

What does Cultural Studies do?

More details



What does Cultural Studies do?

- Cultural studies is an academic field grounded in **critical theory**.
- It generally concerns **the political nature of popular contemporary culture**, and is to this extent distinguished from cultural anthropology.
- Researchers concentrate on how a particular **medium** or **message** relates to matters of:
 - ❖ ideology
 - ❖ identity
 - ❖ social class
 - ❖ nationality, national origin
 - ❖ religion
 - ❖ race, ethnicity
 - ❖ sexuality
 - ❖ gender
 - ❖ (+ even species!)



What is Cultural Studies?

Cultural studies is extremely holistic, combining methods and insights from:

- sociology
- social theory
- anthropology
- political theory
- history
- literary theory
- media theory
- communication studies
- semiotics
- philosophy

to study cultural phenomena in various societies. Cultural Studies seeks to understand the ways in which meaning is generated, disseminated, and produced through various practices, beliefs, institutions, and political, economic, or social structures within a given culture.

Cultural Studies is influenced by

- Cultural Studies is influenced by Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss.
- Cultural Studies is influenced by structuralism and post-structuralism.
- Cultural Studies uses anthropology.
Cultural studies is not a tightly coherent unified movement with a fixed agenda, but a loosely coherent group of tendencies, issues and questions.
- Cultural Studies uses **French Theory**



Definitions of Cultural Studies



Today's Cultural Studies practitioners like popular culture.

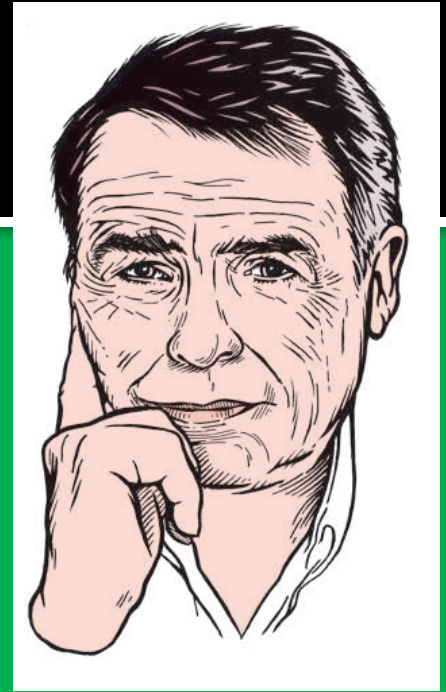
Cultural Studies transcends the confines of a particular discipline such as literary criticism or history.

Cultural Studies practitioners are resisting intellectuals who see what they do as an emancipatory project, because it erodes the traditional disciplinary divisions in most institutions of higher education.

Cultural Studies is usually politically engaged. Cultural critics often see themselves as oppositional, not only within their own higher education system but also when it comes to many of the power structures of society.

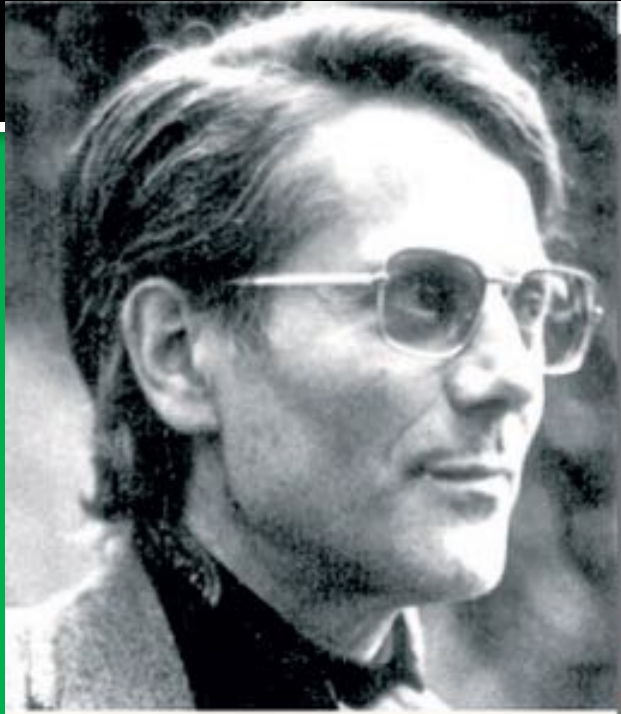


Pierre Bourdieu, one of the theorists who explores how “good taste” often reflects social, economic, and political power bases.



