

..... Introduction

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Recent decades have witnessed an almost ever-increasing attention to questions of culture, cultural theory and the cultural turn, yet what this means is still not entirely clear. In this collection, a range of authors, both well established and new, address these questions in a variety of ways. While literatures on cultural theory, including large edited collections, are now profuse, if not perhaps even profligate, this collection is unique in two senses. First, rather than acting as a 'round-up' of previously published readings, it brings together a series of original papers by authors, both time-honoured and recent; and, second, instead of asking the question, what is the significance of the impact of cultural analysis and theory for or upon sociology and social science, it asks, what is the legacy of sociology and wider social scientific inquiry in understanding the significance of culture, cultural practice, or cultural theory? It is perhaps a rather odd sleight of hand that manages to reinvent history so that cultural inquiry almost appears to precede the immense significance of over a century and a half of sociological theory and social investigation of concepts, practices and phenomena that clearly had much to do with culture, however defined. In this brief introduction, then, I have two intentions: first, to outline what constitutes and defines 'cultural theory' in this particular instance and, second, to summarize some of the findings of the authors in this particular collection at this particular moment of time, space and culture.

The term cultural *theory* is something of a misnomer here for the original title of cultural *sociology*, thus directly informing an understanding of the cultural significance of sociology and the sociological significance of culture. Understandings of cultural theory must necessarily reflect, and indeed depend upon, definitions of culture *per se*. As is now well known across the social sciences, these tend to split into two: the first definition centred on notions of art, style and more widely the visual, and the second definition simply defined as ways of life (see, for example, Williams, 1988). Of course, this is precisely where the perceived conflict between cultural studies and or more 'culturalist' poststructural and postmodern theory and social science and sociology, particularly its nineteenth - century classical traditions, can perhaps be seen to originate. Sociology and social science have always been concerned with culture as ways of life – that is precisely what makes any of it 'social' – yet understandings of visual culture have tended to reside under the auspices of the arts. The rise of studies of popular

••• Tim Edwards •••

culture, media theory, visual analysis, and so on – following their growing importance throughout the western world and beyond in the twentieth century – started to force these two previously separate disciplines, and even worlds, to collide, leading to what is now commonly recognized as the ‘turn to culture’. This is perhaps most succinctly defined by Stuart Hall in his essay on the centrality of the cultural (Hall, 1997). Here, Hall defines the cultural turn according to two key dimensions: first, the substantive turn to culture in terms of empirically demonstrable developments in the media, economy, technology and most significantly globalization; and, second, the epistemological turn to culture in terms of the more philosophical break with Marxism and the rise of poststructural theory centred on new, and much more fluid, notion of language – and indeed culture – in particular. This somewhat dualist sense of the turn to culture also informs the collection of essays here which are divided into three parts: the first focusing on the legacy of sociological theory, the second considering some more contemporary theorists, and the third concerned with more empirical, or at least topical, dimensions of contemporary theory.

The first five chapters focus on the legacy of the classical tradition in sociology and the importance of the Frankfurt School in understanding more contemporary cultural theory more particularly. Key within this is the supposed ‘break’ with Marxism that is commonly seen to lead to the formation of cultural studies yet this is variously demonstrated to be as mythical as it is real. John Scott’s chapter on Humanist Marxism in particular pulls apart the so-called rupture between cultural studies and Marxist theory and focuses on the continuities. Starting with the work of Lukács, Scott shows how the Frankfurt School acted as a forerunner for more contemporary notions of the cultural economy, particularly in its perception of the need to complement economic analysis with cultural study. Chris Rojek, in Chapter 2, while berating the belated and uneven legacy of the work of Simmel for cultural studies, also argues strongly that Simmel’s work on money and the metropolis, as a form of what Frisby calls ‘sociological impressionism’, not only constitutes one of the most important analyses of modernity but a primary ‘entrée’ or route into more contemporary cultural analysis (Frisby, 1981). One might also cite the growing sociology of consumption as one example of such a legacy. Similarly, in keeping with Scott’s trajectory, Kellner, in Chapter 3, re-evaluates the significance of the Frankfurt School and the work of Walter Benjamin more particularly as potential forerunners of contemporary media studies. Indeed, in illustrating their influences upon work as diverse as that of the Birmingham School for Contemporary Cultural Studies and Raymond Williams, Todd Gitlin and Jürgen Habermas, Kellner shows how the break with Marxism is often misplaced, and that this centres more upon the rise of a more particular form of poststructural and postmodern theory. This is a theme picked up in the following two chapters which consider a couple of more particularly British traditions in sociology. Rojek’s direct consideration of the work of Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School for Contemporary Cultural Studies, in Chapter 4, follows Kellner’s logic in detecting a linguistic turn rather than a cultural turn as critical in causing the drift away from more directly Marxist theorizing. Hall’s influential essay on en/decoding is pivotal here in highlighting the growing significance of anti-essentialist theorizing, often influenced in turn by the rise of identity politics such as feminism and

••• Introduction •••

anti-racism (Hall, 1980). The name of Anthony Giddens is not the first that springs to mind when considering cultural theory, yet in Chapter 5 John Scott argues that culture is central to Giddens' analysis on two fronts: first, culture as structure in relation to his consideration of rules, norms and dispositions and, second, culture as lifeworld in relation to ways of life. Thus, Scott's argues, Giddens' analysis of culture informs his influential theory of structuration and his wider sociology of modernity although he critiques Giddens' lack of interrogation of the role of material resources.

