

provides basic details about the comics tradition that those who are not familiar with the genre may find of interest. The book has many illustrations (black & white and colour) which help readers to recognise many of the characters dealt with throughout the text. Likewise, those who have been exposed to the genre as readers and/or scholars may discover a surprising wealth of detail. It cannot be said that this is a profound theoretical study of the genre (I suspect it was never meant to be) but it certainly shines out as a little jewel for those who, like me, have a tangential interest in the topic. Its only drawback is the

fact that one of the chapters is written in French. This is a serious handicap if the book is expected to reach readers from outside the area of Modern Languages. Considering that some of the authors are teaching in French universities (or are francophone), the translation of one chapter should not have been a problem. Other than this, the book is extremely attractive and deserves a place in libraries as a contribution to the study of a genre which characterised the 20th century.

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María José COPERÍAS (ed.)
Culture & Power V: Challenging discourses.
Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 2000.

Cultural Studies is a wide-ranging discipline which brings together various areas of human knowledge within an extremely ample diameter of action. A priori disparate areas such as pragmatics, biology, anthropology, politics and literary theory, just to mention some, may converge in cultural studies in order to analyse human behaviour and its cultural manifestations. This confluence of the numerous subjects conforming cultural studies has its *raison d'être* in the attempt to understand what culture is, no matter how utopian the idea of achieving a universally agreed definition of this term may be.

Challenging discourses, fifth volume in the annual series *Culture & Power*, is a look into some of the most intriguing questions concerning the always misleading concept of culture. Among these are the difficulties to delimit this term socially, geographically, linguistically and even politically, the conflicts emerg-

ing due to cultural and ethnic differences – mainly based upon economics and class – gender, ideology and so on, and even the attempts at correcting popular misleading assumptions about the meaning of the term 'culture' itself. The volume is divided into three sections: *Challenges*, which puts some emphasis on education and class while paying attention to other subjects like ethnicity and different cultural modes, such as drug consumption; *Challenging Texts* where visual and auditory forms of communication, especially films and music, play a central role and *Challenging Identities*, which is centred upon the interrelation of different human groups while dealing with history and gender as well.

The need to redefine the meaning of 'culture' and some other taken-for-granted concepts such as progress, education and ethnicity is the basis of the first section of this collection. Exceptionally, the social standing of drugs as

well as the experimentation with them are the germane concerns of the introductory essay by Sadie Plant. This is a very readable and stimulating text which examines the attraction and effects of a journey into that quite often taboo world and effectively relates the experiences of such authors as De Quincey, Coleridge, Foucault and Michaux to their literary production. The «progress beneath which the powerful hide» is the starting point for the following article. In it, José Manuel Estévez Saá analyses John Berger's works and the way class conflicts are depicted in them as a reflection of the actual social situation. As for the role of education, this is taken into account by Salvador Faura and Barry Pennock Speck from different perspectives. On the one hand, Faura's text compares two models: informal education, which is said to fight against oppression, and traditional education, which promotes oppression by merely describing it. In his defence of informal education the author rescues the origins of postcolonial discourse, which, he argues, attempted to change the world's injustices as opposed to the immobilising situation third world elites appear to defend, and suggests taking up again that leftist attitude based on action, applying it as a pattern for education. On the other hand, Pennock's article inquires into the role of popular culture and education in our society by analysing Willy Russell's *Educating Rita*. Alvaro Pina's article provides a most clarifying introductory text to the world of cultural studies since it develops some of the implications derived from Raymond Williams' basic concepts of «long revolution» and «common culture», whose meanings and values are articulated by society as a whole, exposing William's defiance of the popularly widespread notion of culture. Attention should also be paid to Mike Pritchard's intelligent article on the now fully

acknowledged link between racism, Nazism, and the emergent 19th century biological research and hypotheses on craniology – phrenology – and physiognomy. As a matter of fact, the author proposes a new conceptualisation of ethnicity unlike its exclusionary conventional definition, where 'ethnic' pejoratively connotes the «homeland of the others». This is a fascinating article dealing with really current topics such as immigration and the different cultural confrontations individuals may undergo.

The central part of the text provides the reader with several writings which focus on the visual arts, dealing with the relationships between signifiers and meanings as well as with the often mistaken and even obliterated connotations of certain forms of expression. Of special interest are the three texts devoted to music: Mónica Calvo Pascual's article on Madonna's video *Express Yourself*, Anna Pairaló García on Sinead O'Connor's song *Famine* and Sara Martín Alegre's on Marilyn Manson. Whereas García's text considers the way such a traumatic past event as the potato famine is understood and conveyed nowadays by such a controversial singer as O'Connor, Martín's essay is precisely centred on the controversy of another public figure. Indeed, her text constitutes a bold attempt to deconstruct one of the self-proclaimed antichrists of our time, analysing not only his public image but also the various reactions it provokes. As for Pascual's article, it provides an analysis of the non-verbal information conveyed through Madonna's video focusing on the image of woman as subject – not object – of discourse and even hinting at some (con)fusion of masculine and feminine stereotypes in it. The treatment of the female figure is also the centre of María Dolores Martínez Reventós's absorbing text. In it, the author elucidates the partiality of language as well as linguistic determin-

ism through the analysis of some revealing advertisements. Ultimately, the author demonstrates the way certain kinds of ads make products become sexualised and women objectified. But there are other forms of expressions which are dealt with in writings which are equally remarkable. A couple of instances are John Cunningham's essay which, taking some films located in the Arab world, shows the way this world continues to be mystified and represented as exotic and how its members have their own experiences marginalised, if expressed at all, in favour of the white Western viewpoint, and Jamie Fowlie's innovative hypertextual discussion on new forms of social interaction.

Last but not least, the final section of the volume is an assemblage of coherently related essays centred on the concepts of nation, identity, colonialism, historical knowledge, gender and genre and homophobia, primarily. Again new definitions need to be tackled here and, with this aim in mind, meaningful everyday examples are provided. Suffice it to point out Martin Montgomery's clever analysis of the way language can be, and actually is, manipulated for political purposes taking the example of a Scottish Nationalist Party campaign. The author succeeds in proving the way in which a certain combination of words and images contributes to giving an overall message of idealistic, and even pastoral, nationalism with which the audience may easily identify. Ultimately, Montgomery asserts the impossibility to positively affirm a nation – *we* – without negatively denoting another – *they*. A brilliant survey of the United States' recent history and past ideals of fraternity, contrasting with its

actual contemporary situation of internal colonialism, is what Julio Cañero Serrano's text offers to the reader. In this essay, which is incidentally complementary to the one written by Russell Dinapoli, where he undermines the presumed homogeneity in the country's social strata, the author crudely depicts U.S. Hispanophobia and denounces Hispano cultural genocide. Alongside these studies, the importance of authentic cultural voices is present in the revaluation Felicity Hand proposes of historical knowledge, claiming a necessary place for orality along with the conventional written sources. Likewise, María Isabel Santalària's and David Walton's discussions of femininity in the detective story and homophobic connotations and implications in T.V. programmes, respectively, are worth reading.

Challenging discourses is, in short, a compendium of ideas and proposals which has, on a popular level, the ability to broaden narrow minds and to break through prejudices and social constructs and barriers usually caused by ignorance. For we should not forget that these writings should, as a last resort, attract the interest of their object of study, in other words, the members of culture(s). And that is its general interest. On an academic level, the student and the non-specialist will definitely find their horizons widened with new fields to investigate and fascinating new links between different areas of study. *Challenging Discourses* certainly contributes to maintain the ongoing challenging discourse round culture.

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