Cultural Studies denies the separation of high and low cultures / elite and popular cultures.

(PoMo)



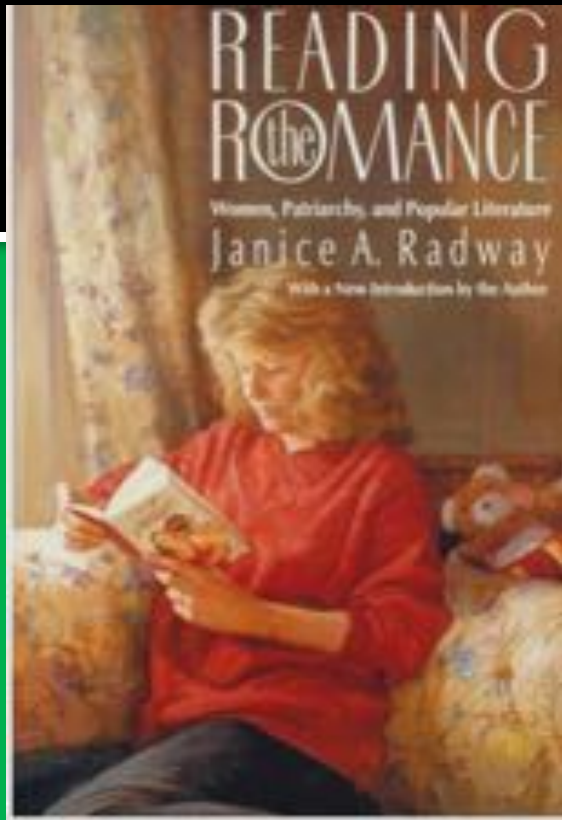
Drawing upon the ideas of Michel de Certeau, cultural critics examine the “practice of everyday life.”

Rather than determining which are the “best” works produced, cultural critics analyze what is produced and how.

What does CS do?

Cultural critics also aim to reveal the political and economic reasons why a certain cultural product is more successful at certain times than others.





The book cover of Janice Radway's *Reading Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*.

CS likes looking at popular fiction (romance, sci-fi, supernatural romance, etc.)

Five Types of Cultural Studies

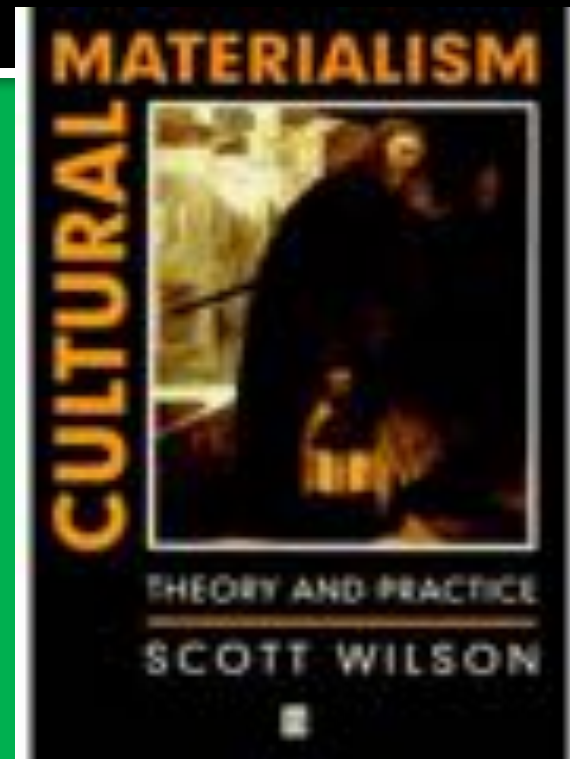


Poster for *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), directed by James Whale.

