

Some [New] Elementary Axioms for an American Cultur[al] Studies

Jay Mechling

In Memory of Gene Wise

With great affection for his memory, I have borrowed the title of Gene Wise's 1979 essay; put simply, the title embodies the "pragmatic attitude" I admire.¹ Gene was an interdisciplinary intellectual historian, among other things, and by 1979 he was well on his way to writing the definitive intellectual history of the American Studies movement. Appearing the same year as the "Elementary Axioms" essay was a special issue of the *American Quarterly* taking the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the journal as the occasion for a retrospective on the movement. Although the Bibliography Subcommittee of the American Studies Association was the official convenor of the issue, the plan was all Gene's, and the centerpiece of that issue is his essay, "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement."² The "Elementary Axioms" essay also presents some history, but the mood of the essay is more pragmatic. The essay offers, he explains, "a series of elementary propositions or working 'axioms,' which for me make possible an interdisciplinary culture studies." Wise did not see his list as "*the* necessary axioms for an entire movement. " "I believe we in American Studies," he wrote, "should make our working assumptions visible and communicable, and these are mine." He presents the axioms "in brief, dogmatic form," not because they are the last word but "to prod and generate dialogue." Moreover, he makes it clear that his is a "*working* set of axioms, offered in an experimental spirit. A reflexive American Studies does not need a checklist of unexamined commandments, rather, it needs working goals to try out and inspect and continually revise over time."³

So I am bold enough to propose a revised set of axioms for the late 1990s, playing now with Wise's title by turning "Culture Studies" into "Cultur[al] Studies" and reflecting, thereby, on the ways American Studies might dance with her interdisciplinary sister field, Cultural Studies. Following Wise's advice, I offer these axioms as a sketch of my working assumptions and as an invitation to a conversation among American Studies scholars and teachers about our practices. Before presenting the axioms, though, I want to discuss briefly a little bit of history.

A Little Bit of History

This essay is not a history of Cultural Studies; the reader can find various versions of that history elsewhere.⁴ Nor do I care much for arguing whether cultural studies represents anything new. Intellectuals operate in a system, in a nexus of practices, every bit as capitalistic as others in the new professional class.⁵ To prove value we need to claim difference, so it is entirely expected that disciplines and interdisciplinary fields and individuals within disciplines and fields engage endlessly in claims they are doing something new and different.

At its birth in the 1930s, American Studies really was doing something new and different. Although much of its politics through the 1940s and 1950s were what we would now call conservative, the American Studies "movement" nonetheless practiced a critique of the structures for the creation and reproduction of academic knowledge. We should remember that it was within the rather illegitimate American Studies that some of the first American women's studies scholarship and teaching found a home.⁶ American Studies departments and programs began teaching ethnic studies far before history and literature departments.⁷ Ray Browne used the second meeting of the American Studies Association in Toledo in 1969 to launch what was to become the Popular Culture Association, and otherwise American Studies departments and programs were teaching popular, mass-mediated culture far in advance of other departments. Richard Dorson, in many ways the entrepreneurial "father" of American folklore studies, received one of the first Ph.D.s in American Civilization from Harvard, and the presence of a distinguished Department of Folklore and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania meant that a number of Penn American Civilization graduate students were able to incorporate folklore studies into their coursework.⁸

One sort of identity crisis for American Studies began in the late 1960s, when the emerging specialities of ethnic studies and women's studies spun off to create their own journals and academic departments and programs and when the scholarly practices and teaching in departments of history and literature began to resemble those in American Studies. There was a distinct danger that American Studies would be defined by what remained behind. At the same time, by the mid-1970s members of the Connections Collective (formerly the Radical Caucus) and, later, of the Women's Committee of the American Studies Association were

being elected to seats on the ASA Council and, eventually, were being elected presidents of the association.⁹ The friendly umbrella of the American Studies movement, after some lean years, began to attract a diverse community of senior and junior scholars and teachers, though at each annual meeting one still hears hallway and cocktail party talk about what really distinguishes American Studies from the interdisciplinary work done elsewhere by Americanists. This search for identity is very American.

All this while, there was a cadre of American Studies departments and programs aiming to put the culture concept at the center of “doing” American Studies. What distinguished the American Civilization Department at the University of Pennsylvania from the 1950s on was the project of Anthony N.B. Garvan and Murray G. Murphey to incorporate the social sciences into American Studies, which in this case meant borrowing mainly from anthropology, but also from social psychology.¹⁰ Penn graduates carried this project to all corners of the United States, and in some respects, to international sites, as well.¹¹

The three University of Minnesota American Studies Ph.D.s (Robert Merideth, Brom Weber, and David Wilson) who were the core faculty the American Studies Program at UC Davis hired me right out of graduate school in 1971 specifically, I understood, because I represented “the Penn approach.” As we hammered out a new curriculum during 1971-72, we used the occasion to write an essay describing our assessment of where American Studies had been and where it needed to go. I must let others speak to the impact of that 1973 essay, “American Culture Studies: The Discipline and the Curriculum,” but it has been a constant source of embarrassment that others picked up the name while we never changed the name at UC Davis.¹² In any case, this was the state of affairs when Gene Wise wrote the two 1979 essays, the “Paradigm Dramas” essay in the *AQ* and the “Axioms” essay in *Prospects*. He was trying to advance the notion that the culture concept needed to be at the center of American Studies.

The question by the end of the 1980s, of course, was whether the arrival and success of “cultural studies” in American universities was good news or bad news for American Studies. I realize that in some institutional settings the news has been bad, that advocates of cultural studies from departments of literature, history, communications, and elsewhere have approached deans with the “news” that American Studies is old fashioned or, the worse canard, that American Studies pays no attention to gender, race, class, or sexual orientation, and that by these arguments the advocates of cultural studies sometimes have made successful claims on resources that might otherwise have gone to American Studies programs. I can only say, thankfully, that at UC Davis the scenario seems to be different, that the discussion about proposals for graduate and undergraduate programs in cultural studies have been cooperative across disciplines and interdisciplinary programs. So I tend to see the success of cultural studies as a benefit to American Studies. Still, I see some shortcomings in cultural studies that can be addressed by American Studies practitioners so as to make for a powerful,

interdisciplinary American Cultural Studies. Let me discuss these briefly before presenting my new axioms.

The Poverty of Cultural Studies¹³

Cultural Studies, as currently practiced, tends to have impoverished understandings (or undertheorized versions) of several key concepts, among them “culture,” “history,” “discourse,” and “class.” First, it is odd that the culture concept, so central to cultural studies, slips by undefined in most cultural studies scholarship. The British cultural studies coming out of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (founded in 1964) seems to depend most upon Raymond Williams’s work. While I find Williams’s work very valuable, especially in its lesson about the importance of historical depth in doing cultural studies, even his *Keywords* entry on “culture” settles on a very general notion of the concept.¹⁴ Williams helps us see the relationship between symbolic and material aspects of everyday lives, making problematic the old marxian notion of the relationship between base and superstructure, but I think we need a more specific way to conceptualize culture. It is not that I think all scholars in American cultural studies need to agree to the same understanding of culture; such consensus would be a sign of trouble. But I think an author owes it to the reader to say as plainly as possible what understanding of the structures and dynamics of culture underlies the cultural criticism we are reading.

