"Y'aaaaas," "Okay nah," and other Black Woman Utterances About a Proposed Cultural Production Approach

JONI BOYD ACUFF The Ohio State University

I'M A WANDERER when I read. I am animated when words make the hairs on my arms raise. I ask questions mid-sentence. I write personal stories in the margins. I scratch out words and replace them with other words that help me make sense of the author's writing. I yell out "y'aaaaas" in agreement, and I mutter "umph" when I am provoked. This is my process. When I then write, using what I have read and internalized, my emotional bursts are tempered, muted...institutionalized, and what I present to the world turns into "scholarship."

When asked to do a response to Dr. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández's (2020) paper, I felt honored to know Rubén trusted me to take great care when reflecting on his words. At the onset, I was ready to sit down, read his words carefully, and then write a 2,000 word response that asked questions, tackled his propositions, and reflected on his conclusions and implications for the future. It was sure to be a solid piece of scholarship. However, after internalizing his work, I felt called to respond much differently than with a traditional academic paper. Specifically, while reading, I recognized that, while Rubén suggests a recasting of "the arts," "the arts" can be replaced with any other institution that signifies "the presumed superiority of European cultural sensibilities and affective ways of knowing and, by extension, of whiteness as a way of being" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2020, p. 8). This includes the institution of "the scholar."

I was inspired to reject the master narrative and engage outside of the institution that communicates to me, a Black woman, that I cannot write "True dat!" in a paper because it does not fit into the way "the scholar" has been culturally defined, practiced, and valued. As Rubén, I believe these discourses make clear that whiteness is at the helm; therefore, my response to his work actually activates his propositions and works to delegitimize the discourse of "scholarship."

I created three visual representations of my raw engagement with the material. I did not translate it into "scholarship." It exists as this Black woman's authentic engagement with the proposed orders of cultural production. In the images are my wanderings, curiosities, provocations, connections, and delights about Rubén's assertion that utilizing a cultural production approach situates creative symbolic work at the heart of all learning. You will find excerpts of Rubén's paper overlapped by assertions, questions, and stories. You will witness my shouting. You will participate in my sense-making of his proposed "orders."

Thesis... FIRST THING FIRST..." Yaaaaaas !"Arting & puriment #/ AKA "Arts are transformative" master har native "Ablack Woman Can this be considered toxic pasitivity? TT SUICE The past of badies. Few ideas have captured the imaginaries of curriculum scholars and educators committed HELTERS RACISM. to social justice than the notion Texic Positivity = ... the arts and other forms of symbolic work and cultural production play in social and cultural the excessive and processes that, unfortunately, are central to producing inequality and social injustice. that the arts can change the world. ineffective overgeneralization of a happy, optimistic state across all structions. The pracess of toxic positivity results in denial, minimization, + invalidation Curriculum scholarship is full of facile you betta establish of your human emotional experience arguments premised on the un-...arts are in fact implicated questioned in social reproduction as assumption well as racist, sexist, ableist, that "the and colonial violence arts" are a ((Fe) membering as an act of decolonization." good thing AREINA? Every memory I have of my mother mopping and sweeping the house is accompanied by the sound track of either the classical hour on Radio Universidad de Puerto Rico or the voice of Mercedes Sosa in the background. That's funny | My mommas sound track was Betty Wright and Bobby Blue Bland. Hsbrazy how those memories bring back smells, feelings of safety. Was it the Music or ...? This is Indeed, professional training as a musician seemed to be antithetical to any kind of politics and required me to form a different musical identity and to do different things with music (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010). Specifically, I want to put forward the thesis that the notion of "the arts" - along with the common phrase "arts-based" - operates through a metonymic relationship to thitenest, hegemonic understandings of culture and to notions of European civilization in particular in ways that appropriate a wide range of cultural practices in the name of colonization and White supremacy (see Gaztambide-Fernández, Kraehe, & Carpenter, 2018). We gotta find a different hame for what we are In fact, these various musical practices often did not travel well across contexts, and when doing. All supported symbolic they did, they required a significant amount of adjustment in order to be legible and and creativity should not collapse into the category of ARTS BASED. adequately respond to institutional expectations and to literally perform certain kinds of musical identities that could be framed around specific relationships. And of course, I changed across these contexts and the ways in which I used music as an expression of who I was changed as well.

