
it might be possible for fully equal and shared parenting, men are neither encouraged nor rewarded for staying at home. When they try to pitch in and help, they are often chastised by their wives for “not doing it right.” Phillips puts the matter in stark but apt terms: “A man without a wage has no value in a family system in which wage earning is a man’s only function.” Small wonder, then, that when things start to fall apart for men, their rate of suicide, depression, and substance abuse soars.

How should we redefine masculinity? Neither author offers a completely satisfactory answer, but at least many of the right questions are finally being addressed. Munder Ross stresses the “feminine underside” of a man’s nature. He finds that, much more than traditional psychoanalysis allowed, men (and boys) want to be like women (and girls). Even as girls may yearn for the ostensible “external” excitement of the male world, boys yearn for the relational warmth and safety of the female world, as they have themselves experienced it as sons.

The point is that males are just as variable and complex as females. But, as Phillips states, “lessons in violence, indifference, and separation are provided every day for every male child.” At the same time, crying and distress in boys are less tolerated and less tended to than in girls. Boys are still ordered to “shape up.” Much greater latitude is permitted to girl tomboys than to boy sissies. “There is no socially sanctioned way in which boys can show their anxiety and ask for help,” writes Phillips.

“If they are rough and anxious they are seen as aggressive, but they are given precious little encouragement to show weakness either.” Destructive boys need to be taught not to be destructive; calling them monsters only assures that the behavior will continue.

There are a few moments of speculative silliness in Phillips’s book, passages where she becomes untethered from her own evidence and suggests that men are somehow united in a determination to “fiercely” defend the status quo. The “world would be a better place without hard men,” she concludes. Here I would recommend repeat readings of, say, Max Weber’s “Politics as a Vocation” to Phillips to get her off this particular kick. Statecraft is infinitely more complicated than adolescent males fielding teams determined to do one another to death.

But all in all, these volumes show us just how hollow current celebrations of “difference” really are. On the most elemental level, we seem no closer to respecting the reality of male and female difference and the complexity of negotiating the shoals of that difference in the emergence of our own identities and in our engagements with one another than we ever were. That we cannot do so means the project of generous and accepting equality between the sexes will continue to elude us.

—Jean Bethke Elshtain, visiting professor of government at Harvard University, is author most recently of *Democracy on Trial*, forthcoming from Basic Books.

Reading Cultural Studies

THE CULTURAL STUDIES READER. Edited by Simon During. Routledge. 478 pp. \$49.95

Imagine feeling like an alert, slightly irritable foreign guest in the midst of your own culture. Imagine that the TV shows, pop songs, movies, best sellers, radio pro-

grams, and sports events that other people look to for pleasure or edification have a much different status for you. To you, they are artifacts to analyze. And you analyze them not in terms of the pleasure they yield but in terms of their power to perform certain social functions. You want to see whether they induce

conformity, challenge it, or somehow do both of those things at once.

So a popular movie such as *Sleepless in Seattle* is of interest to you for the way it tries to keep the ideal of heterosexual marriage and the nuclear family alive during a time when the movements for women's rights and gay rights and certain economic developments have put that ideal in question. Granted, you may also have liked the movie, but then you'd want to interrogate your own attraction to its conventional ideals.

Someone who approaches popular culture in this way is practicing (albeit in a rather elementary form) what the academy calls cultural studies. Cultural studies is the latest academic wave, the movement that seems to have taken the vanguard position recently occupied by new historicism and, before that, by deconstruction.

Cultural studies practitioners are something like anthropologists in the midst of their own culture. They ask how the meanings that the culture manufactures create social cohesion. They look at cultural works in terms of ritual, with ritual understood as a symbolic action that confirms and reproduces existing social forms. A Jivaro initiation ceremony in Peru may allow the young initiate a period of liminal self-dispersion in which his conventional identity is suspended, but the ultimate objective is for the young man to embrace a self-conception much like his father and grandfather's.