Second, a good deal of heated debate over cultural studies has been over the field’s underdeveloped notion of history. The rise of cultural studies has happened at the same time that historians have been debating the effects of poststructuralism on the practice of historical scholarship, and the two movements and their debates have criss-crossed several times.¹⁵ At stake is the nature of historical knowledge and the relative privilege of historical narratives as texts for contextualizing other texts.

Without recounting this debate, I want to say simply that by my reading, most books and essays doing contemporary American Cultural Studies could benefit from a greater familiarity with American history. More precisely, I would say that the historians doing cultural history are producing better work than are the critics doing contemporary cultural studies. This is still a terribly broad generalization, and there are cultural studies scholars doing solid historical work. But I can point to one example that stands for others. Douglas Kellner’s 1995 book, *Media Culture*, offers a number of provocative interpretations (“figural analysis,” as he calls it) of media cultural texts, including Madonna, *Poltergeist*, the Gulf War, and Cyberpunk.¹⁶ But Richard Slotkin’s *Gunfighter Nation* provides, in my view, a much better map of the historical contexts for the sort of mass-mediated narratives both Kellner and Slotkin examine.¹⁷ Slotkin’s historical depth permits him to speak about change over time, about the continuities and discontinuities in the “myth” of the frontier and how that myth “thinks itself” as we Americans come

to consider a “text” like the Gulf War, whereas Kellner’s analysis seems much more synchronic than diachronic. Many otherwise strong cultural studies texts could use a good dose of history.

Third, cultural studies too often has an inadequate understanding of discourse. Most cultural studies scholarship privileges printed discourse or treats visual discourse as if it were print. Absent is an understanding of the dynamics of oral cultures and of the relationships between oral and visual discourse, understandings of the sort offered by folklorists and sociolinguists and by some rhetoricians. I came to folklore studies after my training in American Studies, and reading in folklore helped me understand the primacy of oral discourse in human experience. Some folklorists are working in cultural studies, trying to show their colleagues what the theories and methods of folklore might contribute to cultural studies, but most scholars in cultural studies are oblivious to the work of folklorists.¹⁸ I cannot imagine understanding the poetics and politics of American popular culture without understanding the relationship between that mediated discourse and the oral and material discourses of everyday life; yet, most cultural studies critics do exactly that.¹⁹

Finally, cultural studies offers American Studies an inadequate understanding of social class. An instructive text in this regard is Douglas E. Foley’s *Learning Capitalist Culture: Deep in the Heart of Tejas*.²⁰ Half of Foley’s book tells an interesting ethnographic tale about the racial, class, and gender politics of a small town in South Texas, with a focus on the high school and on the ways Anglo and Mexicanado adolescents of both the working and middle classes construct and perform their identities. The other half of the book, however, consists of two appendices in which Foley works through the inadequacies of Paul Willis’s classic cultural studies book, *Learning to Labor*.²¹ Put simply, Foley finds that Willis’s understanding of the dynamics of social class, which might work well for analyzing British society, does not work as well when trying to understand “class” in the American setting. Instead, Foley combines the insights of Habermas and Erving Goffman to construct a “performance view of class reproduction and resistance in schools.” Foley’s experience matches those of many in American Studies, I believe, who find that importing the understandings of class as developed by cultural studies scholars in Europe simply does not seem to work on the American materials. Among other things, race intersects class in some possibly unique ways in the American case. But possibly more importantly, the United States has the most advanced case of a culture forged by commodity capitalism. The students’ choice of the term “lifestyle” over “class” may be more than false consciousness; they might be on to something.²²

Actually, one of the central voices in cultural studies, John Fiske, makes this point very well in his 1993 book, *Power Plays, Power Works*. In a chapter entitled “U.S. Cultures, European Theories,” Fiske notes that the European theories that best make the transition to analyzing the case of the United States are those, like Gramsci’s, that abandon “class” as a category and substitute a more fluid notion

of “the bloc” or “the power bloc.”²³ Fiske adds that it is the historically unique experience the United States had with slavery and with immigration that helps make more complex the ways race replaces class as a salient category in determining who sees themselves as belonging to what power blocs in what circumstances. For Fiske, Gramsci’s key notions of “resistance” and “consent” must take into account the historically distinctive ways capitalism developed in the United States.²⁴

In naming these four undertheorized concepts in cultural studies—culture history, discourse, and class—I am hoping that an American Studies that move in the direction of an American Cultural Studies will do the necessary theorizing

The Americanness of American [*Cultural*] Studies

Our minds thus grow in spots; and like grease-spots, the spots spread. But we let them spread as little as possible: we keep unaltered as much of our old knowledge, as many of our old prejudices and beliefs, as we can. We patch and tinker more than we renew. The novelty soaks in; it stains the ancient mass; but it is also tinged by what absorbs it. Our past apperceives and co-operates; and in the new equilibrium in which each step forward in the process of learning terminates, it happens seldom that the new fact is added *raw*. More usually it is embedded cooked, as one might say, or stewed down in the sauce of the old.

—William James²⁵

Continuing my trend of “sampling” (the polite, postmodern, hiphop way of saying “appropriating”) other scholars’ titles, I borrow here from Robert Berkhofer’s astute essay in the 1979 anniversary issue of the *AQ*.²⁶ Berkhofer notes how “American” is the American Studies movement in the rhetoric of its own history and of its practices within the academy, a rhetoric filled with the “innocence, nostalgia, confidence, mission, and exceptionalism” historians and other culture critics have noted in American discourse. Look at how Europeans and others describe Americans, advises Berkhofer, and you will recognize the language disciplinary colleagues have used to describe American Studies.

As a social movement, American Studies bears the same relationship to American culture as do other social movements, especially the sort anthropologist Anthony F.C. Wallace calls “revitalization movements.”²⁷ Which is to say that the critique American Studies directs at the academy and at the large culture—a critique that changes a bit over time but that consistently argues for wholes over parts, for the continuities of experience, for the value of reflexive knowledge, and so on—comes very much from some basic values one can find

in the culture. The American Studies movement resists both the modernization of consciousness and the postmodern logic, the former for its compartmentalization of knowledge and its separation of ends and means, the latter for its tendency to surrender normative judgment in a plural world. One of the dangers facing revitalization movements also faces American Studies, namely, that with some success and institutionalization the critique becomes stale and forgotten and the movement comes to resemble the institutions it originally defined itself against.

We can ask Berkhofer's question again, only this time of American Cultural Studies. How "American" is this variant, and does that matter?

American Cultural Studies, ironically, is very American in its embrace of Continental and British theory. John Kouwenhoven's 1948 *The Arts on Modern American Civilization*, itself a rich text reflecting late 1940s American culture, describes the inferiority complex Americans felt in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, failing to understand the uniqueness and quality of their own "vernacular style" in contrast with the high styles of European literature, art, architecture, and music.²⁸ American Studies was born in English, history, and art departments where American texts were still barely legitimate for scholarly study.

