Cultural history
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The term cultural history (from the German term Kulturgeschichte) refers both to an academic discipline and to its subject matter. Cultural history, as a discipline, at least in its common definition since the 1970s, often combines the approaches of anthropology and history to look at popular cultural traditions and cultural interpretations of historical experience. It examines the records and narrative descriptions of past knowledge, customs, and arts of a group of people. Its subject matter encompasses the continuum of events occurring in succession leading from the past to the present and even into the future pertaining to a culture.

Cultural history records and interprets past events involving human beings through the social, cultural, and political milieu of or relating to the arts and manners that a group favors. Jacob Burckhardt helped found cultural history as a discipline. Cultural history studies and interprets the record of human societies by denoting the various distinctive ways of living built up by a group of people under consideration. Cultural history involves the aggregate of past cultural activity, such as ceremony, class in practices, and the interaction with locales.

Description
Cultural history overlaps in its approaches with the French movements of histoire des mentalités (Philippe Poirier, 2004) and the so-called new history, and in the U.S. it is closely associated with the field of American studies. As originally conceived and practiced by 19th Century Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt with regard to the Italian Renaissance, cultural history was oriented to the study of a particular historical period in its entirety, with regard not only for its painting, sculpture and architecture, but for the economic basis underpinning society, and the social institutions of its daily life as well.\[1\]

Most often the focus is on phenomena shared by non-elite groups in a society, such as: carnival, festival, and public rituals; performance traditions of tale, epic, and other verbal forms; cultural evolutions in human relations (ideas, sciences, arts, techniques); and cultural expressions of social movements such as nationalism. Also examines main historical concepts as power, ideology, class, culture, cultural identity, attitude, race, perception and new historical methods as narration of body. Many studies consider adaptations of traditional culture to mass media (television, radio, newspapers, magazines, posters, etc.), from print to film and, now, to the Internet (culture of capitalism). Its modern approaches come from art history, annales, marxist school, microhistory and new cultural history.

Common theoretical touchstones for recent cultural history have included: Jürgen Habermas’s formulation of the public sphere in The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere; Clifford Geertz’s notion of “thick description” (exounded in, for example, The Interpretation of Cultures); and the idea of memory as a cultural-historical category, as discussed in Paul Connerton’s How Societies Remember.

A vague delineation

Historiography and the French Revolution
An area where new-style cultural history is often pointed to be as being almost a paradigm is the ‘revisionist’ history of the French Revolution, dated somewhere since François Furet’s massively influential 1978 essay Interpreting the French Revolution. The ‘revisionist interpretation’ is often characterised as replacing the allegedly dominant, allegedly Marxist, ‘social interpretation’ which say the causes of the Revolution in class dynamics. The revisionist approach has tended to put more emphasis on ‘political culture’. Reading ideas of political culture through Habermas’ conception of the public sphere, historians of the Revolution in the past few decades have looked at the role and position of cultural themes such as gender, ritual, and ideology in the context of pre-revolutionary French political culture.

Historians who might be grouped under this umbrella are Roger Chartier, Robert Darnton, Patrice Higonnet, Lynn Hunt, Keith Baker, Joan Landes, Mona Ozouf and Sarah Mazza. Of course, these scholars all pursue fairly diverse interests, and perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on the paradigmatic nature of the new history of the French Revolution. Colin Jones, for example, is no stranger to cultural history, Habermas, or Marxism, and has persistently argued that the Marxist interpretation is not dead, but can be revived; after all, Habermas’ logic was heavily indebted to a Marxist understanding. Meanwhile, Rebecca Spang has also recently argued that for all its emphasis on difference and newness, the ‘revisionist’ approach retains the idea of the French Revolution as a watershed in the history of (so-called) modernity, and that the problematic notion of ‘modernity’ has itself attracted scant attention.

Cultural studies

Cultural studies is an academic discipline popular among a diverse group of scholars. It combines political economy, communication, sociology, social theory, literary theory, media theory, film/video studies, cultural anthropology, philosophy, museum studies and art history/criticism to study cultural phenomena in various societies. Cultural studies researchers often concentrate on how a particular phenomenon relates to matters of ideology, nationality, ethnicity, social class, and/or gender. The term was coined by Richard Hoggart in 1964 when he founded the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. It has since become strongly associated with Stuart Hall, who succeeded Hoggart as Director.

Further reading

Listed by date
Cultural history records and interprets past events involving human beings through the knowledge gained about their acts and experiences. Cultural history, as a discipline, at least in its common definition since the 1970s, often combines the approaches of history and to its subject matter.

Cultural history overlaps in its approaches with the French movements of the eighteenth century; it helped found cultural history as a discipline. Cultural history studies and interprets the record of a group's notion of 'modernity' has itself attracted scant attention. Colin Jones, for example, is no stranger to cultural history, and Mona Ozouf and François Furet's massively influential 1978 essay for recent cultural history have included:

- Of course, these scholars all pursue fairly diverse interests, and perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on the 'revisionist' history of the French Revolution. The 'revisionist interpretation' is often called 'social interpretation' which say the causes of the Revolution in class dynamics.
- 'Modernity' is the 'Great Divide', American Historical Review, 108 (2003)

References

General information


Citations and notes