

Simon Featherstone. *Postcolonial Cultures*.

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This book is an introductory text to postcolonial studies, with an emphasis on contemporary debates. The first chapter, "The Nervous Condition of Postcolonial Studies," clearly outlines the complexities of the field of postcolonial studies. It emphasises the importance of moving away from critical analysis from inside the academy, and instead turning to popular culture for strategies and movements in this discourse.

Featherstone writes of the heavy reliance in universities upon the works of a small number of major writers within the academy, and the need for greater balance in this field by highlighting the contribution to postcolonial studies of popular musicians, dancers, film-makers, poets, performers, orators and athletes. He makes the point that the current state of postcolonial discourse is hierarchical, and takes into account almost exclusively voices that have emerged from within the academy. He cites Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak as the most obvious examples of this. He calls for postcolonial studies to take into account the current trends in the arts and sport in order to move away from the emphasis on literature and political theory that dominate the field.

The three chapters that follow deal with contemporary music, performance and film to discuss the benefit to postcolonial studies of movements outside the academy. In the second chapter, Featherstone uses the example of sociologist Paul Gilroy, who has charted the development of African, Indian and Caribbean music in Britain. The key postcolonial concept present in this music is hybridity – the ability of artists to fuse musical styles to achieve a new sound that is representative of the diaspora in the First World. He cautions against the academy simply selecting for analysis art-

ists who fit their arguments. Instead he calls attention to the need for the academy to observe what is actually happening at the street level, and acknowledging that popular culture will for the most part resist academic analysis by its constant change.

The third chapter, "Body Cultures," discusses not only contemporary dance but also sport as a site of discourse on the postcolonial body. Featherstone states:

Body cultures of sport and dance perform the processes of post-colonial history. Although distinctions of aesthetic value in these body cultures still persist, and although the recovery of their histories remains difficult, the movements of social dance articulate intimate and public cultural changes and exchanges. And whilst sport's more visible and commodified body cultures are in some ways limited in their social narratives, particularly by their gender specificity, their organisational histories, their mass appeal, and their accessible archives of photograph and film make them a valuable resource for postcolonial studies. (94-5)

One of the positive aspects of this book is that for each of his arguments, Featherstone is thorough in his analysis of how realistic, effective and useful it will be to postcolonial studies. He prompts thinkers in the field to articulate how postcolonial texts are chosen and the rationale behind it. Featherstone demands in *Postcolonial Cultures* that we be more contemporary, open-minded and genuine in our choice of postcolonial 'texts'.

In the chapter devoted to film, Indian film-makers Mrinal Sen, Mira Nair and Aditya Chopra are examined for their different explorations of diasporic populations and the challenges of modernity. The chapter discusses how film has the capacity to engage a wider and more global audience than other mediums, and can be a very useful way to explore postcolonial issues such as a political history and cultural tensions. Two New Zealand films, *The Piano* and *Once Were Warriors* are discussed for their portrayal of indigenous populations and their use of narrative structure. Unfortunately for Australian readers, Australian films are not included in this very brief chapter, but the discussion certainly creates interest in film as a potential way of investigating postcolonialism.

The following three chapters of *Postcolonial Cultures* are nowhere near as satisfying as the first half. Here Featherstone moves away from contemporary culture to provide a basic run-down of literature, history and land. "The Irrational and the Postcolonial" is a brief study of madness in postcolonial literature, with specific reference to the seminal text *Black Skins, White Masks* by Franz Fanon and novels by Jean Rhys, Bessie

Head and Erna Brodber. This chapter reads like a typical undergraduate postcolonial studies reader, with its discussion of Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a postcolonial revision of Jane Austen's *Jane Eyre* that is usually set as required reading in English courses. In this chapter Featherstone's critique of Fanon and Rhys in particular is nothing new to the discipline. It actually serves to confuse his emphasis in the first half of the book on the importance of new mediums and the movement away from literature.

"Memory" looks at the re-writing of history from a postcolonial viewpoint with three interesting case studies: museums and public memory, UNESCO's promotion of information technology in developing nations as source of recording cultural memories, and the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa. "Capitalised 'History' becomes only one of a number of ways of telling a story that might take as its centre a range of different social formations" (169). Despite an unoriginal introduction, the modern discussion of history and its issues are refreshing and timely, and provide an objective view of the topic.

The following chapter on land is perhaps the most relevant to Australian postcolonial studies. In the first case study the history of land seizure by Europeans in Australia and the Caribbean is discussed in regards to the differences in the European and the indigenous ways of defining "space" and "place." The following case studies reflect more contemporary landscapes, the beach and the carnival. The beach is not only the first place of contact between European settlers and the indigenous populations, but has evolved into the romanticized tourist beach and the site of cross-cultural pleasure seeking in the form of the sex-tourist. Featherstone does his best work when he moves into contemporary areas of cultural studies and discusses sites of evolving significance for the field.

Despite the book's emphasis on a movement away from the academy, the second half is very much grounded in the mediums that postcolonial studies has traditionally investigated. Featherstone may have done better to avoid going over old ground and realise the potential of the first half by devoting the book solely to contemporary movements. Then he would have been closer to realizing his book's aim of challenging the traditional mediums of postcolonial studies.

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