The jingoism of myth/symbol/image American Studies notwithstanding, that inferiority complex has never gone away. Its newest manifestation lies in the borrowing of Continental and British theory as the foundation for American Cultural Studies. This is very American, at least among academics. In an e-mail exchange among colleagues responding to the draft of a plan for a graduate group in Cultural Studies at my university, a friend in the French Department opined that Critical Theory had to be at the heart of a Cultural Studies graduate program, lest it become a "cheap" degree for students trying to avoid difficult (i.e., French) theory. In his view, American Cultural Studies had no philosophical foundation; hence, it was shallow and unsophisticated.

So pervasive is this view of the intellectual superiority of European philosophy and theory over American philosophy and theory that many scholars in American Cultural Studies feel obliged to look to Europe for their foundations. Working out of Foucault or Lyotard or Stuart Hall legitimates the activity to the primary audience of the scholarship. Even John Fiske, whose chapter on "U.S. Cultures, European Theories" I mentioned approvingly above, lands on a combination of Gramsci, Foucault, Bourdieu, de Certeau, and Bakhtin as the theoretical ground from which he launches his analysis of American texts.

Unfashionable and politically embarrassing as it may be, I want to argue for a sort of American exceptionalism. The "American case" is exceptional in the same way that any national culture is unique; if I were a Cuban scholar doing Cuban cultural studies, I would argue for Cuban exceptionalism. I understand how problematic is the marker "American"; indeed, a fruitful conversation beginning in American Studies is what sense we can make of using the nation-state as a unit of cultural analysis in a world increasingly dominated by transnational

institutions and practices.²⁹ Still, I prefer using the marker, “American,” all the while suspending it in problematic space.

American culture is exceptional in that its culture is the unique product of natural and historical events. A syncretic system always in flux, American culture still has highly probable patterns across time and space, “probable” in the sense that each of us lives his or her everyday life predicting and counting on those probable patterns (and thrown into puzzlement or anomic terror when the unpredicted happens).

Given this “American exceptionalism,” I am prepared to offer the following axiom, one so controversial (I imagine) that I dare not include it in the more easily accepted and refined axioms I shall discuss below. Stated dogmatically, here it is:

AMERICAN THEORIES OF AMERICAN EXPERIENCE
ARE TO BE PREFERRED TO THEORIES DERIVED FROM
EXPERIENCES IN OTHER SOCIETIES.

I have used the “to be preferred” language so as to keep open the methodological strategy of “principled opportunism” (as Henry Nash Smith called it) so central to the very pragmatic American Studies style of borrowing ideas and approaches from other disciplines.³⁰ Binary oppositions and forced choices between the options do not work well in the practice of culture criticism, so I’ll never say “never” use theories from outside American experience. My principle here is that the American theorist has a “map” of a portion of the larger system; therefore, the American theorist understands the system in a way a person who has not learned the system cannot duplicate. The knowledge of the native is “tacit knowledge,” knowledge that must be made explicit. This is the native’s challenge of “reflexive” American cultural studies, of making problematic the commonsense, taken-for-granted, “natural attitude” toward everyday life.³¹ If the native’s challenge is “to make the familiar strange,” then the non-native’s challenge is “to make the strange familiar.” The non-native (let’s say the “stranger”) has certain advantages in not sharing the native’s common sense, but without a cognitive map that connects somehow with the culture larger than the individual’s immediate knowledge, the stranger needs some starting point. The stranger brings her own experiences to the interpretive encounter, but part of the challenge is to shed that commonsense, taken-for-granted, natural attitude.

This talk of natives and strangers creates a neat dichotomy that crumbles in practice, and in several ways. First, by dint of my understanding of culture (see below), “native” and “stranger” are terms entirely relative to the frame being examined. Everyone is a stranger to my personal, private culture. I am a “native” in my mind, in my marriage, in my family, in my friendship groups, in the landscapes and bureaucracies I inhabit, in my moments of televisual delight watching “The X Files,” and so on. I am reminded of this every time I try to explain to a person who otherwise looks like a “native” that baseball is not

“boring” and that the film *Fargo* is “funny.” This point may seem obvious enough, but it challenges me to think about what “counts” as a “native theory.”

For example, American theorists sometimes use European (mostly) ideas in constructing their theories or philosophies. How can I draw a neat line between “American” and “other” theorists? I cannot, but I can argue that the European theory, for example (I am being very Eurocentric here, I know), becomes American when “cooked,” as William James puts it, in the juices of American experience. Freudian theory becomes a new and powerful tool for understanding American culture in the hands of a Karen Horney or an Erik Erikson or a Christopher Lasch or a Nancy Chodorow.³² Richard Rorty assembles his brand of neopragmatism mainly out of American pragmatic thinking, but he borrows (as a pragmatist would) some elements from European philosophers and processes those ideas through the principles of the pragmatism. A version of my axiom would avoid the Eurocentrism of this discussion by looking to the ways other philosophies get into American theory. For example, the notion of a “black sociology” poised against “the Eurocentric sociology of the experience of African people in America” might provide better theory for understanding African American experience.

A second problem with the native/stranger dichotomy is that the natives and strangers, by many accounts, actually have some things in common. What are those shared “things” becomes a crucial question. Murray G. Murphey, for example, has argued recently that cognitive and neuroscience provide a foundation for our confidence that people (who share human physiology) can understand one another’s commonsense knowledge across space and time.³³ In cultural studies, the internationalization of certain sorts of commodity cultures in Late Capitalism means that many of us on the earth are “natives” of that cultural system, such that my commonsense world might resemble Lyotard’s more than it resembles Cotton Mather’s.

A third problem with my bold axiom is that it can be taken as supporting the notion that only those critics with certain kinds of life experiences can analyze with any authority certain sorts of cultural texts. I reject that notion. I teach and write about lots of texts created out of circumstances in which I would be the stranger. But these are also public texts that, by their very existence in the public sphere, invite the relative stranger’s connection and understanding. There are jokes in an African American friendship group that I would not “get,” but I do “get” the contemporary urban legends in the African American community and I can get meaning from a Zora Neale Hurston novel.³⁴

There are other problems with my axiom, but this list is long enough for the reader to wonder why I still hold it. It is precisely the problems that it raises that make it such an interesting axiom to me. I recall being absolutely stunned in a graduate American Civilization seminar at the University of Pennsylvania when Anthony N.B. Garvan said nonchalantly that cultures should only be analyzed with the theories—the ethnosciences—that belonged to the culture. That radical

view seemed to me to take away a whole arsenal of theory we were learning in graduate school. (Professor Garvan, sir, aren't we using anthropologist A.I. Hallowell's theory and language to try to understand the Puritans?) But Garvan's point, of course (I think), was that the historian or culture critic finally had to find some way to understand the culture through its own common sense, itself a dynamic cultural system.

