everyday" to subjectivities, identities, body politics, and the constructions of selves in and between cultures.

More specifically, autobiographical writing/talking opens up

windows on the practices of cultural border crossings, the trajectories of the "world" travellers Williams wrote of, the investments men and women have in particular subjective (masculine and feminine) formations. When you engage with students' autobiographically, a number of things become clear pretty soon. One is that students come into the space of the classroom already challenging and transforming themselves and existing cultural and social relations and forms. So, as educators we have to be careful about any claims we make about the classroom as a site of identity formation, let alone transformation. Another is that a teacher's traditional location as 'professional' gets transformed. I also engage in autobiographical speaking/writing. This immediately introduces all sorts of differences into any cultural analysis we might be doing. Age and time differences come to mind immediately but I should also mention that my feminist project may not be one that my young adult students want to share. How we can come together in difference is of central concern in my feminist decolonizing pedagogy and it may be that my own feminist position must be transformed so as not to colonize younger men and women whose time and struggles may be different to my own. So while the political is never abandoned and my work is never unprincipled, feminist inquiry continues and my position is open to change. A de™colonizing pedagogy, then, has possibilities for the production of new cultural knowledge in postcolonial classrooms in which "world" travelling students critically engage their own and other cultural texts and, in particular, colonial and colonizing representations.

#### CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH IN POSTCOLONIAL TIMES

I've brought the idea of Cultural studies as pedagogical practice and autobiography as cultural critique together to begin to articulate something of what I mean by a decolonizing pedagogy in

this particular education conjuncture, and to rearticulate the "crisis" of critical authority in education. But what are the implications for education studies? From the frameworks provided by contemporary cultural theories, the "crisis" of critical authority has to do not with the theory@practice "gap" nor with the supposed "worldly retreat" of critical intellectuals, but with the complex interplay of the politics of representation, identity and location. That we already know the stories we want to tell because we have investments in those stories is only one part of this. Who "we" are is another. I'll just make a few comments about this in closing.

The first, the idea of teachers doing their own research, has already been argued for many times but I want to infuse it with some new meaning. I'm suggesting that as University teachers we



research our own classrooms. Whereas research has typically been both separated from and valued more than pedagogy in the University setting at least, and in education it's typically been an activity done on someone somewhere else, I'm suggesting that teaching adults in this setting is a way into research, if not itself a research practice in ways that either aren't sufficiently acknowledged or engaged with. I'm suggesting that the work Williams did in adult education classes can be taken up within the University in contemporary times. That means doing away with 'teaching' via the old mode of lectures and tutorials of course. In working through his idea of a "pedagogy of articulation", Grossberg, for example, wrote: "It is also a practice which...constantly traverses the line between teaching and research, allowing them to rearticulate one another, opening knowledge up to new questions, spoken from elsewhere." Lawrence Grossberg, 1994, p.19. In my de@olonizing pedagogy, I use autobiographies as "guiding narratives" (Giroux, 1994, p.155) to initiate inquiries of all sorts.

Secondly, the ongoing question seems to be how to cut into the real and how to make a detour through theory rather than being driven by it and without, I would suggest, returning to the fold of modernist empiricism. What contemporary cultural theories point up is that pedagogy and education research are representational practices. And while teachers and researchers engage in narrating the world, we are positioned inside the narratives we tell. One problem is to avoid the colonizing grand narrative (liberal, Marxist, feminist or poststructuralist). Another is to interrogate our own colonial/colonizing representational practices (including the well established notion that only "we" can know and speak for "them").

Thirdly, in the contemporary post@olonial and post@modern conjuncture in Australia, a rearticulation of Communication Studies, Cultural Studies and Education may have significant consequences. This is not to suggest that Cultural Studies is the final solution to the "crisis" of critical authority in education research. Let's face it, Cultural Studies has its own problems. For instance, there's a lot of debate in Australian Cultural studies circles about the "banality" Meaghan Morris, "Banality in Cultural Studies." *Discourse*, 1988, 10 (2), pp.30-29. of some of its research, whether it should be about reading "texts" or doing ethnography. See, for instance, *Arena Magazine*, no.9, Feb/March, 1994. and whether its categories are sufficiently powerful to offer a counter challenge to the Right. Moreover, the point is not to conflate them but to look for new ways of seeing, new categories and new questions that can be opened up for Education studies. I'm suggesting these include questions about the politics of our

location as teacher/researchers, our relation to culture and to 'the political' as well as questions around subjectivities, identities, experience, representation and truth. As 'readers' of the cultural worlds of classrooms, we bring our own political, ideological and other investments to bear on what we see, and how and what we read and write. If we put these investments on the table, we open up rather than close down the debate.

## NOTES