

Introduction: A Few Preliminary Notes to the Reader (or, Why read this Book?)

What is heuristic thinking and how can it help me do cultural studies?

What's the point of conjuring up Matthew Arnold's ghost?

What can Humphrey and Bogart tell us about Richard Hoggart?

What have Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson got to say about the Frankfurt School of criticism?

Who are Ladvi and Vidal, and what can they tell us about Raymond Williams?

What have Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde got to do with the work of Louis Althusser?

Why might this publication be useful for tutors looking for a book as a source for straightforward exercises to get students motivated to practise cultural studies for themselves?

Just a few things you might learn by reading this book

As large parts of this book are dominated by creative forms of presentation, let's begin by imagining the following situation. You are in a large book shop looking for an introduction to cultural studies. You could be a student about to start a course, or maybe a curious reader who has heard of 'cultural studies' but who wants to know more. You've examined a multitude of titles and they all look interesting. You're not sure which book to try and start to daydream.

You remember that last night you went to see Woody Allen's film *Annie Hall* (1977). A scene comes into your mind where the two central characters (Alvy and Annie) are waiting to see a film. They overhear a man trying to impress a woman with a lot of pseudo intellectual claptrap. Alvy (played by Allen) hears the man mention Marshall McLuhan (one of the writers mentioned in this

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book). Alvy tells the man he thinks he's talking rubbish and doesn't know anything about McLuhan's work.

The man turns to Alvy and says that he happens to be teaching a course at Columbia University on TV, Music and Culture, so he reckons he knows what he's talking about. Alvy points out that McLuhan is actually in the cinema foyer, and McLuhan, by some happy accident, steps out from behind an advertising board. Alvy has McLuhan confirm that the man has clearly failed to understand his work. Alvy turns to address the camera saying, 'If only life were like this!'

You recover from your reverie and look down at the book you are holding – it happens to be mine. At the information desk you overhear a stranger asking about the same book that you have in your hand. The person who is serving this customer says, 'well, if you're interested, why don't you ask the author? He's standing right over there!' You look round and there I am. You can hardly believe the coincidence, but you use it to your advantage to ask me a series of questions about my book. Here are my replies.

Who is this book written for?

This book has been written for those who have had little or no contact with cultural studies, or for those who know something about it but wish to *do* cultural studies for themselves (rather than just read about how others have done it). This means that the strategy adopted here is to get readers to learn through practice and to think about and test ideas before moving onto new ones. I've limited the content of this book to ideas that I feel can be put into practice with relative ease. Also, I've written this book imagining that many of my readers' first language may not be English.

What can I realistically expect from a careful reading of this book?

- To get a basic idea of the historical development of cultural studies, but using Britain as the main focal point.
- To become familiar with some of the most important critics that have been drawn into the British cultural studies tradition.
- To get a concise, reader-friendly, but critically aware, introduction to some of the key concepts that have been used within cultural studies.

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- To become conversant with some of the main areas of interest to cultural studies.
- To develop awareness of how theory can be transformed into practice.
- To acquire ways of thinking with important concepts to help stimulate ideas and ask relevant questions in order to develop the skills required to produce well-argued and informed projects (what I call heuristic thinking).
- To see *how* concepts may work in practice from numerous practical examples.

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- To appreciate the value of different approaches and, if you follow the numerous practice exercises, to gain the confidence to begin practising simple forms of cultural studies for yourself.
- To recognize how creative critical techniques might help you to understand sources, express ideas and aid learning.
- To have an idea of how you might go about further developing your knowledge and practice skills.
- To receive detailed advice on further reading and study.
- To be given indications, often in a playful way, of what's been left out of the version of cultural studies offered in these pages.

Finally, I hope you will be convinced of the value, interest and relevance of cultural studies.

This all sounds interesting, but why should I read *this* book? I mean, what special features does it offer to aid understanding?

Well, to start, there are a number of features designed to present the material in a clear and well structured way. Each chapter has a short introduction to explain the basic content and a brief description of your main learning goals. Chapters are concluded with brief summaries, references and advice on further reading. To help you revise, all key ideas appear in bold. You'll also find 'help files' and 'oversimplification warnings'. To further aid understanding, I introduce a limited number of authors and ideas and move from the relatively simple to the more advanced approaches as the book develops. Also, there's a gradual build-up towards greater levels of student independence.

I also demonstrate fully the strategies I recommend to get readers practising cultural studies for themselves at the very first stage of learning (the heuristic thinking mentioned above which is introduced in chapter three). The heuristics, by the way, are tools for generating ideas through asking specific questions, and aids to thinking, interpretation, analysis and research. They have also been designed to help you to structure your thoughts and experiment with ideas. I hope they will help you develop a certain interpretive independence and that, through their use, you will feel confident to think things through for yourself, rather than just examine what others have written. I've designed this book, then, to give readers a few tools to take away with them for future cultural analysis – tools which provide an easy way of getting started. Furthermore,

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theory is never introduced in isolation from practice. Finally, to make following up ideas easier, I've tried to refer, where possible, to books still in print.