It is possible that this axiom is merely an elaborate (some might say tortured) justification for my own preference for theory arising out of the American pragmatic tradition, and that I should simply announce this orientation as the foundation of my intellectual practices and move on.³⁵ But I do want to persuade practitioners of American cultural studies that the American pragmatic tradition deserves a central role in our criticism. Cornel West, Giles Gunn, Richard Bernstein, John Patrick Diggins, and others will write slightly different genealogies of this tradition, but what is basic to the tradition is a certain stance towards knowledge and toward the social uses of that knowledge.³⁶ Symbolic interactionism, a truly original social theory, has its roots deep in pragmatism. Put most boldly, and I hope my colleague in French is listening, I would say that there is no insight in Critical Theory that one cannot find in William James or Thorsten Veblen. Now, in one sense it is true that there is rarely anything "new" in philosophy, but the nineteenth-century founders of pragmatism were developing a specific philosophy out of their lived experiences in American society.

With this too-short defense of my claim for American theories for American experiences, I am prepared to offer my ten new axioms. These axioms are not meant to replace Gene Wise's; indeed, already much of what I have said is an echo of his argument. I am adding another voice at another moment.

SOME [NEW] ELEMENTARY AXIOMS FOR AN AMERICAN CULTUR[AL] STUDIES

The first two axioms are *cultural*, that is, they posit views of the nature of culture and experience.

1. CULTURE IS A DYNAMIC SYSTEM OF LEARNED CONTRACTS THAT ORGANIZES, EVEN BRIEFLY, THE SUBJECTIVE REALITIES OF INDIVIDUALS SO THAT THE INDIVIDUALS CAN INTERACT AS IF THEY UNDERSTOOD ONE ANOTHER.

I complained above that cultural studies has an undertheorized understanding of culture, so my first axiom attempts to define culture. This axiom embodies the culture theory of anthropologist Anthony F.C. Wallace, which I shall describe here, but it also incorporates Gene Wise's first four axioms, so it might be helpful to repeat those now:

**1. INQUIRERS IN AMERICAN CULTURE STUDIES
SHOULD NOT LOOK FOR FACTS IN EXPERIENCE, BUT
FOR "DENSE" FACTS—facts which both reveal deeper**

meanings inside themselves, and point outward to other facts, other ideas, other meanings. . . .

2. IN AN ONGOING CULTURE, EXPERIENCES ARE INTERCONNECTED ONE WITH ANOTHER. A distinctive task of American Studies should be to trace those interconnections through cultural experience, connections which the compartmentalizing of knowledge into discrete academic disciplines has tended to obscure or block. . . .

3. DESPITE MASSIVE INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES TO SEE IT OTHERWISE, THE FIRST AND FINAL BASE OF AMERICAN CULTURE STUDIES MUST BE NOT IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF ACADEME, BUT IN ONGOING EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE. . . .

4. HOWEVER MUCH WE ARE PROMPTED TO INTEGRATE, WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT OURS IS A PLURALISTIC CULTURE, WITH MULTIPLE REALITIES FUNCTIONING ON A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT, OFTEN CONFLICTING LEVELS.³⁷

Naturally, I see these axioms as coming out of the pragmatic tradition, with their emphasis on experience, on connectedness, and on pluralism. But they are also consistent with a specific model of culture proposed by Anthony F.C. Wallace over thirty years ago in his book, *Culture and Personality*.³⁸ It is a model that sometimes explicitly but usually implicitly entered the curriculum of the American Civilization Department at the University of Pennsylvania (where Wallace was professor of anthropology), mainly through the teaching by Anthony N.B. Garvan and Murray G. Murphey.³⁹

Working against an anthropological tradition that viewed culture as a strategy for “the replication of uniformity,” Wallace was interested in creating a model that would view culture as a strategy for “the organization of diversity.” Since we don’t have access to other individuals’ internal states, we culture critics must satisfy ourselves by asking how unique individuals ever “organize themselves culturally into orderly, expanding, changing societies?”⁴⁰ The primacy of this “how” question leads Wallace to see culture as socially constructed (usually tacitly) “policy” and “contract,” which enables people to predict each other’s behavior and to bring order to social life.⁴¹ Culture organizes diversity, but Wallace shows that it is not necessary that diverse people share the same “map” of the system in order for them to have orderly and somewhat predictable interactions. Indeed, Wallace argues that “cognitive nonsharing” is necessary for the building of more complex cultural systems. All that is necessary is that people who interact have learned the behavior appropriate to a contractual relationship.⁴² Wallace’s formulation makes it clear for us that culture is public, and that what is shared is a public set of formulaic contractual relationships “available” to

members of the society who must interact, either voluntarily or involuntarily. (Wallace neglects the sometimes involuntary nature of social interactions. More on this in a moment.) A useful way to think about this is Roger Abrahams's point that folklore—that is, traditional, formulaic communications face-to-face—provides an acceptable “impersonal” way to comment indirectly on a situation or a person's behavior.⁴³ The value of culture lies precisely in its public, traditional (customary), formulaic, “impersonal” character.

The formulae provide a way, as my axiom says, for people to “interact as if they understand one another.” The participants share knowledge of and some competence in enacting the formulae, but (as Wallace says) we can make no assumption from the interaction that the participants share values, meanings, or motives. The “motives” point is important because Wallace tends to neglect, as I said, the issue of involuntary interactions, which is a subset of interactions in which the power available to the participants is unequal. Older theories of “play,” for example, held that people play voluntarily.⁴⁴ Gregory Bateson's notion of “frame,” on the other hand, shows us that the existence of an interaction between two people (e.g., the play frame) tells us only that the people have agreed to an implicit contract to behave according to the rules of the frame for as long as they sustain the frame; the existence of the interaction proves nothing about the motives of the participants or even whether the two participants “think” they are in the same frame.⁴⁵ Participants may have different power in a frame, and as Erving Goffman's extension of frame analysis shows us, some people quite commonly use frames to manipulate others. As Goffman said, if we can understand how the confidence artist creates and sustains a frame, then we will understand how all reality is socially constructed, threatened, and repaired.⁴⁶

I hope it is clear by now that this formulation of culture is fully consistent with the interest of cultural studies critics in the ways hegemony fails in complex, Late Capitalist societies. John Fiske thinks Gramsci's formulations work especially well in the United States because the notion of “consent” fits the data better than does the liberal, pluralist view of “consensus.”⁴⁷ Wallace's view of culture as “policy” and “contract” affirms that all we culture critics ever see is evidence of consent, not of consensus. Thus, the “manufacture of consent,” as opposed to the manufacture of consensus, becomes a crucial critical question. How do people learn the public, formulaic models for interacting? What are the ways people can take power in those interactions? What is the role of folklore in learning the contracts and in learning ways to take power? What is the role of mass-mediated texts in learning the contracts and in learning ways to take power? These are the sorts of questions my formulation of culture lead me to ask.

My second axiom about culture makes an important statement about the relationship between “private” and “public” cultures:

2. ALL OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S KNOWLEDGE OF CULTURE IS LOCAL KNOWLEDGE.

This axiom condenses many issues and has several important implications. Geertz introduced the notion of “local knowledge” by observing that “[t]o an

ethnographer, sorting through the machinery of distant ideas, the shapes of knowledge are always ineluctably local, indivisible from their instruments and their encasements.”⁴⁸ Wallace’s understanding of culture necessarily means that the individual always enters cultural systems “locally,” in direct encounters with actual or mass-mediated others. The individual “cooks” new experiences in “the sauce of the old.”

