STUDYING CULTURE

an introductory reader

Edited by Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan

Studying Culture

An Introductory Reader

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Acknowledgements

When we decided to construct a reader in Cultural Studies we knew it would be fun. Making such a compilation of selected texts has an affinity with picking a list of favourite records, novels, films or whatever. Yet, little did we imagine how difficult and occasionally tortuous a project we had embarked upon. We have chopped and changed the selection so many times that we have now lost count of quite how many times. Also, when for one reason or another a piece had to be removed we found it impossible to merely slot in a substitute; the unbalancing effect was normally too great. In the end, however, we believe that the selection of writings presented here constitutes a fair representation of cultural studies, and possibly a better one than all the previous selections that we had to discard or modify drastically, which is not to say it is definitive: that would be impossible in any event. Some of the items are cut for reasons of space or in order to bring out the argument more sharply. These cuts are marked by the convention of [. . .]. We apologise to those authors who may feel this has distorted their work. It is, of course, to the authors we have drawn upon that we owe the greatest acknowledgement, all of whom have taught us something and whose works, we believe, exemplify the best of cultural studies. The particular selection of texts has been very much influenced by our learning from students, especially adult education students, initially at the Workers' Educational Association in Leeds and subsequently tutoring on the Open University's Popular Culture course in the mid-1980s. Our present students at the University of Birmingham and Coventry University have further demonstrated to us the value of material which is both accessible and challenging. We also thank our publishers, Lesley Riddle and Louise Thompson, for their endless patience and good humour.

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and Generation (Macmillan, 1984); the author of Phil Cohen, 'Subcultural conflict and working-class community' reprinted from *Working Papers in Cultural Studies 2* (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, Spring 1972); the author for Liz Curtis, 'Echoes of the present – the Victorian press and Ireland', from *Truth: the First Casualty* (Information on Ireland, 1978); Verso for Mike Davis, 'The view from futures past', from *City of Quartz – Excavating the Future of Los Angeles*, (Verso/NLB, London and New York, 1990), the authors and Broadcast for Richard Dyer, Terry Lovell and Jean McCrindle, 'Soap opera and women' reprinted from *Edinburgh International Television Festival 1977 – Official Programme* (Broadcast, 1977); Routledge for Nicholas Garnham, 'Concepts of culture' from *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Methuen & Co; Routledge for Marie Gillespie, 'Technology and tradition', from *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2.; Routledge for Paul Gilroy, 'Black and white on the dance floor' from *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (Hutchinson, 1987); the Council of Europe for Stuart Hall, 'The television discourse – encoding and decoding', © Council of Europe, first published in *Education and Culture* No. 25, 1974; the author and the Institute of Contemporary Arts for Stuart Hall, 'Minimal selves', from *Identity: The Real Me – Postmodernism and the Question of Identity* (ICA Documents 6, 1987) pp. 44–6. © Stuart Hall and the ICA; Verso for Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and consumer society', reprinted from E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Postmodernism and its Discontents* (Verso/NLB, London and New York, 1988) pp. 213–29 the author and *Marxism Today* for Doreen Massey, 'A global sense of place' first published in *Marxism Today*, June, 1991; the author for Kobena Mercer, 'Just looking for trouble – Robert Mapplethorpe and fantasies of race' reprinted from Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh (eds.), *Sex Exposed – Sexuality and the Pornography Debate* (Virago, 1992); Australian Journal of Communication for Graham Murdock, 'Cultural studies at the crossroads' from *Australian Journal of Communication* No. 16 (December, 1989); 'The Institute of Race Relations for Jan Nederveen Pieterse, 'Fictions of Europe', from *Race and Class* Vol. 32, No. 3, (1991); the author for Bhikhu Parekh, 'Between holy text and moral void', reprinted from *New Statesman* (24 March 1989); Verso for Janice Radway, 'Reading *Reading the Romance*' (Introduction to the English edition of *Reading the Romance*, Verso/NLB, London and New York, 1987) pp. 1–18 Pantheon Books for the extract from *Orientalism* by Edward W. Said, © 1978 by Edward W. Said. Reprinted by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc. Routledge for the extract from Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Merryn Williams for Raymond Williams, 'Culture is ordinary' reprinted from N. McKenzie (ed.), *Convictions* (MacGibbon and Kee, 1958); Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd for the extract from Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements* (Marion Boyars, 1978); Open University Press for Paul Willis, 'Symbolic creativity' from *Common Culture*, (Open University Press, 1990).

