

I apologize for only being able to contribute this brief note to the discussion via my friend Ivan. I hope that it adds something to the discussion, and if it does not, I hope that it passes unobserved! After talking to Ivan, I decided that I might best comment on what it is that Cultural Studies attempts to do.

At its heart, Cultural Studies seeks to remain true to the “ruthless critique of all existing things”. By critique I mean the historical analysis of those things that we accept without question (our “Culture”), and the uncovering of their origins so as to deprive them of their authority. This is a very different process from Criticism. Critique postpones judgment, especially those judgments made from the standpoint of disciplinary knowledge. Because of this notion of Critique, Cultural Studies is not interdisciplinary, or trans-disciplinary, it is anti-disciplinary.

Because of this, I might begin by first wondering not if there is a difference between the Art & Design Student and the Liberal Arts Student, but by asking if this divergence is both real and necessary. I have known many artistic liberal arts students, as well as many academic art students. This is not a particularly deep statement, and I am sure that it has already been made by others.

Cultural Studies does pay a great deal of attention to language, but it does not play language games. Language is important because it is the means by which we exchange our various understandings of the world. It is the means by which we exchange “culture”. The critique that Cultural Studies deploys extends by necessity to language, or discourse. It necessitates my asking whether it is possible for us to overcome the division of students into artists and intellectuals. To answer this, I think we would have to critique our notions of professor, student, mastery, grades, foundations, intellectual, academic, intelligence, talent, genius, gift, etc. We would also have to critique our most treasured notions of culture, race, gender, identity, and space. Otherwise, no matter how radical our rhetoric, we will continue to reproduce the order of things that we want to transform.

Cultural Studies is not nihilistic, and it is not postmodern (whatever that means), and it is not relativistic. It has little tolerance for either identity politics or rational-critical discourse. Cultural Studies, by being anti-disciplinary, is inherently a political intervention.

From this perspective, I would suggest that one way to overcome the bifurcation that our topic exposes is to analyze how this difference came about and what reproduces it. The results of this analysis might mean that we have to gear education towards the goal of making one's own life as a work of art, as the

materialist tradition has always urged. This might well be an very anti-artistic suggestion, but it is the direction that critique leads. This does not necessarily mean an outright rejection of the market, but it leads, at this level, to a conscious engagement with the market and thus with ourselves as commodified subjects. To live life as a work of art is a present the most subversive action, and one that is not deflected by the differences between artists and academics.

Ideally, desire for life as a work of art is both the educational goal and the political intervention of Cultural Studies.

Ric Brown

Asst. Prof. Cultural Studies