The next five axioms are *methodological* and *strategic*.

3. LOOK FIRST TO THE BODY.

For the pragmatist, the twin experiences of both *having* and *being* a body make the body a prime site for the creation of meaning.⁴⁹ Beginning in the 1970s, Mary Douglas, Victor Turner, and other symbolic anthropologists taught us how cultures use the body as a metaphorical equivalent of the society.⁵⁰ In Douglas’s formulation, for example, the body’s nature as a bounded system, with an inside and an outside and with “danger” zones where materials cross into the body (air, food, drink, semen) and out of it (excretions), makes the body a rich symbol for society, another bounded system with dangerous border crossings. I find Douglas’s approach enormously useful in my writing and teaching.⁵¹ Similarly, sociolinguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have demonstrated the ways our bodies provide the experiential basis for “the metaphors we live by.”⁵² Among other things, as Lévi-Strauss noted, the bilateral symmetry of the body may prompt humans to think in terms of binary oppositions.⁵³ In short, in most cases culture criticism around a “dense fact” or dense text can profit from beginning with the body and from all of the methodological hunches that beginning can prompt.

4. LISTEN TO THE SILENCES.

Whenever I am puzzling over a cultural text for teaching or writing, I always find it profitable to ask what Peter Berger or Mary Douglas or Gregory Bateson might say about the text. Bateson was very interested in the ways cybernetics and information theory might contribute to anthropological and psychological understandings, and he defined “information” as “news of a difference” and an “idea” as a “difference that makes a difference.” A subtle point he made in writing about information, however, was that the event that doesn’t happen—his example is the letter we expect to receive and don’t—also provides information, news of a difference.⁵⁴ Other wise people, like Adrienne Rich, have reminded us to “listen for the silences” in order to learn some important things about the workings of culture.⁵⁵ One way this principle manifests itself methodologically is for the critic to ask, “what could have happened here and didn’t?” It was brilliant for Janice Radway to ask her informants for *Reading the Romance* to name some “failed” romances they have read and to articulate what is missing from a failed romance.⁵⁶ I often give this advice to students—ask your informants what would constitute a “failed” version of this experience. What should have happened and didn’t?

5. IF YOU GET IN A MUDDLE, TRY MOVING UP ONE LEVEL OF LOGICAL TYPE.

This is pure Bateson again.⁵⁷ His idea of the frame draws upon Russell and Whitehead’s Theory of Logical Types, best understood through Bateson’s

description of the play frame. In order for two mammals to play, they have to exchange and agree to a communication that establishes the frame, “this is play,” such that the participants understand that the ensuing messages (communication, behavior) are to be interpreted according to the “rules” known to govern the “metamessage” (a message about other messages), “this is play.” The peculiar paradox of play, as Bateson puts it, is that the actions in the play frame (e.g., a playfight) do not mean what they would mean if another meta-message (e.g., “this is a fight”) framed the interaction

The idea of the frame leads in many interesting directions, among them Bateson’s double-bind theory of schizophrenia and a very useful understanding of creativity.⁵⁸ Among the methodological lessons is the one named in this axiom—namely, that if one gets in a muddle puzzling through the meanings of a text, stepping up a level of logical type, from the class of texts to the class of classes of texts, often provides clarity. This sounds more difficult than it is in practice. My favorite example comes from the experience of an American Studies senior who was attempting to write a senior thesis in the early 1970s about Native American suicide. The more sources she consulted, the more confused she became. The whole category “Native American suicide” became problematic, as some claimed that the numbers were artifacts of carelessness and biases in Anglo bureaucratic practices, others claimed that all Native American “suicides” were really murders, still others claimed that death by alcoholism must be counted as a suicide, and so on. She solved her problem when she realized that her topic was not Native American suicide but discourse about Native American suicide.

The ability to move competently and comfortably between levels of logical type is a necessary quality for the individual who would play, which leads naturally to my next axiom:

6. PLAY WITH THE DISCOURSE

The interdisciplinary cognitive style (which characterizes the “American studies type,” as Richard Dorson called us) values “play” with ideas. Gene Wise acknowledged the importance of play in his tenth and final axiom: “SCHOLARSHIP IS A SERIOUS BUSINESS, BUT WE MUST REMIND OURSELVES THAT ‘PLAY’ OF MIND AS WELL AS WORK OF MIND IS NECESSARY TO UNDERSTANDING. BESIDES, IT IS HEALTHIER!”⁵⁹ Amen.

Stan Bailis is particularly forceful in describing interdisciplinary thinking as a game, as “the game.”⁶⁰ The critic who would play the game must be adept at the subjunctive, “as if,” mood of play. Sometimes the game is to think about a cultural phenomenon “as if” one were a sociologist of a certain type, let’s say, or “as if” the gender or race of the participants were changed, or “as if” this text were like that one. My favorite example comes from *The Arts in Modern American Civilization*, where John Kowenhoven quotes Le Courbusier’s exclamation, upon seeing New York’s skyscrapers, that they were “hot jazz in steel and stone.” Kowenhoven poses and tries to answer this quintessential sort of American Studies question: how is jazz music like a skyscraper?

7. ESCHEW OBFUSCATION.

This axiom appeared first as a humorous bumpersticker, probably in the late 1960s. It would make a nice poster for academic offices and studies. An increasing number of culture critics, both in print and orally, have taken some version of the pledge to write clearly and simply. As bell hooks puts it, “my decisions about writing style, about not using conventional academic formats, are political decisions motivated by the desire to be inclusive, to reach as many readers as possible in as many locations. This decision has had consequences both positive and negative.”⁶¹

The last three axioms are *pedagogical*.⁶²

8. RESPECT YOUR STUDENTS’ KNOWLEDGE.

In their interesting book, *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, Belenky and her colleagues notice that women’s experience with the male-defined college classroom, especially in science courses, very often gets framed something like this: “You cannot trust the ways you have learned to know things. Cast those old ways aside. I will teach you how to know things.”⁶³ Whether one wishes to accept or argue with the authors’ argument that women’s everyday epistemology is different from men’s, I think we can easily recognize that male and female students alike often experience the meta-message, “you don’t know anything worthwhile, so I am here to teach you.”

The great pleasure of teaching folklore and popular culture is that students do know lots that is worthwhile. Students already know folklore, from the everyday conversational genres of proverbs, charms, and jokes to the more elaborate genres, such as urban legends. In the cases of popular culture, such as the latest sorts of music, the students easily might know a great deal more than the teacher. What the students lack is a set of ideas and a vocabulary for making “strange” this all-too-familiar cultural discourse. The teacher helps them learn how to distance themselves from the “natural attitude,” from the everyday, commonsensical understanding of the discourse to understanding the important psychological and social work the discourse is doing. As a teacher of folklore and popular culture, I find it does wonders for the classroom that the students can teach me certain things, and I can teach them certain things.

What this amounts to is “cognitive respect.”⁶⁴ Cognitive disrespect causes great mischief, both in society and in the classroom. Approaching students as if they have “false consciousness” that I, the teacher, am about to set straight doesn’t get very far, in my view.

