

The English Culturalists: Interpreting Culture As A Social And Historical Process

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses the intellectual contribution of the English culturalists to the development of modern cultural studies. Formed within the social realities of post-war Britain, this tradition challenged restrictive definitions of culture and proposed an expanded analytical framework that includes everyday practices, popular forms of expression, and collective experience. By examining the ideas of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and E. P. Thompson, the study demonstrates how culture can be understood as a historically situated and socially produced process closely connected with power relations and human agency. The article also evaluates the relevance of English culturalist perspectives for contemporary humanities research.

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Introduction

In contemporary humanities, culture is no longer perceived as an exclusive domain limited to elite artistic production. This shift is largely associated with the intellectual legacy of the English culturalists, whose work reoriented cultural analysis towards social experience and historical context. Their approach emphasized that cultural meanings emerge through everyday interaction, rather than being confined to canonical texts or institutionalized art forms.

The English culturalist perspective developed in response to profound social transformations in mid-twentieth-century Britain. Industrial change, the expansion of mass communication, and increased educational access created conditions that demanded new modes of cultural interpretation. As a result, culturalism offered a framework capable of explaining how culture operates within social life.

Formation of the English Culturalist Tradition

The emergence of English culturalism can be understood as a reaction against both formalist literary criticism and rigid economic explanations of culture. Rather than treating cultural production as a passive reflection of economic structures, culturalists emphasized historical specificity, moral values, and collective agency. This perspective allowed culture to be examined as an active component of social development.

Richard Hoggart's studies of working-class communities demonstrated that everyday cultural practices possess internal coherence and ethical significance. His analysis highlighted the tension between locally rooted traditions and the growing influence of commercial mass culture.

Conceptual Contributions

Raymond Williams significantly expanded culturalist thought by conceptualizing culture as an integrated pattern of social life. His analytical vocabulary enabled scholars to explore how language, communication, and symbolic practices operate within particular historical moments. The concept of shared social experience,

often described as structures of feeling, provided a tool for understanding cultural change beyond formal institutions.

E. P. Thompson introduced a historically grounded approach that linked cultural practices to class formation and political awareness. Through his work, culture appeared not as an imposed system, but as a field shaped by participation, conflict, and negotiation.

Culture, Power, and Social Agency

A defining feature of English culturalism is its attention to the relationship between cultural forms and power relations. While acknowledging the influence of dominant ideologies, culturalists avoided deterministic conclusions by emphasizing the capacity of individuals and communities to reinterpret and transform cultural meanings.

This balance between structural influence and human agency distinguishes English culturalism from reductionist models of cultural analysis and allows for a nuanced understanding of resistance within everyday cultural practices.

Contemporary Significance

The analytical principles developed by the English culturalists continue to inform present-day cultural research. Their emphasis on everyday life remains particularly relevant in studies of digital media, popular communication, and global cultural exchange.

Although some critiques point to limitations in addressing economic structures, the culturalist focus on lived experience and ethical responsibility continues to provide valuable insights for interdisciplinary scholarship.

Conclusion

The English culturalists redefined the study of culture by situating it within social practice and historical process. Their work challenged hierarchical models of culture and demonstrated that meaning is produced through collective experience and social interaction. As a result, English culturalism remains an essential reference point for contemporary cultural theory and humanities research.

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