

Northernness, Northern Culture and Northern Narratives

Edited by
Gabby Riches, Karl Spracklen and
Spencer Swain

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Northernness, Northern culture and Northern narratives are a common aspect of popular culture, and the North of England, like other Northernnesses in Europe, is a collection of narratives, myths, stereotypes and symbols. In politics and everyday culture, Northern culture is paradoxically a site of resistance against an inauthentic South, a source of working-class identity, and a source of elite marginalisation. This book provides a key to theorising about Northernness, and a platform for scholars working towards exploring the North in different aspects of culture. The aims of this book are twofold: to re-theorise 'the North' and Northern culture and to highlight the ways in which constructions of Northernness and Northern culture are constituted alongside other gender, racial and regional identities. The contributions presented here theorise Northernness in relation to space, leisure, gender, race, class, social realism, and everyday embodied practices. A main thematic thread that weaves the whole book together is the notion that Northernness and 'the North' is both an imagined discursive construct and an embodied subjectivity, thus creating a paradox between the reality of the 'North' and its representation.

This book was originally published as a special issue of the *Journal for Cultural Research*.

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Spencer Swain is a Lecturer at York St. Johns University, UK. His PhD focused on the leisure lives of young British-Somali men in Sheffield, UK.

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Chapter 1

Theorising northerness and northern culture: the north of England, northern Englishness, and sympathetic magic

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Chapter 2

'Singing acts' from the deep North: critical perspectives on northern exotics, contemporary ethnic music and language preservation in Sámi communities

Juha Ridanpää

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Chapter 3

Everyday leisure and Northerness in Mass Observation's Worktown 1937–1939

Robert Snape

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Chapter 4

'Northerness', gender and Manchester's creative industries

Katie Milestone

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Chapter 5

Speaking for herself: Andrea Dunbar and Bradford on film

Alison Peirse

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Feeling Northern: 'heroic women' in Sally Wainwright's Happy Valley (BBC One, 2014—)

Kristyn Gorton

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Chapter 7

Strangers of the north: South Asians, cricket and the culture of 'Yorkshireness'

Thomas Fletcher and Spencer Swain

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Spencer Swain is a Lecturer at York St. Johns University, UK. His PhD focused on the leisure lives of young British-Somali men in Sheffield, UK.

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Introduction: Northernness, Northern Culture and Northern Narratives

Gabby Riches, Karl Spracklen and Spencer Swain

Northernness, Northern Culture and Northern Narratives are a common aspect of popular culture. The North of England, like other Northernnesses in Europe, is a palimpsest of narratives, myths, stereotypes and symbols. In politics and the public sphere of everyday culture, Northern Culture is paradoxically a site of resistance against an inauthentic South, a source of working-class identity, and a source of elite marginalisation. In cultural studies and wider, inter-disciplinary analyses of Northern Culture, such myth-making needs to be interrogated and explored. The purpose of this special issue is to provide a key to theorising about Northernness, and a platform to scholars working away at exposing the North in different aspects of culture. The aims of this special issue are twofold: to re-theorise ‘the North’ and Northern Culture and to highlight the ways in which constructions of Northernness and Northern Culture are constituted alongside other gender, racial and regional identities. The contributions presented here theorise Northernness in relation to space, leisure, gender, race, class, social realism, and everyday embodied practices. A main thematic thread that weaves all of these papers together is the notion that Northernness and ‘the North’ is both an imagined discursive construct and an embodied subjectivity, thus creating a paradox between reality and representation. Diverse in their theoretical positionings, methodological approaches and research contexts, the articles within this special issue speak to how Northern identities are not constituted or exist in isolation from other forms of identity but are dynamically intersectional and intricately embedded within popular culture discourses.

The first section of the special issue aims to theoretically and empirically contextualise Northernness by critically unpacking how Northernness and northern identities have been previously discussed in cultural theory. Karl Spracklen’s paper offers a detailed critique of how common sense ideas of Northernness have been expressed in culture by and about the north. He provides a detailed historical and sociological mapping of how ‘the North’ and Northernness has been constructed hegemonically by outsiders and the ways in which it has been invented, performed and invoked by northerners in Britain. Spracklen focuses on three forms of popular culture – rugby league, art and poetry, and television – in order to demonstrate how representations of the north are aligned with working-class culture for middle-class sensibilities. He suggests that the concept of Northernness acts as a simulacrum which serves to “exclude and marginalise people”. He concludes his discussion by demonstrating how Northernness has become a form of Frazerian sympathetic magic, a cultural practice that is performed