This reminds me of a story. I teach regularly in our Integrated Studies Program, a residential honors program for about seventy first-year students. In the Fall, we give them an additional ten-week series of lectures around a theme, and a few years ago the theme was “Discrimination.” Guest lecturers sailed through, each talking about discrimination from a particular disciplinary point of view (I lectured about racism, sexism, and homophobia in folklore). For their one unit

(Pass/No Pass), students had to write an essay responding to the question, “What is the most serious kind of discrimination at UC Davis and what do you think can be done to alleviate it?” The half dozen or so faculty members who read the essays (I had not volunteered) exploded when a large number of students named “reverse discrimination” as the most serious problem. One faculty member wanted to flunk them all, but the faculty readers agreed, finally, to let the students rewrite the essay.

Politically conservative teachers and citizens will find in this story an instance of “political correctness” run amuck, but that position holds the indefensible proposition that there are courses that are not “political,” that do not coerce students into thinking about (or, better, pretending to think about) a topic in a particular way. Rather, I see a lesson in this story for the progressive teacher. It was not surprising at all to me that so many students chose “reverse discrimination” as their target; indeed, I imagine a few dozen others would have said so if they had the nerve. These students were writing about a social situation of *which they had direct experience*. Many Euroamerican and Asian American students at Davis had Berkeley (a mere 70 miles down Interstate-80) as their first choice. These students also know that there were high school classmates with lower SAT scores and lower GPAs who *did* get into Berkeley. They know this; no amount of lecturing at them with pieties about racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism in American society will undo what they know from direct experience.

The progressive pedagogical answer is not to raise our voices at them. The pedagogical challenge is to take what these students *know*, and what other students (say, students of color or gay/lesbian/bisexual students) *know*, show respect toward their knowledge and the experiences generating that knowledge, and then move to contextualize and complexify what the students and teachers “know.” Why do students value a UC Berkeley degree over a UC Davis degree, when, by many accounts, a student can get a better, more attentive undergraduate education at Davis than at Berkeley? That simple question can lead to others probing the entire political, social, economic, and historical context for UC admission practices. This event happened before the historic UC Regents vote (summer of 1995) to eliminate affirmative action in admissions and hiring practices, and that vote has prompted a necessary conversation about the history of discrimination and of the present state of racial, class, and gender bias in the society.

I do not have easy answers to the pedagogical problem I have posed, nor am I certain how I would reconstruct that lecture series if I had the opportunity. But I do know that I would not understand “what went wrong” in that course without following the axiom that I must respect the knowledge of students. If I had any chance of “teaching” them away from a simple, naturalized attitude toward affirmative action programs, that chance depended on their confidence that I respected their knowledge and experiences.

There is an important political and ethical question here, one we teachers should address. Is my goal of “changing” the student a form of disrespect toward

the student, especially in an academic climate in which an increasing number of students assert a “right” not to be changed by their university education? Put differently, what the liberal, pluralist teacher sees as a sign of the “mature” intellect, making problematic all the certainties students hold, some students see as an assault on their values and beliefs. Hence the salience of the “political correctness” debate on campuses. My ninth axiom is my response to this dilemma:

9. TEACH AMERICAN CULTURAL STUDIES AS A MODEL OF MORAL DISCOURSE IN A LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY; WE CAN AND SHOULD MAKE JUDGMENTS ABOUT BETTER AND WORSE WAYS TO LIVE TOGETHER.

This axiom sounds the most dangerous, because it speaks to the most troubling implications of “the linguistic turn” in philosophy and cultural studies. To explain this dangerous axiom, I must write autobiographically for a moment.

I was an American Studies major at a small, church-affiliated liberal arts university in the mid-1960s, and although I wasn’t terribly religious at the time, I appreciated the fact that my courses were taught under a broader canopy of values questions. American Studies felt like a comfortable home, in retrospect, because it was a utopian “social movement” and, as such, resembled a religious movement. As Robert Berkhofer noted, American Studies in those years was very American in its sense of “mission” and in its utopian sense that we could work against the compartmentalization and rationalist neutrality of the university. My graduate education in American Civilization at the University of Pennsylvania lacked the religious canopy, but it still had a strong sense of mission. When I arrived at Davis in 1971, Robert Merideth had brought his radical politics to the program a year earlier, and the “American Culture Studies” essay he, David S. Wilson, and I wrote out of that first year of conversations has plenty of utopian vision, I think. We three became active in the Radical Caucus (later the Connections Collective) of the American Studies Association and worked actively to create a curriculum and classroom practices that enacted on a small scale the utopian transformation of the university.⁶⁵

As I read through the work of sociologist Peter L. Berger, I came to appreciate the ways one might strike a balance between detached culture criticism and normative judgment. Berger looks to Weber and to Reinhold Niebuhr for guidance on this balancing act, and I especially value Niebuhr’s view that we must go ahead and act in the world, knowing all the while that there might be unintended consequences of our acts. Such is the tragedy of human action. William James offers similar advice, noting that we are faced often with “forced options” that require us to act without full knowledge; it is easy to see Niebuhr and Berger as working out of the American pragmatic tradition.⁶⁶

Rorty nicely addresses this dilemma, of course. Much of Rorty’s writing aims at explaining why the pragmatic understanding of knowledge and truth does not lead to moral relativism, but I especially like his description of himself as one

of the “liberal ironists”—i.e., “people who combined commitment with a sense of the contingency of their own commitment”—and his critique of Foucault “as an ironist who is unwilling to be a liberal” and of Habermas as “a liberal who is unwilling to be an ironist.”⁶⁷ Rorty’s description of the liberal ironist seems to fit my own attitude and work.

Teaching as a liberal ironist means that I explain to students that there are distinct “moments” in cultural criticism. One “moment” consists of the radical deconstruction of all knowledge and “truth” as socially constructed, discovering the ideological dimensions of the most familiar and naturalized discourse. But I consider it intellectually and morally irresponsible to leave students dangling in that moment. That critical act must be toward some desirable end, some vision of a society in which we would all want to live. So complete the critical act, I tell students, by entering the second “moment,” in which you make a normative judgment about the knowledge you have created through your critical practices.⁶⁸ Just keep a sense of liberal irony about your decision.

Rorty’s liberal irony is not to be confused with the ironic stance named in most definitions of postmodernism. The postmodern ironic stance too often resembles cynicism and nihilism, a “cool stance” whose pleasures are fleeting and dehumanizing. Moreover, as some feminist critics have noted, postmodern irony may make for poor politics.⁶⁹

10. TEACHING IS IMPORTANT CULTURAL WORK, POTENTIALLY TRANSFORMING WORK, SO DON’T APOLOGIZE FOR IT; BUT TEACHING AND OTHER SORTS OF WORK FOR SOCIAL, RACIAL, AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE, SO SAVE SOME OF YOUR TIME, TALENT, AND TREASURE FOR OTHER WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.