The cultural studies critic is attuned to the possibility that an artist might challenge the status quo. But because he begins with the anthropological assumption that cultural works tend to consolidate, rather than question or defy, established social forms, the critic will be especially alert to how what looks like a rebuke to the existing order may subtly re-



inforce it. So Oliver Stone's *JFK*, which suggests that a pro-Vietnam War junta killed the president, may strike one as a subversive piece of work. But it's Hollywood work, the cultural-studies critic warns, so look twice. Conspiracy theorists such as Stone are often optimists in disguise: If only it weren't for those wicked cabals, they suggest, we'd be fine. They forget that it's political and economic injustice—deeply rooted, systemic problems—that account for most human misery in America. A movie such as *JFK* takes your eye off the real target. Cult-studies analysts supposedly have their antennae poised for the genuine article—for music, film, and dance that release progressive energies. But mostly what they see around them are ersatz goods.

As Simon During, who teaches English and cultural studies at the University of Melbourne, writes in his thoughtful introduction to *The Cultural Studies Reader*, a cultural studies maven is likely to be on the Left: He's likely to see cultural works in terms of how they refute or reaffirm capitalism's lucrative patterns of oppression. And the popular work that engages his energies will probably be contemporary, though there are cultural studies types devoted to, say, Elizabethan pop culture, often with special attention to what Shakespeare or Marlowe might have skimmed from it. The method will be interdisciplinary, combining terms and theoretical narratives from

sociology, psychoanalysis, literary criticism, and elsewhere. And, too, the practitioner is probably out of patience with what he takes to be the blind commitment to a high-brow standard of taste sustained in the local department of English.

Fair enough. But to his casual description of the contemporary scene, During wants to add a historical genealogy of cultural studies. The genealogy starts out well. During discusses the work of F. R. Leavis and Raymond Williams and points to the Birmingham School studies of popular culture by writers such as Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart, the latter the author of the brilliant and moving 1957 volume, *The Uses of Literacy*. But During also wants to tell a more or less Hegelian story about how cultural studies picked up influences on the way to its present apotheosis, gaining resources from the Frankfurt School, Foucault, feminism, and gay studies.

Actually, the field is far less systematic. A good cultural studies critic will have read Marx, Foucault, Bourdieu, Adorno, Lyotard, and Williams (all but the first of whom are represented in During's anthology). But she will apply these and other big thinkers with a chef's discretion: a dash of historicism, a dollop of Althusser, and a drizzle of Derrida when needed.

The turn to cultural studies seems to me potentially a splendid development. What better for intellectual life than that a lot of bright people who know something about both art and philosophy go public with their interests? Pauline Kael wrote vivid movie reviews for the *New Yorker*, recording the immediate experience of seeing a film like no one before or since; Stanley Kauffmann's confident aesthetic judgments and catholic taste, still on display in the *New Republic*, remain gifts to be grateful for. But one might hope for more comprehensive responses to film than either of these critics have been in a position to provide. Why not try, for instance, to see major films in terms of their power to console, inflame, define, or shape what one might call the national psyche? I've been looking for a long time to

find an expansive cultural critic with something valuable to say about what I take to be the best American movie, *The Godfather Part 2*, and in particular about its deep broodings on revenge—a major subject in the wake of the Vietnam War. Most people will, I suspect, be able to point to popular works that have meant a lot to them, works they would like to see explicated with gusto and skill. So I want to like cultural studies, no doubt about it.

And in fact sometimes I do, though only two of my favorite practitioners turn up in During's anthology. One is Andrew Ross, who has recently moved from Princeton University to New York University. During excerpts Ross's chapter on pornography from his recent book, *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture* (1989). It is perhaps the least consequential chapter in the book, but it's not hard to see why an editor would want a treatment of pornography to enliven his volume. Ross writes about the attitudes struck by American intellectuals in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s on issues such as media, race, camp, and the Rosenberg case, as well as pornography. He shows how the American intelligentsia tried to acquire cultural authority by condemning popular forms in unthinking, programmatic ways. But Ross can be almost as hard on his contemporary colleagues in arms: He is suspicious of Marxists who denounce all popular forms as simple functions of bourgeois ideology.