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Introduction

This book aims to introduce cultural studies by offering a particular selection of more or less 'classic' readings. Such an offering obliges the editors to address the question: 'what is cultural studies?' That is a perfectly reasonable question to be posed by a newcomer to the field, and it is newcomers to the field who are inevitably positioned as the ideal readers of an introductory textbook. The book, however, also aims to address those already familiar with the field of study who may feel they have been journeying through a terrain for which there is no agreed map. Which is not, of course, to say there are no maps, the best known being Stuart Hall's original efforts (1980a and 1980b). Since Hall mapped out the field according to the distinction between the paradigms of 'culturalism' and 'structuralism', his own neo-Gramscian synthesis of 'hegemony theory' and a series of 'post-structuralist' variants, the field has expanded and become much more diverse than it was at the end of the 1970s (Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler, 1992).

Although the question as posed is reasonable, there is no easy or satisfactory way of answering it. It is one of those questions which tends to come up against evasions and, at best, to spawn other questions, questions that are much more pertinent than the desire to achieve comfort by fixing too precisely the coordinates of an unruly and rapidly developing field of study. We do not intend to evade the question but we also believe there is no single answer that would not do violence to the values of openness. Ours is a particular version by virtue of being a selection shaped by educational considerations derived from our own experiences of studying and teaching cultural studies over several years. We think this book can be useful to students and tutors by facilitating a provisional entry into the field.

There are some answers to the question, however, both narrow and broad. The narrowest answer depends upon prefixing 'cultural studies' with 'British' (Turner, 1990). It is true that the term 'cultural studies' became current in Britain during the late 1960s and early 1970s with specific reference to its institutional siting at Birmingham University: the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, founded in 1964 by the Professor of English, Richard Hoggart, and over which Stuart Hall presided as Director in the 1970s. This Centre of international repute, now superseded by the Birmingham Department of Cultural Studies, drew upon a tradition of study which emerged in the post-Second World War period in British

adult education (Williams, 1989). Out of the discipline of English, inspired by Raymond Williams (1958) and the little-recorded efforts of many other adult education tutors, important questions were being asked, mainly by working-class mature students, about the relations between 'culture' and 'society', which broke the bounds of traditional disciplines like literature and history and had a difficult and sometimes deeply troubled association with newer social scientific disciplines, most notably sociology.

For sociologists schooled in a positivistic mode, cultural studies seemed far too soft, concerned with the interpretation of meanings, reminiscent of literary criticism, but encroaching upon the grounds of the social: qualitative in its approach rather than 'scientifically' quantitative. Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) 'read' everyday working-class life, customs and habits, as though they were literary texts, opening up the study of popular culture and applying the interpretive procedures of the humanities to the stuff of social science. In this sense, cultural studies had more in common with anthropology than with the survey research methods and statistical analyses of mainstream sociology. Its great precursor was Mass Observation, a movement of the 1930s and 1940s which sought to turn the anthropological gaze inwards from colonial subjects exclusively to register indigenous subjects (Jeffrey, 1978). Another significant precursor of cultural studies was George Orwell, who wrote about the English working class (*The Road to Wigan Pier*, 1937) and popular cultural artefacts, such as the 'vulgar' postcards of Donald McGill ('The Art of Donald McGill', 1942, reprinted in Orwell's *Collected Essays*, 1968). A further complementary strand was that of 'history from below', represented at the time most profoundly by Edward Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). These precursors and complementarities to cultural studies, as it was forming, are not anthologized in this book. To leave Hoggart and Thompson out is indeed strange. It is due to limitations of space and to the stronger claims, at present, of more immediately usable material for understanding contemporary cultural practices. We have included Raymond Williams's less well known essay from 1958 to represent this 'culturalist' current, 'Culture is ordinary', which in its polemical title encapsulates most sharply the cardinal impulse of what became understood as 'cultural studies' in Britain and in the English-speaking world generally, the stress on 'lived experience' and the recovery of 'the popular' from its denigration or sentimentalization by cultural elitists (McGuigan, 1992). We also believe that Williams is the single most important figure in the original formation of cultural studies, although Hall played a larger role in establishing it as a curriculum subject, particularly by fusing the British tradition of 'culturalism' with the French tradition of 'structuralism', represented initially in this anthology by Roland Barthes's essay from 1964, 'The rhetoric of the image'.

