

INTRODUCTION TO CULTURE, CULTURAL STUDIES, AND (US) POPULAR CULTURE

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What are we talking about?

1. What is Culture?
2. What is Cultural studies?
3. What is Popular Culture?

WHAT IS CULTURE?

1. A general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development;
2. A particular way of life, whether of a group, a people, a period (including cooking, sports...);
3. The works and practices of intellectual activity and artistic activity (plus physical activity).

Examples

*A play by Shakespeare might be said to be a distinct piece of cultural work / to be the product of a particular (English) way of life / to represent a certain stage of cultural development.

*US 1950s rock 'n' roll might be said to be a distinct piece of cultural work / to be the product of a particular (American) way of life / to represent a certain stage of cultural development.

Questions to be asked when studying culture

- How do people become part of a culture?
- How does cultural studies interpret what cultural products mean?
- How does cultural studies understand the past?
- Can other cultures be understood?
- How can we understand the relationships between cultures?
- Why are some cultures and cultural forms valued more highly than others?
- What is the relationship between culture and power?
- How can culture provide **spaces of resistance**?
- How does culture shape and / or reflect who we are (gender, race and class)?

WHAT IS CULTURAL STUDIES?

1. *Cultural Studies looks at (the meanings of) high art, low art, and everyday life*
2. *Cultural studies advocates an interdisciplinary approach*
3. *Cultural studies is eclectic in its use of theory*

What does Cultural Studies look at (PoMo)?

- An expanded notion of culture
- Culture and conflicts
- The decentering and decanonizing of culture
- Production, distribution, consumption
- Popular culture and populism
- Dediisciplining.
- The rejection of absolute / universal values
- Popular culture v. folk culture
- Popular culture v. mass culture
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WHAT POPULAR CULTURAL PRODUCTS ARE WE GOING TO LOOK AT AS PRACTITIONERS OF CULTURAL STUDIES?

*Generally available artefacts: books,
comic books, films, records (and videos),
TV programs, newspapers, magazines,
parlor games, toys, video games, clothes...*