So Ross bobs and weaves, showing how mass-produced, commercialized products such as Motown soul music aren't to be written off as trash, as a somber socialist like Irving Howe would have been inclined to do. Nor is such music the product of pure appropriation, of callous businessmen sucking the passion and protest out of indigenous black culture—sanitizing Little Richard and selling him as Michael Jackson. To Ross, there's good stuff in popular Motown music. It's simple, passionate, direct (as John Milton said all poetry ought to be), speaks for sex and tenderness, and also for black pride.

To be sure, Ross's work can degenerate into a guide to hip, left-wing taste. He can be read as telling you—and here's a phrase I hear all too unself-consciously now—what "it's okay to like." Can you be into Frank O'Hara and still count as a bona fide left-winger? Yet I like Ross because he has fresh, complicated things to say about popular culture. The optimal critical method, said T. S. Eliot, is to be very intelligent, and that describes Ross at his best.

It also describes a number of the better critics who are not included in this volume: Carol Clover, who is to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* what Aristotle was to *Oedipus Rex*; Laura Kipnis on *Hustler*; Constance Penley on home-made fan magazines; Mark Crispin Miller, whose pieces in *Boxed In* (1982) on Richard Dawson and *Family Feud*, on *The Cosby Show*, and on Orwell as prophet of TV culture are marvels; and Richard Poirier, whose 20-year-old reflections on the Beatles, published in *The Performing Self* (1992), are a model of receptive close scrutiny and speculative panache.

But the best any critic of popular cultural has recently done in combining critical individuality with (give or take) progressive left-wing politics has been Roland Barthes, represented in the *During* collection by a piece called "Dominici, or the Triumph of Literature." Barthes, who taught at the Collège de France until his death in 1980, went through a new theoretical phase in virtually every book: He has avatars as a Marxist, a semiotician, a structuralist, a post-structuralist, a reader-response theorist, and an allusive autobiographer. In whatever guise he wrote, Barthes delivered marvelous observations. He's a serious critic with the right light touch: The staged wrestling match "enacts the exact gestures of the most ancient purifications"; Greta Garbo's face "reconciles two iconographic ages, it assures the passage from awe to charm"; the Eiffel Tower "makes the city into a kind of nature"; Baudelaire strove "to protect theatricality from the theater."

Yet the academic verdict on Barthes has

been revealing. Virtually no academics write in the mode of Roland Barthes. In fact, despite his extraordinary originality and range, he's rarely even cited by academics. Though he's a great critic, he's too urbane, too much the *flâneur*; he doesn't take himself, or his methods, seriously enough. Susan Sontag, the author of a polemical essay called "Against Interpretation" (1964) that calls at its close for an erotics of art, saw this, and connected herself with Barthes in ways that she couldn't with the more somberly methodological Derrida and Foucault.

When, by contrast, the very intelligent Meaghan Morris, an Australian feminist critic, decides to write about shopping malls, she prefaces her trip to the contemporary agora with a slag heap of anxious reflections on method. The reflections are wearisome, the theory dull. Barthes would have known better; Ross too. Morris's approach is a way of establishing credentials with the other intellectuals, of flashing badge. It's also a way of engaging good old Arnoldian high seriousness. For, in truth, professional anxiety continues to be rife in cultural studies, as it was during the reign of high theory. Intellectuals seem to need to apologize for their immersion in Barbie and Ken, in *The Dukes of Hazzard*, in Madonna, by longer and longer bouts of ritual theorizing.

Ross paid his dues by writing a so-so book about modernism; Barthes wrote a sleepy volume of his own to inaugurate his career. Both of them then used academic security to have some fun. In fact, it's often the respectable youth, *les enfants gris*, who are cluttering what could be a splendid field with their ponderous, adult wisdom. Why doesn't someone write a cultural studies book on professorial rituals?

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