The linguistic turn in cultural studies during the 1970s, inspired by structural linguistics (Saussure, 1974), Levi-Strauss's (1968) structural anthropology and Barthes's (1972) semiological readings of contemporary popular culture, relates to the broader answer to what is cultural studies: seen in retrospect, something of an imperialistic project. This was not only associated with the pretensions of structuralism since 'culture' could be conceived from a historical materialist perspective, after economy and

polity, as 'the third instance of the social whole' (Mulhern, 1980: 32), clustering together all sense-making practices. There is a consistency here with structuralism's systematic retotalization of academic enquiry in general and especially its promise to colonize the humanities and social sciences entirely with a universalistic method and the startling claims that language speaks us and, because everything is discursive, therefore, inseparable from the subterranean operations of language (Lane, 1970). This is not the context in which to evaluate the structuralist project and its legacy for cultural studies: briefly, the crucial point is that cultural studies, for a moment, seemed to be out to capture the whole field of 'the cultural', to hegemonize its own intellectual leadership. That rationalist takeover bid did not succeed. The traditional disciplines changed but were not displaced. Literary criticism, for example, became increasingly redefined according to the new literary theory (Eagleton, 1983) and, for another example, sociology took on board the cultural to a greater extent, particularly in the encounter with postmodernism towards the end of the 1980s (see, for instance, Lash, 1990). The resultant outcome of cultural studies's bid for hegemony, however, was to leave it peculiarly boundless. Unlike older disciplines, and some of the newer ones, proponents of cultural studies are reluctant to enclose their terms of reference with definitional precision: everything remains up for grabs. There is also an enormous resistance to the very idea of disciplinarity and its connotations of policing the borders of knowledge. Cultural studies, broadly speaking, can still be said, however, to be concerned with anything that is meaningful, usually seen in connection to power relations.

There is an additional way of trying to pin cultural studies down: institutional and, to some extent, spatial. Cultural studies crept in from the margins, accompanied by other subjects (communication, film, media studies), to become institutionalized within the academy and to spread, in one form or another, throughout the educational system. We now have undergraduate degrees variously named which either mark themselves out explicitly as cultural studies or which are in some implicitly cognate relationship to it. For instance, communication studies, which led the way at this level, is frequently all but cultural studies in name or includes the cultural studies 'perspective' as one amongst any number of disciplinary contributions to an umbrella subject. Many students reading this book will be on programmes of study not named cultural studies but for which the book is undoubtedly relevant. And, on the school curriculum, there are now numerous and varied courses in communication, cultural and media studies.

Cultural studies has latterly gone international. Its reception, especially in Australia and North America, decentred what was once a distinctly British field of study that had been obsessed, arguably, with the peculiarities of the British, bringing continental rationalist theory to bear upon localized empirical objects, for example, the succession of spectacular youth subcultures, one of Britain's major exports to the rest of the world. It is debatable whether cultural studies has become decentred or, instead, *recentred* in the United States's university system, as a recent symposium held at the University of Illinois, drawing together stars in the firmament,

to ponder the past, present and future of cultural studies, would suggest (Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler, 1992). The claims of feminism, black politics, the discourses of 'the other', however, were already decentring British cultural studies politically from its narrowly national and social class preoccupations. These political interventions and their theoretical consequences have guided our selection of material. For American students, Patrick Brantlinger's *In Crusoe's Footprints* (1990) provides a useful articulation of cultural studies with American studies that may offset the necessarily British-rootedness of this particular collection.

This book, in effect, traces the developments outlined above, beginning with Raymond Williams's challenge to cultural elitism from within the tradition of 'English' criticism, and concluding with writings that illustrate the internationalization of cultural studies and the critical renewal of an intellectual field which is not contained by traditional disciplinary borders. Mike Davis's elegaic remarks on socialism in the desert outside Los Angeles, the city which epitomizes utopian and dystopian imbrications in the modern world, are followed by Jan Nederveen Pieterse's critique of 'European' rhetoric in an old world riven by racial and ethnic conflicts. The final piece, by Doreen Massey, a geographer, discusses the relations between the global and the local, thus focussing attention on the contemporary politics of place in a complex and rapidly changing world.

By tracking through a dense forest of theoretical perspectives and analytical applications, not all of them compatible with one another, we aim to provide a sense of what cultural studies has been and might yet become. The selection slightly marginalizes the textual in favour of the lived. This reflects both the availability of other readers, particularly concerned with visual and literary media, which foreground the textual (supplemented by the psychoanalytic) and do not need yet further replication, for the time being at least, and our own predilections, which are more ethnographically-inclined and policy-oriented. The book represents, then, a comparatively sociological 'take' on cultural studies, though probably unrecognizably so to many sociologists. It may, therefore, be more accurate to describe this selection as one which foregrounds the social with the partial aim of redressing the balance in that direction.

