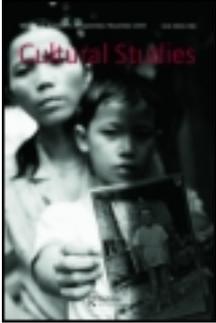


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THE PASSION OF CULTURAL STUDIES

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Book Reviews

THE PASSION OF CULTURAL STUDIES

J. Macgregor Wise

Cultural Studies' Affective Voices

MELISSA GREGG

Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006

183 pp., ISBN 1-4039-9902-3, \$74.95 hbk

Melissa Gregg's book, *Cultural Studies' Affective Voices*, is first and foremost a genealogy of an affective cultural studies, tracing elements and strategies in the discourses of key cultural studies figures which mark cultural studies as an important and unique form of scholarship. These figures – Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, Lawrence Grossberg, Andrew Ross, and Meaghan Morris – each rely on a particular affective turn in their discourse, or use the affective register as a way of presenting alternatives to mainstream scholarly practice. Richard Hoggart in the *Uses of Literacy* elicits in the reader an empathy for the working class; Stuart Hall, in his emphasis on the historical specificities of conjunctural analysis, himself becomes an affective model, an inspiration for pursuing cultural studies as a vocation; Lawrence Grossberg not only theorizes affect especially in his work on rock music and politics, but seeks to personally mobilize cultural studies in the United States student by student, scholar by scholar (Gregg refers to him as 'Messianic'); Andrew Ross's is a clear voice pursuing justice and accountability, twinning academic and activist work; and Meaghan Morris's critical feminist voice uses its affective charge (frustration, enthusiasm, anger, panic, amusement . . .) to ground theoretical, political, and cultural debates in the specificities of historical and personal conjunctures. What the use of affective discourse reveals is the importance of the conjunctural to what is uniquely cultural studies – not letting theory or abstraction or traditions of detached critical distance let one off the hook of understanding the felt specificities of the historical. Gregg writes: 'The positive affects I am claiming for cultural studies are those of solidarity, commitment and hope . . . these are the forces required to maintain belief in the significance of human-centred scholarship in a world of pervasive cynicism, commerce and fear' (p. 23).

As a book about affect and conjuncture it is important that this book too takes a conjunctural approach to these matters. The book is a self-consciously generational book in many respects. It comes from the perspective of a generation of cultural studies students coming into an already established field

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in the new century, a generation formed on issues of terror, neoliberalism, and the rapidly shifting nature of the university from privileged and restrictive ivory tower to one marked by economic imperatives and the exploitation of teeming ranks of part-time itinerant lecturers. As a genealogy of affective cultural studies the book locates aspects of cultural studies' discourse which not only bear perpetuating to future generations (affective historical conjuncturalism) but also are themselves a means of perpetuating cultural studies by addressing new audiences, training and motivating new students and activists, and leveraging the potential transformative conditions of the contemporary university. Hence the importance of the issue of cultural studies' institutional location to this book. Gregg highlights both the advantages and limitations of higher education as the central locus of cultural studies practice, clearly emphasizing ways that many of these figures (especially Hoggart, Ross, and Morris) have worked from other institutional locations (but still retain a certain faith in the university).

The book is more than a review of Key Figures in Cultural Studies and it is certainly not a generational critique of the old guard of cultural studies. Indeed this is not a book of critique at all but (and this is its own affective dimension) of generosity, collegiality, 'intellectual hospitality', and 'sympathetic reading'. This is a refreshing and humanizing approach to scholarship. However, though this book is not a critique it is not a festschrift either, but an attempt to construct a version of cultural studies through its engagement with these figures. And what's unique here is the focus not just on the work of these people but on their voices. By emphasizing the grain of their voices the book can address the affect of voice. By 'voice' Gregg primarily concerns herself with the thematic, methodological, and textual proclivities of these scholars as evident in their writings, but she also takes a little time to engage the importance of considering vocal and nonverbal performance in speeches and lectures in establishing a particular affective voice.

Given the book's own convivial approach it seems a bit gauche, if not just bad form, to offer a critique *per se* in this review (especially since I do like this book quite a bit), so let me respectfully acknowledge a critical absence, which is the lack of a chapter on Raymond Williams. This absence is noteworthy because Williams in many ways lurks like a ghost in the machinery of the book. His notion of 'structure of feeling' is important to Gregg's argument and, indeed, he pops up in nearly every chapter. His absence is explained away in a footnote: Williams' humanism is too well documented elsewhere – though, I would argue, not in the way that this book would address him. There are some things the book could address a bit better, especially the specificity of what is called cultural studies. For example, if Grossberg appears marginalized within US cultural studies (as Gregg argues), that depends on what one takes to be the center and margins of US cultural studies (the matter of some contention). Indeed, the book tends to take an assumed uniformity of cultural

studies a bit too much for granted, despite some quite careful work differentiating the national contexts of UK, US, and Australian cultural studies.

Be that as it may, this is a wonderful book, a refreshing and welcome contribution to the metadiscourse of cultural studies itself. Gregg's own affective voice is exceptionally clear as is her commitment to cultural studies as a resource for hope in troubled times.

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AMERICA'S MOST UNWORTHY

Aurora Wallace

White Victims, Black Villains: Gender, Race and Crime News in US Culture

CAROL A. STABILE

New York/London, Routledge, 2006

235 pp., ISBN 0415374812, \$110.00 hbk; ISBN 0415374928, \$30.95 pbk

Carol Stabile's latest book *White Victims, Black Villains* reflects the relentless and oppressively stubborn patterns in the way race and gender are comprised in crime news in perhaps the most ambitious study to date. Navigating the competing tensions of sensationalism and ordinariness in crime reporting from the Jacksonian era through to the present day, it can be read as a series of discrete essays or as a chronological narrative providing snapshots of pivotal historical cases in the American media. Historians of the press, and crime news in particular, will find much of interest in Stabile's chapters on the nineteenth-century murders of Helen Jewett and Mary Rogers, the anti-draft riots, and the lynching narratives of the 1890s. Her treatment of the twentieth century details the early police-journalist relationship, the decline of sentimentalized reporting, the moral panics over white slavery and child kidnappings, the FBI's subsequent wars on crime and a plethora of racial hoaxes in the press. Mapping the construction of race and gender onto this impressive time span allows Stabile to demonstrate that few of the purported modernizations of the media industry have helped to ameliorate how race is reported.

Without suggesting that racism, or racist news coverage, is uncomplicated or even transhistorical, Stabile identifies important patterns. What is consistent is the establishment and maintenance of a 'system of racialized androcentrism' and the rehearsal of the 'protection scenario' in which white women are the necessary and sole beneficiaries of safeguarding by white men from men of