

RECONCEPTUALIZING CULTURE: THE ENGLISH CULTURALIST TRADITION AND ITS THEORETICAL LEGACY IN CONTEMPORARY HUMANITIES

Shigabudinova Dina Yasaviyevna

Bukhara State University

Lecturer, independent researcher, faculty of foreign languages ,(ESP) cross faculties department

d.y.shigabudinova@buxdu.uz, orcid.org/0000-0002-2718-0510/

Abstract

This article offers a critical reconceptualization of the English culturalist tradition as a foundational paradigm in the development of modern cultural theory. Moving beyond descriptive accounts, the study situates the works of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and E. P. Thompson within broader epistemological and socio-historical transformations of post-war Britain. The paper argues that English Culturalism constitutes not merely an intellectual movement but a methodological rupture that redefined culture as a dynamic, lived, and contested domain embedded in structures of power and everyday practice. By synthesizing historical analysis with theoretical reconstruction, the article demonstrates how culturalist concepts—such as “structure of feeling,” lived experience, and cultural agency—continue to inform contemporary debates in cultural studies, identity theory, and critical social analysis. The findings suggest that the culturalist framework remains analytically productive in addressing current challenges posed by globalization, digital culture, and symbolic power.

Keywords

English Culturalism; cultural theory; Raymond Williams; structure of feeling; cultural studies; social philosophy

1. Introduction

The emergence of English Culturalism in the mid-twentieth century represents a decisive epistemological shift in the humanities and social sciences. While earlier traditions tended to conceptualize culture as a domain of elite artistic production, culturalist thinkers reconceptualized it as an **immanent dimension of social life**, inseparable from everyday practices, class relations, and structures of meaning.

Despite the extensive scholarly attention devoted to cultural studies, the **theoretical coherence and methodological specificity** of English Culturalism remain insufficiently systematized in contemporary research. This article addresses this gap by advancing the following research questions:

1. How can English Culturalism be understood as a distinct theoretical paradigm rather than a loosely defined intellectual movement?
2. What are its core conceptual innovations and methodological implications?
3. In what ways does the culturalist framework retain relevance under conditions of late modernity and digital transformation?

The central thesis of this study is that English Culturalism constitutes a **methodological reorientation** that redefined culture as a site of negotiation between structure and agency, thereby establishing a durable analytical framework for interdisciplinary inquiry.

2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This research employs a **qualitative interpretive methodology**, combining:

- **Intellectual history** (contextual reconstruction of post-war British thought)
- **Conceptual analysis** (examination of key categories such as “culture,” “experience,” and “agency”)
- **Comparative theoretical synthesis** (situating culturalism vis-à-vis Marxism, structuralism, and later post-structuralist approaches)

The theoretical framework is grounded in **critical social theory**, particularly the intersection between Marxist humanism and cultural analysis. Unlike structuralist paradigms, which prioritize systemic determination, English Culturalism foregrounds **lived experience and historical agency**, thereby introducing a dialectical understanding of culture.

The rise of English Culturalism must be understood against the backdrop of **post-war socio-economic restructuring** in Britain. The decline of industrial capitalism, expansion of mass education, and transformation of class identities necessitated new analytical tools capable of capturing the complexity of cultural life.

In this context, culture ceased to function as a static repository of canonical works and instead emerged as a **processual and relational phenomenon**. Culturalists challenged both:

- **Elitist cultural criticism** (e.g., the Arnoldian tradition), and
- **Reductionist Marxism**, which subordinated culture entirely to economic base structures.

This dual critique positioned English Culturalism as a **mediating paradigm**, capable of integrating structural analysis with attention to human agency.

Key thinkers and conceptual contributions as Raymond Williams advanced a radical redefinition of culture as a “whole way of life,” thereby dissolving the boundary between high culture and everyday practice. His concept of “**structure of feeling**” represents a major theoretical innovation, capturing the pre-articulated, affective dimensions of social experience.

Williams’s work is particularly significant for its **anti-reductionist orientation**, emphasizing that culture is both shaped by and constitutive of social relations. This duality allows for a

nanced understanding of cultural production as a site of negotiation rather than passive reflection. Richard Hoggart's contribution lies in his methodological commitment to **empirical cultural inquiry**. Through detailed observation of working-class life, he demonstrated that popular culture possesses its own internal coherence and symbolic richness.

Hoggart's work resists both cultural pessimism and uncritical celebration of mass culture, instead proposing a **context-sensitive analysis** that accounts for continuity, transformation, and resistance within everyday practices.

E. P. Thompson extends culturalist insights into the domain of social history by conceptualizing class as a **historically constructed cultural relationship**. His emphasis on agency challenges deterministic models and foregrounds the role of human actors in shaping cultural meanings.

Thompson's approach underscores that culture is not merely expressive but **constitutive of historical processes**, thereby reinforcing the central thesis of English Culturalism.

3. Discussion: Culturalism as a Methodological Paradigm

The analysis reveals that English Culturalism is best understood not as a set of isolated contributions but as a **coherent methodological paradigm** characterized by:

- **Ontological expansion of culture** (beyond art to everyday life)
- **Epistemological emphasis on experience**
- **Dialectical relation between structure and agency**
- **Interdisciplinary integration**

In contrast to structuralism, which privileges systemic logic, and postmodernism, which often emphasizes fragmentation, culturalism maintains a **balanced analytical framework** capable of addressing both continuity and transformation.

Under conditions of globalization and digitalization, the culturalist framework acquires renewed significance. Contemporary cultural phenomena—such as social media practices, digital identities, and algorithmic mediation—can be effectively analyzed through culturalist concepts.

In particular:

- The notion of “**structure of feeling**” can be reinterpreted in relation to digital affect and networked subjectivity
- The emphasis on **everyday practice** aligns with studies of online behavior and participatory culture
- The focus on **agency** remains crucial in analyzing resistance within digital environments

Thus, English Culturalism continues to provide a **robust analytical toolkit** for understanding the complexities of late modern culture.

4. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that English Culturalism represents a foundational paradigm that reshaped the conceptualization of culture in the twentieth century. By foregrounding lived experience, agency, and the embeddedness of meaning within social practices, culturalists established an enduring framework that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

The continued relevance of this tradition lies in its ability to adapt to new historical conditions while retaining its core analytical insights. As such, English Culturalism should be recognized not merely as a historical movement but as an **ongoing theoretical resource** for contemporary humanities and social sciences.

References

1. Hall, S. (1980). *Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms*.
2. Hoggart, R. (1957). *The Uses of Literacy*. London: Chatto & Windus.
3. Thompson, E. P. (1963). *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Vintage.
4. Williams, R. (1958). *Culture and Society*. London: Chatto & Windus.
5. Williams, R. (1961). *The Long Revolution*. London: Chatto & Windus.