



Resource Review

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Name of reviewed item:	New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory
Author(s) / Editor(s):	Gary Hall & Clare Birchall (editors)
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Review:

New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory is an ambitious publication that attempts to map the history, present state, and possible future(s) of cultural studies. The book consists of 16 chapters, divided into four sections: New Adventures in Theory, New Theorists, New Transformations and New Adventures in Cultural Studies. There is also a 'Bonus Section' (free with every copy of this book) which consists of a New Cultural Studies Questionnaire where you can test your own 'new' cultural studies knowledge (very amusing). There are numerous cultural studies titles on the market right now and most of them, with a few exceptions, tread a well-worn path. The value of this title is that it does offer a lot of 'fresh' material whilst also covering what one would expect a book on cultural studies to cover. So what's new about New Cultural Studies? According to the editors of this volume:

"New Cultural Studies is endeavouring to reposition cultural theory and reaffirm its continuing intellectual, and indeed 'political' (and 'ethical'), relevance to cultural studies, and to culture and society at large" (Hall and Birchall 2006, 23)

This book contains an impressive collection of essays written by a generation of post-Birmingham (their words, not mine) theorists intent on redefining cultural studies in

order to map out and explore new territories and intersections for cultural theory. Part of this strategy involves opening-up critical dialogues with a range of theorists such as Agamben, Badiou, Hardt and Negri, and Levinas. Some more familiar names also make an appearance – Deleuze, Derrida and Laclau are prominent. In part, this project appears to involve a desire to specify the role of theory against the back drop of broader contextual factors such as the crisis of the Left, the marketisation of Higher Education, the war in Iraq, the new economy and global events (post) September the 11th, 2001. But the prefix 'new' is not an attempt to dismiss what has come before or to devalue in any way the 'old' cultural studies - so don't throw away your copy of *The Cultural Studies Reader* (During 1993) just yet. Indeed each of the contributors owe, in some way, a significant debt to the pioneering work of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, the BCCCS and Stuart Hall, the turn to Gramsci and the various theoretical twists and turns that have underpinned the development of the 'cultural studies project' to date. A key tradition in cultural studies is certainly continued here in the form of critical self-reflective essays on the nature, aims and objectives of the discipline itself. Another key attribute of cultural studies in terms of its interdisciplinary and somewhat eclectic approach to all things cultural is also retained.

At the time of writing this review I have not, as yet, used *New Cultural Studies* as a teaching and learning resource but I will be recommending it to students as a key text to be used alongside other established titles in the field. One of the main strengths of the book is that it is structured and organised into themed sections, and therefore it can be usefully read either as a whole or sections and chapters may be dipped into and used as required. The quality and scope of the essays that comprise this volume makes this book invaluable but I would recommend some discretion. The back-cover notes state that the book is "both an introductory reference work and an original study" which, in many respects, is a fair assessment of what the book sets out to accomplish. But it seems to me that students using this book will need a certain amount of background knowledge concerning cultural studies as well as a good grasp of some broader contextual issues and themes in order to get the most out of it. This is not a criticism, but it is certainly the case that some of the contributors are entering the debate at a level where a sufficient degree of prior knowledge is essential. Students will need to have a very thorough understanding of, say, Stuart Hall's (1980) "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms" at the very least before taking on some of the chapters in this title. Therefore, I can only see *New Cultural Studies* working best as an introductory text in the context of designated Cultural Studies or Popular Culture degree programmes where a certain amount of groundwork would have been covered early on, most probably in the first year of study. In the context of some Media Studies or Sociology programmes with a broader remit I envisage this title being more effective in level three modules. Without a doubt, *New Cultural Studies* should certainly be required reading at post-graduate level.

In summary, I really enjoyed reading this book and will most certainly be using it in the future. It is a valuable addition to the field and I'm sure that it will find its way into reading lists on a range of Sociology, Media and Cultural Studies courses in the UK (and further afield). Overall, then, I would rate this book as a positive contribution that will be an invaluable resource for both lecturers and students in enhancing the teaching and learning experience. This title offers a diverse selection of really well-written and informative interventions (theoretical and methodological) that will undoubtedly be influential in helping to establish both what cultural studies is, and what it might become, as we move further into the 21st Century.

References

During, S. (ed) (1993) *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Routledge.

Hall, G. and Birchall, C. (2006) *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory* (Some Comments, Clarifications, Explanations, Observations, Recommendations, Remarks, Statements and Suggestions) in Hall, G. & Birchall, C. (eds) *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*. Edinburgh University Press.

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