In what way would you say your book is original?

I use what I call creative critical approaches to introduce much of the theory and give examples of practice. You'll find many dialogues that are intended to make the theory more accessible and there are letters, a chat, and even a form of criticism in the shape of a rap. One of my aims, which I think distinguishes this book from others, is that I encourage my readers to tap into their own creativity to produce cultural analysis. What I try to do is practise what I preach – I don't just recommend creative techniques but give many examples as I go along. Towards the end of the book the creative approach includes playful exercises to help you assimilate the content. For example, in one section I change the names of important writers featured in earlier chapters and you have to see if you can remember who put forward a particular idea. This book works towards the combination of heuristic thinking with creative-critical approaches. I hope to show that the combination of the two can be very effective, engaging, and fun.

That's all very well, but sometimes introductions set questions that I can't answer! Am I offered any help?

Yes, you'll see that the book is full of sections called 'notes on practice', which are easily distinguished from the main text. These notes serve a number of functions: they offer sample answers to give you an idea of ways you might respond to many of the practice exercises; they offer very detailed advice on how to go about practice, and try to anticipate problems you may have when using the heuristics. So you've got plenty of backup. This book provides a lot of help in the early chapters and encourages readers towards greater autonomy as it progresses, but without abandoning the detailed notes on practice.

A number of strategies have been adopted to motivate readers to respond to the book in an active, and I hope, enjoyable way. By the way, just about all my examples are drawn from popular culture, especially contemporary film, to give what I hope are lively, interesting, accessible and relevant examples. I ought to

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say, however, that this book does leave significant gaps for you to fill, but always offers advice on how to go about improving your knowledge and skills.

You'll also find the 'oversimplification warnings' mentioned above and, in the earlier chapters, boxes called 'the voice of contemporary criticism' which show how earlier approaches relate to later developments. There are also occasional boxes entitled 'A dialogue with the social sciences' to indicate how the theories may relate to those approaches (which are not the main focus of this book). Another feature I'd like to emphasize is that some of the points are illustrated by drawings to make them more vivid, to help readers understand concepts visually, and to aid memory. By the way, many of the drawings feature the writers mentioned so, through caricature, you'll get an idea of what a writer looked like.

Hmm, not bad! How about a few *more* details?

I not only provide many original examples of possible practice but show how the ideas introduced may be adapted to new uses and contexts. This means that this book, while rooted in the theories it introduces, does try to make a contribution to the way cultural studies might be tackled (especially at an early stage). I've also tried to inject the book with a certain humour, which I hope will make reading it that bit more lively and memorable. However, I don't think I'll say anymore here because I hope you'll enjoy exploring these features for yourself.

You mean I have to read your book to find out more?

Yes, that's what I'm suggesting.

Alright, but I'm not convinced yet. Can you suggest a few strategies for using this book?

Well, let me state the obvious: the ideal strategy is to start at the beginning and finish at the end! The reason is that the early chapters are designed to introduce ideas and themes which will be elaborated as the book goes on. As suggested above, this book progresses from the relatively simple to the more advanced; however, this doesn't mean you can't dip in and explore something that really interests you. Even the more advanced chapters are written using an accessible style, so you should still be able to understand the ideas and experiment with

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them. Also, the book has been written with numerous summaries and copious references to earlier chapters. This is designed to help you to consolidate your knowledge and practice – if you dip in, or even read the book backwards, these sections give you a taste of what you’ve missed. If you look at the chapter breakdown (or consult the index), you can negotiate a path of your own. If you’re brave and you want a quick, but informed, overview of the entire book, read the last chapter first!

OK, but what if I don’t live in Britain, or don’t intend to analyse British culture, is this book still relevant to me?

Yes. While you’ll need to adapt the concepts you find in this book to the appropriate cultural contexts of your study, my hope is that the strategies outlined in this book will provide you with useful starting points. You might take into account that the issues the book raises are not the preserve of British culture or the British brand of cultural studies, and that many of the concepts have their origins outside Britain. Also, this book is not obsessively focused on Britain: you’ll find that some of the examples and the suggestions in the further study sections refer you to other cultures. The more you read about cultural studies the more you’ll notice a certain ‘cross-fertilization’ of ideas between different cultures. In the practice sections I hope I provide sufficiently broad examples of how to go about using the ideas introduced. But, of course, my references will be limited – I haven’t the space or the knowledge to include the whole world! Also, many of the strategies presented in this book have been developed teaching not only Spanish students but many international exchange students from Britain, France, Belgium, Germany and Asia.