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Editors' note

In some of the earlier pieces in this Reader the term 'man' is used to refer to both men and women in a manner common until feminism's questioning of patriarchal language impacted upon academic discourse. The problem is signalled now rather than marked in every instance.

Contents

Section I

Some foundations

Reference has already been made to the problems of definition in relation to cultural studies and the same can be said of any attempt to construct a history of a field of study, which the term 'foundations' would seem to imply. It is true that there could be many different histories accounting for the development of cultural studies but the most common one begins with the 'triumvirate' of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Edward Thompson, more remarkable for their differences than this traditional grouping would imply but who, writing in the late 1950s in Britain, shared at the very least a common questioning of academic values and disciplines, in particular those entrenched within English and History. However, our selection here is less concerned with constructing a coherent or chronological narrative through cultural studies, but rather seeks to indicate a number of interventions, often from the margins, which at their best cause disjunctures and dislocations in the development of the field of study.

Writing in 1958, **Raymond Williams** insisted that 'Culture is ordinary' and forced the first important shift into a new way of thinking about the symbolic dimensions of our lives. Thus, 'culture' is wrested from that privileged space of artistic production and specialist knowledge, into the lived experience of the everyday.

In following with **Roland Barthes**'s 'Rhetoric of the image', originally published in France in 1964, we are recognizing the impact of the body of work known as 'structuralism' in the development of cultural studies, although its impact reverberated through many disciplines. Structuralism and, particularly in this instance, semiology, was seen to offer the potential for a rigorous mode of analysis, especially of the visual image, but also of other texts and social practices. This was an analysis which, with its emphasis on the underlying structures of texts and practices, was seen to provide a necessary distance which the more experiential and humanistic versions of cultural studies lacked.

Although semiotics offered a method of textual analysis, attempts were made to go beyond this limited focus. The essay by **Stuart Hall** provides

a model for understanding the textual construction of meaning *and* the practice of reading, or decoding, the text. This model was taken up most notably by David Morley in his study of the popular magazine programme, *Nationwide* (Morley 1980). Here Hall introduces a sociological dimension to the question of 'reading' (a term used in relation to all texts) and this piece also serves to place television as a key object of study.

This focus is returned to and expanded in the paper presented to the Edinburgh International Television Festival in 1977 by **Richard Dyer**, **Terry Lovell** and **Jean McCrindle** on women's viewing of and representation in the soap opera genre, which insists that popular television should be taken seriously and further demands that genres specifically addressed to a female audience should be critically examined. This was an important intervention from which followed a number of studies of soap opera in particular (Dyer et al. 1981; Brunsdon 1981; Hobson 1982; Modleski 1982; Allen 1985; Ang 1985; Geraghty 1990), and also of female genres more generally and the female audience. The theme of soap opera and women provided an important bridge between the sociologically based media studies and feminist work within film theory, producing fruitful attempts to work with often incompatible theoretical frameworks (Kuhn 1984; Mattelart 1986; Brunsdon 1986; Gamman and Marshment 1988; Pibram 1988; Taylor 1989; Seiter et al. 1989; Brown 1990.)

Edward Said's ground-breaking book *Orientalism*, the introduction to which is printed here, opens up a very different set of questions, those of 'race' and ethnicity which were being raised elsewhere in a range of contexts, but more broadly, using a Foucauldian framework, he points to the operations of power in the Eurocentric constructions of the 'Orient' across many sites of knowledge production. The consequences of these dense accumulations of 'referential power' constituting myths of the Orient in the culture at large were never more sharply focussed than during the Gulf War of 1991 when the global dimensions of 'race' and 'otherness' and the crippling consequences of Orientalism were exposed in all public, and many private, discursive sites (Kabbani 1986; Norris 1992.)

The inclusion of **Nicholas Garnham**'s paper presented to the Greater London Council in 1983 is to introduce an often neglected dimension of culture within the field of mainstream cultural studies. That is the constitution and formation of the cultural industries, the intensification of cultural distribution, and therefore access to audiences, and what contribution cultural studies can offer to policy making. This important level of analysis is rendered absent in most studies of cultural consumption.