There is now a (to me) tiresome debate in cultural studies about whether teaching from the safety and comfort of a tenured position “counts” as radical practice. There was an earlier version of this debate when the focus was on the claims by John Fiske and others advocating audience-response criticism that audiences have a certain sort of “power” in their interpretive practices, a power to resist certain readings of texts and to substitute their own readings against the grain. A poignant moment in this debate was Todd Gitlin’s complaint that calling both “channel-surfing” and standing in front of a tank in Tienanmen Square “cultural resistance” makes the phrase mean nothing.⁷⁰ Lately, and somewhat in response to the political right’s successful use of “political correctness” as a weapon in the culture wars, the debate in cultural studies has been over misspent energies and false notions about what counts as radical praxis.

My axiom simply asserts that teaching does count as a respectable radical (or liberal ironic) practice. Cultural studies critics like bell hooks and Henry Giroux make cogent arguments for the difference this pedagogy can make, but we should not accept the false forced choice between teaching as a radical activity and other sorts of work toward transforming the culture. Fundraising in religious and in not-

for-profit organizations has settled on some version of the “time, talent, and treasure” formula for describing the three sorts of gifts the volunteer can give an organization. American Cultural Studies teachers do not have to see the classroom or the printed page as their only venues for progressive, transformative practices.

Conclusion

It was with great nervousness that I embarked on this experiment of “updating” Gene Wise’s ten “Axioms for an American Culture Studies.” The 1979 essay works perfectly well as orienting advice as we approach the century’s end. Still, following Gene’s advice, I thought it important to articulate my own scholarly and teaching practices, especially as the disciplinary landscape has changed somewhat and “cultural studies” is all the rage. I am not sure what Gene Wise would say today if he were here to revise his essay. I do not think he would see cultural studies as a competitive threat to American Culture Studies. I think he would be pleased to see “culture” as the center of our criticism and to see that C. Wright Mills’s dictum—namely, that the function of social criticism is to “connect private troubles with public issues”—now seems so natural to the community of American Cultur[al] Studies practitioners.⁷¹ I know I am.

Notes

1. Gene Wise, “Some Elementary Axioms for an American Culture Studies,” in *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*, Vo. 4, ed. Jack Salzman (New York, 1979), 517-547.

2. *American Quarterly* 31:3 (Bibliography Issue, 1979), 293-337.

3. Wise, “Axioms,” 528.

4. Editors Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg offer this definition of cultural studies in the introductory chapter to their anthology, *Cultural Studies* (New York, 1992):

cultural studies is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counter-disciplinary field that operates in the tension between its tendencies to embrace both a broad, anthropological and a more narrowly humanistic conception of culture. Unlike traditional anthropology, however, it has grown out of analyses of modern industrial societies. It is typically interpretive and evaluative in its methodologies but unlike traditional humanities, it rejects the exclusive equation of culture with high culture and argues that all forms of cultural production need to be studied in relation to other cultural practices and to social and historical structures. Cultural studies is thus committed to the study of the entire range of a society’s arts, beliefs, institutions, and communicative practices” (4).

The editors go on to provide a brief history of the field. Similarly, Simon During provides a brief history in the introductory essay to his edited anthology, *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London, 1993). Joel Pfister’s “The Americanization of Cultural Studies,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 4:2 (1991), 199-229, has a useful perspective on the history. Douglas Kellner provides both history and some practical suggestions in his *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern* (London, 1995). By far the best intellectual history of cultural studies is Stanley Aronowitz’s *Roll Over Beethoven: The Return of Cultural Strife* (Hanover, NH, 1993).

5. Barbara Ehrenreich describes the "new professional class" in her *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York, 1989).

6. The *American Quarterly* published the work of a good many feminist scholars from history and literary criticism, and the ASA presidential addresses by Michael Cowan, Linda Kerber, Alice Kessler Harris, and Allen Davis (all published in the *AQ*) recount some of this history. At my own institution, Robert Merideth taught the first women's studies course (1970-71) in the American Studies Program, and the program hired a visiting professor to teach (in the late 1970s) the campus's first course in gay studies. Similarly, the first women's history course at the University of Kansas was offered in 1974 through the American Studies Department.

7. We sorely need a history of these developments. Ulysses Lee, a professor at Morgan State College (in Maryland), began teaching a course on "The Negro in American Culture" for the Department of American Civilization Department at the University of Pennsylvania (where I took the course). Upon his sudden death the department hired Professor Harry Jones (also of Morgan State) and, later, Antoine Joseph (who joined the department with a full appointment) to teach the course. American Civilization was also the first department at Penn to offer a course on "Asians in America" (in 1989 or 1990 by Professor Jean Wu from Bryn Mawr). (Personal correspondence from Murray G. Murphey, August 27, 1996).

8. See Jay Mechling, "Richard M. Dorson and the Emergence of the New Class in American Folk Studies," *Journal of Folklore Research* 26 (January-April, 1989), 11-26. Richard Bauman, one of the key folklorists in creating the "performance paradigm," was a Penn American Civilization graduate.

9. Allen F. Davis tells much of this story in his presidential address, published as "The Politics of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 42:3 (1990), 353-374.

10. The 1940s and 1950s were heady times for those hoping that the social and behavioral sciences could come together under some big paradigms, and several historians shared the excitement of this "project." One only has to think of David Potter's *People of Plenty* (Chicago, 1954) and David Riegan's (with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denny) *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, 1950) to see the effects on American Studies.

11. Ron Clifton, a Penn American Civilization Ph.D. and a career officer in the United States Information Agency, has done the most to be sure the Penn Am Civ model had its influence in cultural programming abroad.

12. Gene Wise used the phrase, of course, and Bowling Green State University adopted the name for its degree program. I am uncertain what Jack Salzman had in mind when he made *Prospects* a "Journal of American Cultural Studies" long before cultural studies had much presence in American universities. As a further embarrassment, in 1995 I announced on the American Studies moderated internet discussion list, H-AMSTDY, the intention of the UC Davis American Studies Program to rename itself "Cultural Studies." Those who cried "Jay, say it ain't so!" will be relieved to know that the Executive Committee of the College of Letters and Science (which I chaired at the time) vetoed our request. Too many non-Americanists felt left out by this proposal to claim the name, so we are still "American Studies." In part our name change was meant to get around the increasingly problematic use of "American" in American Studies, a condition that has drawn much attention and concern in other American Studies programs. So we kept the name but make the "American" problematic at every step.

13. The title of this section is a bit strong, but it is in keeping with my borrowing titles (i.e., Karl Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism*) for this essay. I want to overstate my case for effect, but Barry Shank's response to my essay makes me think I have signaled an antipathy to Cultural Studies that I do not hold.

14. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York, 1976).

15. See, for example, "Symposium on Post-Structuralism and American History," a special section edited by William Graebner, with essays by Saul Cornell, Barry Shank, Nancy Isenberg, and Jonathan Arac. *American Studies* 36:1 (Spring, 1995), 53-114.

16. Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern* (New York, 1995).

17. Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 1992).

18. For an example of a folklorist doing cultural studies, see Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia, 1992).

19. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Houston Baker, and Trudier Harris are among those alert to the ways orality enters print and visual media, but they tend to stay on the literature end of the mass-media spectrum and away from analysis of television sitcoms, for example. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York, 1988), Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A*

Vernacular Theory (Chicago, 1984), and Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (Knoxville, 1991).

20. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press, 1990.

21. Paul E. Willis, *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (New York, 1977). Foley's book actually creates a kind of dialogue, as Willis wrote a "Foreword" and Foley responds to the foreword in his theoretical appendix.

22. Indeed, segmental marketing amounts to an effective sort of cultural analysis. See Michael J. Weiss, *The Clustering of America* (New York, 1988).

23. John Fiske, *Power Plays, Power Works* (New York, 1993), 10.

24. *Ibid.*, 41.

25. *Pragmatism* (Cambridge, MA, 1975; orig. 1907), 83.

26. Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., "The Americanness of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 31 (Bibliography Issue 1979), 340-345.

27. Anthony F.C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58:2 (1956), 264-281.

28. John Kouwenhoven, *The Arts in Modern American Civilization* (Chicago, 1948).

29. Jane C. Desmond and Virginia R. Domínguez, "Resituating American Studies in a Critical Internationalism," *American Quarterly* 48:3 (September, 1996), 475-490

30. Henry Nash Smith, "Can American Studies Develop a Method?" *American Quarterly* 9 (Summer, 1957), 197-208.

31. This talk of common sense and the natural attitude come from the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz, who enters American theorizing most directly through Peter L. Berger. Schutz's reliance on William James is what makes me see Peter Berger as, finally, a pragmatist, which he denies, but in any case symbolic interactionism certainly belongs to pragmatism. See Jay Mechling, "The Jamesian Berger," in *Making Sense of Modern Times: Peter L. Berger and the Vision of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. J.D. Hunter and S.C. Ainlay (London, 1986), 197-220, and Rodman B. Webb, *The Presence of the Past: John Dewey and Alfred Schutz on the Genesis and Organization of Experience* (Gainesville, 1975).

32. See Karen Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (New York, 1937); Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York, 1968); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York, 1979); and Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, 1978).

33. Murray G. Murphey's *Philosophical Foundations of Historical Knowledge* (Albany, 1994). See the review symposium on Murphey in *American Studies* 37:2 (Fall, 1996).

34. Patricia A. Turner, *I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture* (Berkeley, 1993).

35. Katherine Kinney, a colleague at the Fall, 1996, University of California Humanities Research Institute residential seminar on "Post-National American Studies," suggested only half-jokingly that I reword this axiom in this way: READ WILLIAM JAMES. She is right; that is my meaning.

36. Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, 1989); Giles Gunn, *Thinking Across the American Grain: Ideology, Intellect, and the New Pragmatism* (Chicago, 1992); Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia, 1983); John Patrick Diggings, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago, 1994); and Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago, 1996).

37. Wise, "Axioms," 529-533.

38. 2nd. ed.; New York, 1970. Orig. 1961.

39. This model is visible in Murphey's recent *Philosophical Foundations*, cited above.

40. Wallace, *Culture and Personality*, 23.

41. *Ibid.*, 24.

42. *Ibid.*, 35.

43. Roger D. Abrahams, "A Rhetoric of Everyday Life: Traditional Conversational Genres," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 32:1 (March, 1968), 44-59.

44. Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston, 1955).

45. Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York, 1972), 177-93.

46. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York, 1974).

47. Fiske, 41-44.

48. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Sociology* (New York, 1983), 4.

49. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, NY, 1966), 50.

50. See, for example, Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (New York, 1970).
51. See, for example, Elizabeth Walker Mechling and Jay Mechling, "'Sweet Talk': The Moral Rhetoric Against Sugar," *Central States Speech Journal* 34:1 (Spring, 1983), 19-32. The body is so much at the center of culture criticism now that I could turn this footnote into a bibliographic essay, but see Katherine Young, ed., *Bodylore* (Knoxville, 1993) and Emily Martin, *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture—From the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (Boston, 1994). HIV/AIDS criticism (which counts itself as cultural studies) lends itself especially to looking for ways discourse about the body really masks discourse about the society. Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (New York, 1978) and *AIDS and its Metaphors* (1989), finally published together (New York, 1990), pointed the way for much of the current HIV/AIDS criticism, especially the work by Paula Treichler and Cindy Patton.
52. George Lakeoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 1980).
53. Claude Lévi-Struss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *Journal of American Folklore* 68 (October-December, 1955), 428-44.
54. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York, 1972).
55. Adrienne Rich, "Taking Women Students Seriously," in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978* (New York, 1979), 245.
56. Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill, 1984).
57. Incidentally, the best essay I know describing the nature of interdisciplinary thinking is Gregory Bateson's "Introduction" to *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. (New York, 1979), 3-21
58. In my own work, I have used Bateson's double-bind theory to "read" a novel, an autobiography, and Boy Scouts' cheating at a game. See Jay Mechling, "Play and Madness in Joseph Heller's Catch-22," *Play & Culture* 1 (1988), 226-38, Jay Mechling, "The Failure of Folklore in Richard Wright's Black Boy," *Journal of American Folklore* 104 (Summer, 1991), 275-294, and Jay Mechling, "On the Relation Between Creativity and Cutting Corners," in *Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 15, ed. S.C. Feinstein (Chicago, 1988), 346-66.
59. Wise, "Axioms," 540.
60. Stanley Bailis, "'Holism, Pluralism, and the Interdisciplinary Persuasion in American Studies,'" unpublished paper delivered at the 1993 meeting of the American Studies Association in Boston, MA. Bailis is Professor of History and American Studies at San Francisco State University.
61. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York, 1994), 71.
62. Gene Wise did not include any pedagogical axioms in his original list, though certainly he was interested in teaching as an important form of practicing American Culture Studies. Indeed, he chose as one of the "paradigmatic moments" in his history of American Studies Robert Merideth's creation of a course called "Culture Therapy 202" at Miami University in the late 1960s, and he thought of his own teaching as important cultural work.
63. Mary Field Belenky, et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing; The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York, 1986).
64. Peter Berger introduces the notion of "cognitive respect" in *Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change* (Garden City, NY, 1976).
65. Allen F. Davis's ASA presidential address, "The Politics of American Studies," *American Quarterly*, 42:3 (1990), 353-374, tells much of this history. See, also, Jay Mechling, Robert Merideth, and David S. Wilson, *Morning Work: A Dialogue on Issues of Knowledge and Freedom in Doing American Culture Studies* (Bollinas, CA, 1979).
66. William James explains the "forced option" in "The Will to Believe," in B.W. Wilshire, ed., *William James: The Essential Writings* (Albany, 1984), 308-325; the essay originally appeared in 1896. On Berger and pragmatism, see Mechling, "The Jamesian Berger"; on Niebuhr and pragmatism, see West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 15-164.
67. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York, 1989), 61.
68. This is the move—"relativizing the relativizers," he calls it—Peter L. Berger makes in *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (New York, 1969).
69. See Berger & Luckmann, 172, on "cool alternation." For feminist doubts about irony, see the essays collected in Linda J. Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York, 1990).
70. Todd Gitlin, "Commentary: Who Communicates What to Whom, in What Voice and Why, About the Study of Mass Communication?" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7:2 (June, 1990), 185-196.
71. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York, 1959). Mills worked out of the pragmatists' tradition.