

“Y’aaaaas,” “Okay nah,” and other Black Woman Utterances About a Proposed Cultural Production Approach

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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... "Yaaaaas!" *Arting Ex periment #1*

AKA "Arts are transformative" master narrative *Abblack woman agreeing!*

Can this be considered toxic positivity? *This narrative offers no room to be attentive to the ways "the arts" constitute and reconstitute hierarchies of bodies. IT SHELTERS RACISM.*

Toxic positivity = the excessive and ineffective over-generalization of a happy, optimistic state across all situations. The process of toxic positivity results in **denial, minimization, + invalidation** of human emotional experience.

...the arts and other forms of symbolic work and cultural production play in social and cultural processes that, unfortunately, are central to producing inequality and social injustice.

...arts are in fact implicated in social reproduction as well as racist, sexist, ableist, and colonial violence

Toxic *you gotta establish your Ethos...* *two Emps*

"(re)membering as an act of decolonization." - Bettina Love cit. B. Dillard

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 soundtrack was Betty Wright and Bobby Blue Bland. Its brazy how those memories bring back smells, feelings of safety. Was it the music or...?

This is NOT art, I'm just thinking. from...

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 (Gatzambide-Fernández, 2010).

Whiteness

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 **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 Gatzambide-Fernández, Kraehe, & Carpenter, 2018).

In fact, these various musical practices often did not travel well across contexts, and when they did, they required a significant amount of adjustment in order to be legible and 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.

We gotta find a different name for what we are doing. All ~~symbolic~~ symbolic and creativity should not collapse into the category of ? → ARTS BASED.

Image 1. "First thing first, yaaaaas!"

ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE...
 (PE) Conceptualize Rhetoric...
 Move the DISCOURSE!

We destabilize the institution everytime we conceptualize our work while freedom dreaming; it ends up outside of the institutionalized specialized definition of "the arts," that which has been constructed by mainstream, white minds. It is what we do that is inherent in us for the purpose of survival.

Curriculum scholarship has generally failed to recognize these differences in understandings of culture, especially in relationship to "the arts." In fact, there is often a slippery movement between dynamic and essentialist understandings of culture, and of the arts in particular, largely because a dynamic understanding of culture is anathema to the rhetoric of effects.

DISCURSIVE UNDERGROUND
 According to the Coalition for Racial Equity in the Arts and Education (create)...

...creative symbolic work also responds to discursive regimes and larger ideological forces that shape but do not over-determine either the intensions, the experiences, or the outcomes of any particular instance or expression of symbolic creativity.

...the status of "the arts" are by definition works of symbolic creativity, not all such work is always granted the status of "the arts" (although some times the adjectivization on "arts-based" seems to do that rhetorical work, particularly in education).

Propositions
 E.G. The "CRAFT" vs "ARTS" debate.

In fact, when discourses of "the arts" are used in reference to practices that are not usually associated with European concepts of creativity and aesthetic production, the purpose is usually to differentiate and to exalt such practices over others.

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Symbolic Order
 Material Order
 Spatio-Temporal Order
 Relational Order
 Affective Order

Can my mommas shrimp & grits recipe be cultural production?
 -Material Order

possibilities • non-human materials or entities • spaces become places • pedagogy • structures of feeling • symbolic creative work PERIOD! • stories • reconfigured meanings of signs • imagination • material creation • no passive material circumstance • how does symbolic work unfold • make with and connect to • becoming • embodiment • affect locate yourself • effect

...the trajectories of arts education research to date have hardly provided a real exit for arts education out of its paradoxical predicament of the rhetoric of effects.

There is a point at which methods DEVOUR themselves.

Okay nah, you betta speak Fanon!

DON'T LEGITIMIZE DISCOURSES of "the ARTS."

Cultural production approach does NOT participate in the continued reproduction of the hierarchies the concept "the arts" implies.

We must join [the]... quating movement which they are now just giving a shape to, and w... started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question. L... about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell... and it is there that our souls are crystallized and that our perceptions... nsfused with light. (Fanon, 1963, p. 227)

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

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