Janice Radway's introduction to the British publication of her influential work *Reading the Romance* usefully reminds us of the importance of the context of intellectual production whilst outlining her study of American romance readers as an 'interpretive community'. Whilst Radway's auto-critique is important (see also Radway 1988), *Reading the Romance* remains as one of the few examples of a multi-layered analysis of a hugely popular fictional genre and its readers.

This section ends with a note of caution and critique from **Graham Murdock** in which he registers a problem for the future of cultural studies. The metaphor of the 'Crossroads' is nicely ironic in its allusion to the highly

popular and much analysed British soap opera of the same name given his critique of the tendencies in recent work within cultural studies; that of populism and a critical pluralism; its British focus and its tendency to ignore questions of political economy. What he, and others, have signalled is the danger in the slippage from 'ordinariness' to 'banality' (Morris 1988) in cultural studies, and the need to constantly reflect on our frameworks and objects of study.

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1

Culture is ordinary

Raymond Williams

The bus stop was outside the cathedral. I had been looking at the Mappa Mundi, with its rivers out of Paradise, and at the chained library, where a party of clergymen had got in easily, but where I had waited an hour and cajoled a verger before I even saw the chains. Now, across the street, a cinema advertised the *Six-Five Special* and a cartoon version of *Gulliver's Travels*. The bus arrived, with a driver and a conductress deeply absorbed in each other. We went out of the city, over the old bridge, and on through the orchards and the green meadows and the fields red under the plough. Ahead were the Black Mountains, and we climbed among them, watching the steep fields end at the grey walls, beyond which the bracken and heather and whin had not yet been driven back. To the east, along the ridge, stood the line of grey Norman castles; to the west, the fortress wall of the mountains. Then, as we still climbed, the rock changed under us. Here, now, was limestone, and the line of the early iron workings along the scarp. The farming valleys, with their scattered white houses, fell away behind. Ahead of us were the narrower valleys: the steel-rolling mill, the gasworks, the grey terraces, the pitheads. The bus stopped, and the driver and conductress got out, still absorbed. They had done this journey so often, and seen all its stages. It is a journey, in fact, that in one form or another we have all made.

I was born and grew up halfway along that bus journey. Where I lived is still a farming valley, though the road through it is being widened and straightened, to carry the heavy lorries to the north. Not far away, my grandfather, and so back through the generations, worked as a farm labourer until he was turned out of his cottage and, in his fifties, became a roadman. His sons went at thirteen or fourteen on to the farms, his daughters into service. My father, his third son, left the farm at fifteen to be a boy porter on the railway, and later became a signalman, working in a box in this valley until he died. I went up the road to the village school, where a curtain divided the two classes—Second to eight or nine, First to fourteen. At eleven I went to the local grammar school, and later to Cambridge.

Culture is ordinary: that is where we must start. To grow up in that country was to see the shape of a culture, and its modes of change. I could

stand on the mountains and look north to the farms and the cathedral, or south to the smoke and the flare of the blast furnace making a second sunset. To grow up in that family was to see the shaping of minds: the learning of new skills, the shifting of relationships, the emergence of different language and ideas. My grandfather, a big hard labourer, wept while he spoke, finely and excitedly, at the parish meeting, of being turned out of his cottage. My father, not long before he died, spoke quietly and happily of when he had started a trade-union branch and a Labour Party group in the village, and, without bitterness, of the 'kept men' of the new politics. I speak a different idiom, but I think of these same things.

Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind. The making of a mind is, first, the slow learning of shapes, purposes, and meanings, so that work, observation and communication are possible. Then, second, but equal in importance, is the testing of these in experience, the making of new observations, comparisons, and meanings. A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we see through them the nature of a culture: that it is always both traditional and creative; that it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings. We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life—the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning—the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture are questions about our general and common purposes, yet also questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind.

Now there are two senses of culture—two colours attached to it—that I know about but refuse to learn. The first I discovered at Cambridge, in a teashop. I was not, by the way, oppressed by Cambridge. I was not cast down by old buildings, for I had come from a country with twenty centuries of history written visibly into the earth: I liked walking through a Tudor court, but it did not make me feel raw. I was not amazed by the existence of a place of learning; I had always known the cathedral, and the bookcases I now sit to work at in Oxford are of the same design as those in the chained library. Nor was learning, in my family, some strange eccentricity; I was not, on a scholarship in Cambridge, a new kind of animal up a brand-new ladder. Learning was ordinary; we learned where we could. Always, from those scattered white houses, it had made sense to go out and become a scholar or a poet or a teacher. Yet few of us could be spared from the immediate work; a price had been set on this kind of learning, and it was