In Part II, our attention shifts more towards the contemporary terrain of cultural theory yet a continuing emphasis upon social structure and patterns of inequality informs Peter Beilharz's consideration of Bauman, in Chapter 6, where he argues that culture for Bauman is primarily a 'structuring activity'. Through a wide-ranging analysis of the influences upon Bauman's work from Marxism and Freud through to Foucault, Beilharz interrogates Bauman's *Culture as Praxis*, ultimately returning to Bauman's dialogue with anthropology, and the work of Lévi-Strauss specifically, arguing that this is most fundamental in understanding Bauman's work on culture (Bauman, 1999). No work on cultural theory would be complete without reference to the seminal influence of French social science, and the work of Foucault most particularly. Powell and May's analysis of Foucault in Chapter 7 is driven most strongly by a consideration of his work on the philosophy of knowledge and his theorizing of subjectivity. Key within this is Foucault's anti-essentialist, and one might also say anti-realist, stance that refutes the 'reading off' of culture from deeper structures and his rearticulation of the role of culture in relation to wider – and more dynamic – historical and societal contexts, including medicine, sexuality and the role of the state. His attention to questions of power is a theme taken up in Chapter 8 in Robbins' consideration of the work of Bourdieu who, he argues, sees culture as a form of power relations or perhaps stratification, while still attempting to refute the concept *per se*. Robbins is particularly sensitive to what one might call the 'uses and abuses' of the work of Bourdieu and the significance of Anglo (mis)interpretation of specifically French philosophy and theorizing. Finally, in Chapter 9, Will Merrin considers the work of the on occasions near sociological *persona non grata* of Baudrillard. In conducting a particularly thorough review of his work, Merrin argues that Baudrillard – like Bourdieu – is subject to much misunderstanding and misuse when his work, and particularly his reformulation of semiotics or what Merrin calls his 'Durkhemian radicalism', are of enormous and continuing relevance to understandings of culture.

In summary to these more directly theoretically driven chapters, we are perhaps presented with three strongly interlinked key themes or points: first, that the supposed and oft-quoted break of contemporary cultural theory with early or more classical sociology, and particularly Marxism, is – to say the least – often overstated; second, significant continuities as well as conflicts exist between apparently diverse and contrasting strains of theorizing and analysis; and third, that those contrasts that do still exist are often contextually based and, more specifically, related to differing traditions of Anglo-American and European thought.

Following this point, in Part III, our attention shifts to more applied and topical dimension of contemporary cultural theory. In Chapter 10, Ann Brooks shows how feminist work and debates concerning subjectivity and identity intersect with and

••• Tim Edwards •••

inform issues of transnationalism and transculturalism. Within this she considers two examples: the Chinese diaspora and the 'politics of veiling' or Islam and feminism. Through a wide-ranging discussion, often placing a heavy emphasis upon questions of feminist praxis, she concludes that neither the traditions of sociology nor cultural studies alone are wide enough to incorporate the complexities of contemporary culture. Implicit within this and a recurrent theme through Part II is an engagement with interdisciplinarity or, more basically, an argument for what one might call subject hybrids combining and drawing on an array of disciplinary backgrounds. O'Neill's Chapter 11 on feminist epistemology and the role of participatory action research is complementary here. Interestingly, once again, she also returns to reconsider the legacy of the Frankfurt School and phenomenology more widely for contemporary feminist praxis. In his chapter on pop music, Eamonn Carrabine provides an effective survey of a wide range of theorizations of music from Adorno's work on jazz through to McRobbie's critique of Hebdige, concluding that pop music is indeed a hybrid topic in need of equally hybrid theorizing and understanding. Stevenson's final chapter on citizenship is perhaps the most wide-ranging of all and the one that opens up, and yet also concludes, the discussion of cultural phenomena. In opening up the politics of the cultural through an analysis of the increasing conflation of citizenship and consumption, Stevenson steers a deft course through the contested terrain of the cultural and the economic concluding that more attention is needed to address the increasing social divisions emerging from neo-liberal politics and practice, suggesting that the work of Raymond Williams may form the basis for such an engagement.

At the start of this Introduction, I pointed to a perceived conflict or tension between cultural theory and sociology. The chapters collected here, however, in a wide diversity of ways point to the falsity of any such division and the need for greater – and mutual – engagement between such disciplines and indeed many others. The challenge, then, is to put this into effect not only individually or in one direction but collectively across disciplines and with the mutual recognition of the enormity of contributions of sociology and sociologists past and present for cultural analysis and cultural practice.

References

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