Image 1. "First thing first, yaaaaas!"

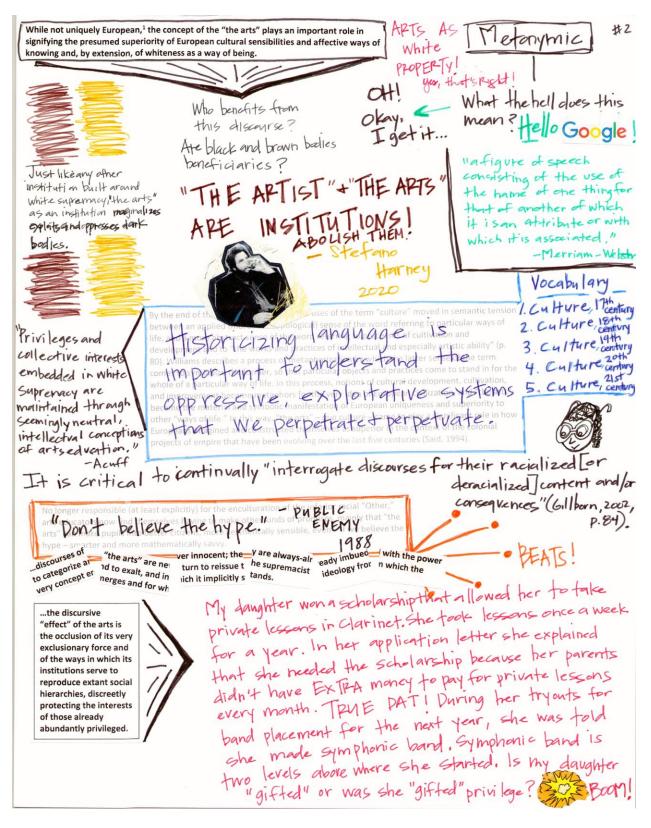


Image 2. "Don't believe the hype"- Public Enemy circa 1988

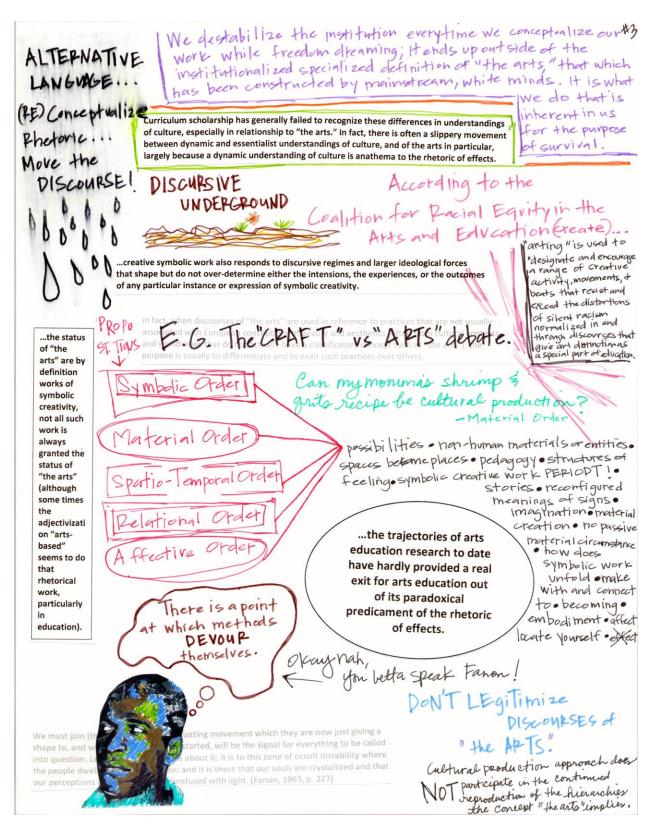


Image 3. "Can my mommas shrimp and grits recipe be considered cultural production?"

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