- British Cultural Materialism
- New Historicism
- American Multiculturalism
- Postmodernism and Popular Culture
- Postcolonial Studies

British Cultural Materialism

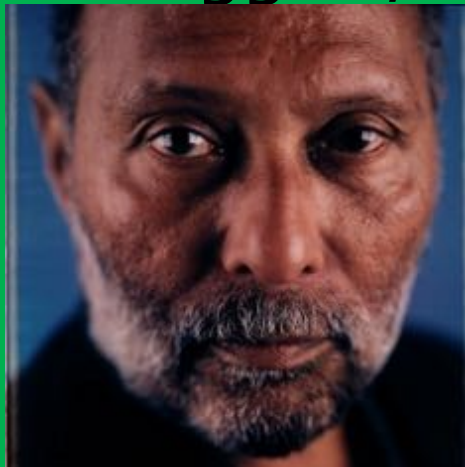
Cultural materialism began in earnest in the 1950s with the work of F. R. Leavis, heavily influenced by Matthew Arnold's analyses of bourgeois culture.



Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice by Scott Wilson. Cultural Studies is often referred to as “Cultural Materialism” in Britain.

The Brits invented Cultural Studies

Cultural Studies began in **Birmingham, England**, at the Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies (CCCS), founded by the literary theorist, Richard Hoggart, in **1964**



- *Stuart Hall was a Jamaican-born cultural theorist, political activist and sociologist who lived and worked in the United Kingdom from 1951. Hall, along with Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, was one of the founding figures of the school of The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies.*

<- Stuart Hall

CS is linked to New Historicism

New Historicism is a form of literary theory whose goal is to understand intellectual history through literature, and literature through its cultural context, which follows the 1950s field of history of ideas and refers to itself as a form of cultural poetics. It was first developed in the 1980s, primarily through the work of the critic and Stephen Greenblatt, and gained widespread influence in the 1990s.

How does CS think?

For Michel Foucault,
history was not the
working out of
“universal” ideas.



Cultural Studies rejects the strict
periodization of history in favor of ordering
history only through the interplay of forms
of power.

American Cultural Studies

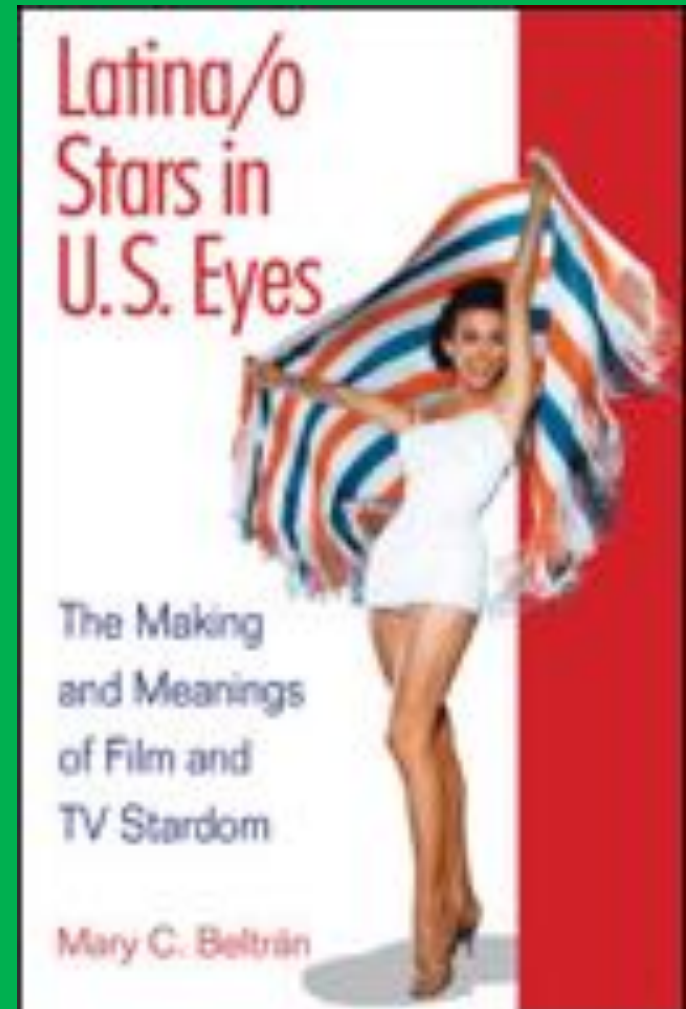
CS is linked to African American Studies