I’ve been looking at many introductions and it seems to me that defining ‘culture’ and cultural studies is a very difficult task. What’s your approach?

Well, I don’t offer general definitions of ‘culture’ and the identity of cultural studies at the beginning of the book. As suggested above, the approach adopted here has been to assume readers would get a gradual idea of how these might be understood by being exposed to some of the most important contributors to the area and encouraged to experiment with some of the most important concepts and strategies. I focus on these questions in the last chapter when readers are in a better position to consider them.

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How did you decide what to include and what to leave out of the book? I presume you don't pretend to have covered the whole field?

Of course, I'd be lying if I suggested that this book is in any way exhaustive. The idea here is that the exploration of a limited number of authors and ideas is more effective than trying to introduce a lot of material which may overwhelm my readers. I don't offer complete overviews of each theorist – there are many books that already do this admirably, and I indicate those I've found particularly useful in the references and sections on further reading. What I do try to do is to go into enough detail so that the reader gets a fairly good idea of what to expect from a particular author or approach. Inclusion or exclusion of ideas has depended on these questions:

- Is this idea appropriate to an introduction?
- What is a writer actually *doing*, and how does this relate to method?

I ought to state here that I shall no more be describing everything a writer is doing any more than I can discuss all the implications for method. I merely select what I consider to be important and useable concepts from a writer's work and I try to show how these concepts might be applied in practice. Actually, this book has been conceived as a metaphor for cultural studies as a huge, continuing dialogue. But here (the author takes his book and opens a page in his introduction), read this:

Oversimplification**W A R N I N G**

It must be kept in mind that the approach adopted in this book is only *one way* of understanding some of the important contributors to British cultural studies (who have tended to have an influence on other cultural studies' traditions). The 'continuing dialogue' created in these pages is not designed to suggest that there is absolute agreement about what constitutes cultural studies. Many historians of cultural studies might question my choices which are based on the aims set out in this introduction.

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One wish?

I hope this book will help to give you the confidence to *practise* simple forms of cultural studies for yourself.

OK, you've got me interested, but can you give me a little information about the content and organization of the book? But be brief!

I'll be as brief as I can. The first three chapters make up part one of the book ('High Culture Gladiators: Some Influential Early Models of Cultural Analysis'), which collects together, as the title indicates, some early influential versions of cultural analysis that have helped to establish some very important themes in cultural studies. Many of the book's themes will grow out of these chapters. I call the writers included in this part 'high culture gladiators' because they all work with models that give priority to what they regard as high, serious, or quality forms of culture. In this part you'll find things like the ghost of Matthew Arnold and a conversation between Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson.

The second part (chapters four to six) is entitled 'The Transformative Power of Working-class Culture'. This comprises three chapters which focus on critics who placed great emphasis on the importance and meaning of working-class history, consciousness and culture. In this way they helped to broaden how culture could be defined, interpreted and understood. In these chapters you'll get to read dialogues between Humphrey and Bogart, Ladvi and Vidal, and E.P. and Thompson, to learn about important areas of theory and practice.

The following five chapters (chapters seven to eleven) make up part three, which has been labelled 'Consolidating Cultural Studies: Subcultures, the Popular, Ideology and Hegemony'. This section shows how cultural studies (especially in Britain) reinforced itself as an area. Here subcultures and popular music take centre stage. Growing out of these interests we see how cultural critics revised the Marxist tradition of cultural analysis through engaging with the concepts of ideology and hegemony. This will be done through the exploration of a popular film and dialogues, including one between Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

Part four (chapters twelve and thirteen), has two chapters shaped by the implications of the section title: 'Probing the Margins, Remembering the

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Forgotten: Representation, Subordination and Identity'. These chapters are designed to help you think about, and explore, some important themes within feminism. You are then shown, and encouraged, to adapt some simple ideas to the exploration of other areas of subordination. Dialogues and popular film will be used to explain theory and help with practice.

The fifth and final part ('Honing your Skills, Conclusions and "Beginnings"') is made up of a single chapter, the contents of which are summed up by the title: 'Consolidating practice, heuristic thinking, creative cri-tickle acts and further research'. This section reviews the whole book in terms of the concepts, methods and themes that have been introduced, and also reflects on the identity of 'culture' and 'cultural studies'. Furthermore, it offers advice on how to consolidate and extend research and practice skills (through heuristic thinking and creative criticism) and suggests ways you might synthesize the many ideas explored in these pages.

And by the way, the references are placed at the end of each chapter, rather than at the end of the book, and I've used square brackets to indicate the original date of a publication (where it is different from the later edition I use) - that way you don't get the impression that Karl Marx wrote and published his works in the 1970s.

Well, now you've got this far into the book, why not step inside?