

A CRITICAL AND CULTURAL THEORY READER

Second Edition

Praise for the first edition

"The selection is judicious and valuably supplemented by thorough commentaries that contextualise and clarify the debates and issues and the importance of each excerpt. Though today there may be many readers in and around cultural and media studies, Easthope and McGowan's remains vital..." **THES**

This Reader introduces the key readings in critical and cultural theory. It guides students through the tradition of thought, from Saussure's early writings on language to contemporary commentary on world events by theorists such as Baudrillard and Žižek. The readings are grouped according to six thematic sections: Semiology; Ideology; Subjectivity; Difference; Gender and Race; Postmodernism.

The second and expanded edition of this highly successful Reader reflects the growing diversity of the field.

- Featuring thirteen new essays, including writing by Homi Bhabha, Simone de Beauvoir, Franz Fanon and Judith Butler
- With a general introduction as well as useful introductions to each of the thematic sections
- Including summaries of each of the readings - invaluable for students and lecturers

Key reading for areas of study including cultural studies, critical theory, literature, linguistics, English, media studies, communication studies, cultural history, sociology, gender studies, visual arts, film and architecture.

Essays by: Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Homi K. Bhabha, Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, Simone de Beauvoir, Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, Frederick Engels, Franz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, Jean-François Lyotard, Colin MacCabe, Pierre Macherey, Karl Marx, Kobena Mercer, Laura Mulvey, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Edward Said, Slavoj Žižek.

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Introduction

In the gap between the first edition and the second updated edition of this Reader, critical and cultural theory has undergone something of a transformation. Initially regarded with suspicion, many of the ideas that constitute the discipline have filtered through the academy and have now become required reading in subjects ranging from English literature, cultural studies and art history to the humanities generally. It is no longer the job of this Reader, then, simply to insist on putting critical and cultural theory 'out there' into the Anglo-American domain. However, this in itself poses a special kind of problem, which must be addressed. Whenever initially disturbing ideas become accepted within a mainstream that has resisted them, there is invariably an issue as to how, why and in what terms that acceptance has been possible. While some of the terms of critical and cultural theory have undoubtedly provided 'buzz-words' for English and cultural studies over the years, it is less certain that the concepts they establish have been as readily embraced. If the acceptance of some of the work in critical and cultural theory has been possible without a rigorous regard for the full implications of the ideas they offer, then the radical potential of such ideas to challenge and disturb the disciplines within which they operate is lost. Perhaps the job of this Reader now is to continue to insist upon the full spectrum of those ideas encountered in their original contexts and without the inevitable dilution of easy 'how to' guides or reductive readings that make unfamiliar ideas appear more palatable. This means an insistence on reading Saussure, Derrida, Lyotard *et al.* first hand, and on tracing the logic through which ideas in the contemporary can be placed and understood.

We are conscious at the same time, of course, that the very selection of material for this Reader has its own consequences. It does, unashamedly, proffer a *particular* pathway through critical and cultural theory. It privileges a particular set of ideas that start from an attention to language as the seat of meaning. It deals, then, very specifically with poststructuralist and postmodern ideas, and it focuses specifically on issues of textuality. One attraction of this paradigm of study is that it breaks with the supremacy of the canon of traditional English literature, and with the idea of the literary work as a supposedly self-defining object. Within its terms, the work comes to be seen as *transitive*, an effect of the relation between text and the reader, and as

culturally constituted in much the same way as other kinds of text less venerated than literature. To this end, we have included a range of work, influenced variously by psychoanalysis and theories of the subject, which explores how texts can become effects in and for their readers, and which actively encourage the study of the texts of high and popular culture together. In doing this, this selection of readings also marks itself off from the more sociological aspects of cultural studies, which focus on analyses of reception, audiences and the ways in which groups and classes have reproduced and used cultural texts. To have done justice to this, and to the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jürgen Habermas, Pierre Bourdieu and Clifford Geertz (among others), would have required a second, companion volume. Perhaps this is a starting point for another kind of project.

In the meantime, however, no selection is natural, no anthology perfect. We are conscious that this one traces a particular history of the reception of continental ideas into the Anglophone world. And while the collection of readings for this second edition represents something of an 'updating', it is interesting to note how much of the content of the original Reader remains crucial to an understanding of the 'new'. The readings selected are grouped into six sections. Five consist of 'Semiology', 'Ideology', 'Subjectivity', 'Difference' and 'Gender and Race'. Another is used to indicate the crucial importance of understanding the present, a question acutely posed by the issue of postmodernism. One special problem for this new domain of critical and cultural theory is posed by the fact that the medium of popular culture is frequently visual – film, television, advertising, journalistic photography. In response to this, we include a number of essays which address the analysis of specifically visual material. Finally, with regard to the ideological effect of language, we have taken the liberty of noting its operation in some of the original text. On the first occasion a writer has assumed everyone is male, we have written [sic] but not subsequently.

Much of the work collected here was written in France, particularly after the 'events' of May 1968, and has had to be translated into English. Some of it is difficult to follow, partly because it is written in general theoretical terms, but often because it argues for views that are, as we have claimed, disturbingly unfamiliar. For this reason, as well as an 'Introduction' to each section, every text is given an outline 'Summary' at the end of the book. In writing these, we have been guided by our experience of teaching students at Manchester Metropolitan University, though these summaries represent only a version of each text, another voice in the discussion the texts themselves should provoke.

Section SEMIOL

Introduction

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