Henry Louis Gates

Latina/o Studies

- CS is linked to Latina/o Studies



American CS

- CS is linked to Native American Studies



Postmodernism and Popular Culture

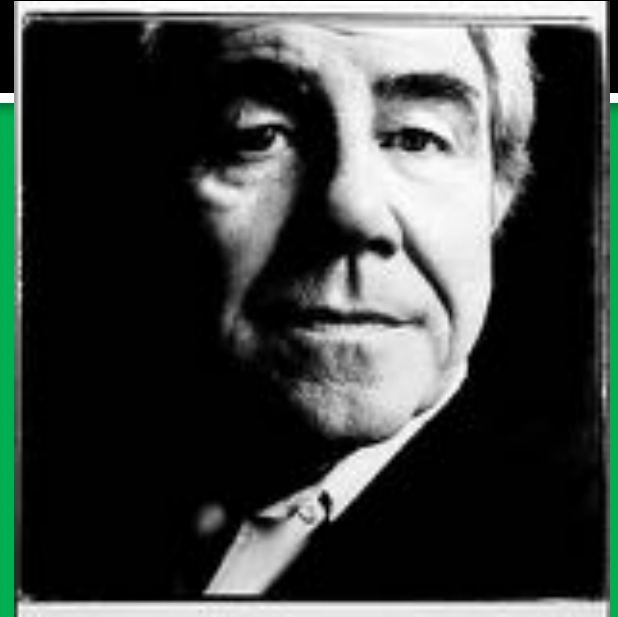


Jean-François Lyotard theorized grand narratives / metanarratives.

- The postmodern questions everything, notably what rationalist European thinking long held to be universally true.
- Between the 1950s and the 1980s, the postmodern emerged in art, architecture, music, film, literature, philosophy, sociology, communications, fashion and other fields.
- The postmodern rejects metanarratives, has a penchant for irony, is self-conscious, self-referential, hyper-referential, playful, fragmented, ambiguous, deconstructed, and decentered.

Postmodernism and Popular Culture

The postmodern argues that all is contingent and that most cultural constructions have served the function of empowering members of a dominant social group at the expense of others.



Jean Baudrillard describes the “simulacra” of postmodern life which have taken the place of “real” objects (the hyperreal)



Postmodernism and Popular Culture

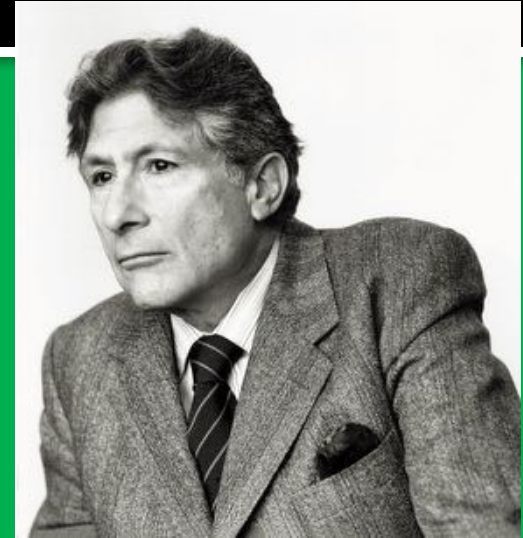
- They assess how such factors as ethnicity, race, gender, class, age, region and sexuality are shaped by and reshaped in popular culture.
- There are four main types of popular culture analysis: production analysis, textual analysis, audience analysis, and historical analysis.



The Postmodern loves Pop culture

CS is linked to Postcolonial Studies I

Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism* was an important touchstone to postcolonial studies.



- Postcolonialism refers to a historical phase undergone by the Third World countries after the decline of colonialism.
- Westerners' constructs of them are based upon Western anxieties and preoccupations. Said sharply critiques the Western images of the Oriental as "irrational, depraved (fallen), child-like, 'different,'" which has allowed the West to define itself as "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal.'"

CS is linked to Postcolonial Studies II



Homi K. Bhabha says that **what drives white people** to take over the world and spread their way of doing things is not power or even wanting to get rich, but **their screwed-up way of looking at the world.**

- Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory involves analysis of nationality, ethnicity, and politics with poststructuralist ideas of identity and indeterminacy, defining postcolonial identities as shifting, hybrid construction.
- Among postcolonial feminism is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who examines the effects of political independence upon "subaltern" or subproletarian women in the Third World (see how female subjects are silenced by the dialogue between the male-dominated West and East, offering little hope for the subaltern woman's voice to rise up amidst the global social institutions that oppress her).