
With the recent release of *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, internationally renowned author and academic Lawrence Grossberg re-establishes himself as a leading scholar of cultural studies; a field he seems to have mastered and become a primary advocate for. Trained at the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies by the likes of Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart, Grossberg continues a legacy of research and exploration in areas of popular culture and the philosophy of communication. His recent scholarship, however, focuses on the role of cultural studies within emerging formations of modernity.

*Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* takes Grossberg’s interest in the articulations and contextuality of modernity – and his critique of the intellectual left – to a new, structured and discursive dimension. As he states in the introduction, the book has more to do with asking the questions than it has with providing answers. In general terms, Grossberg asks: Where are we going? How can the world be improved? He then guides the reader through six chapters of cultural theory beautifully balanced with contextual foregrounding as he questions the current economic, political and cultural situation within – and, he hopes, outside of – established ‘euro-modern’ and ‘euro-centric’ borders.

Grossberg begins his book with a noteworthy introduction to and definition of cultural studies. For the reader unfamiliar with this area of scholarship, Grossberg’s concise explanations allow for an overview of the field of a clarity rarely encountered. After establishing cultural studies as a radically contextual practice in which emphasis is placed on the “relational,” Grossberg explains the importance of the connection between relationality and radical contextuality in light of what can be seen as the key term of his study: “conjuncture.” He approaches his ideas through a “logic of the Conjuncture,” by which Grossberg means the attempt to recognize the multiplicity and complexity of situations rather than assume that things simply “work.” Grossberg’s audacity emerges in his adamant refusal of reductionism, a position he takes against intellectuals who appear too sure of themselves and the theories they advocate. As he states in his second chapter, this reductive approach may lead thinkers to risk “producing an intolerable mixture of political and theoretical certainty and empirical ignorance” (p.66).

What is Grossberg’s solution to this dilemma? The aim of the six chapters that form the body of *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* is to offer proposals for future formations of cultural studies. Chapters One and Two are scene-setting chapters in which cultural studies is defined in relation to the political, cultural, and economic struggles the world faces today. These struggles, Grossberg explains, cannot be confronted without a “radical contextuality [which] undermines any assumptions that the questions we ask, the challenges we face, are somehow universal – as if the whole world were driven to answer the same question” (p.43). The outcome of such intellectual sterility, he argues, can undermine our ability to create broader discussions and to imagine alternative futures. A laudable example in the book concerns the current situation of tertiary education. Grossberg believes we should be disturbed by the ongoing corporatisation of the university, and even more by the notion that
the value of education seems to be uncertain, or worse, under attack. Chapters Three, Four, and Five respectively deal with economy, culture, and politics. The most fascinating and accessible of these is the third chapter, in which Grossberg expresses his fear of an economy divorced from the social world and managed solely by economists. He proposes economic reforms which would include more consideration for history, culture, and empirical grounding and, above all, he promotes interdisciplinary dialogues. Chapter Four focuses on the role of culture as mediator, as both transcendental and particularising, as universal and at the same time specific. He emphasises that this specificity must not be lost in the ordinary and at times banal role that culture plays in our everyday lives (p.181). Chapter Five, entitled ‘Complicating Power: The “And” of Politics and…’ is more akin to the third chapter in its suggestion that the political should be integrated into everyday life and seen as a dimension and articulation of everyday practice. Grossberg reminds us that “there is no reality without power, or rather, without the political” (p.251). He ultimately encourages his reader toward the (re)discovery of this interchangability while yet leaving that reader free to decide what this “and” should be.

By the final chapter of the book the reader has been invited to look to the future of modernity and to consider the need for interdisciplinarity within intellectual authority in tackling forthcoming global challenges. Grossberg’s message appears to be directed particularly at undergraduates and emerging scholars who, he hopes, will emerge as the open-minded and progressive vanguard of intellectual and political movements to come. Although at times weakened by an excessive use of contextual theory within which the unexperienced reader of cultural theory can become lost, I would strongly recommend Grossberg’s book to anyone seeking an introduction to and future hypotheses about the field of cultural studies.

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