

# ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture***

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Joanne Morreale and P. David Marshall,  
"Introduction to *New Papers in American Cultural Studies*"**  
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**Joanne MORREALE and P. David MARSHALL**

### **Introduction to *New Papers in American Cultural Studies***

Cultural studies has refracted into many directions over the last forty years. Initially, cultural studies emerged as a response to the elitism of a critical literary tradition that conceived of culture and civilization as identical. Its inception is generally attributed to the publication of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1958) and Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958), both of which disputed the separation between high culture and "real life." Their contestation emerged out of a concern for the social and economic conditions of the working classes in Britain that was disregarded in the dominant theoretical paradigm. In the 1960s, Williams developed the key analytical concepts of "structure of feeling" and "selective tradition" that became foundational for cultural studies. Williams argued that "structure of feeling," with its quality of everyday lived culture, was often at odds with the nation's efforts at constructing a "selective tradition" as to what constitutes the nation, its history, and the nation state. The work of cultural studies was to examine the meaning and practices of everyday life, with particular attention to power relations: how ideology inscribed the ideas of the dominant culture and in so doing, marginalized particular groups and subcultures. In the 1970s, Stuart Hall added provocatively that popular culture is a "contested terrain" of cultural struggle, and the focus shifted to culture as a sight of resistance and conflict. Hall's work, closely associated with the Birmingham Centre for the Study of Contemporary Culture (now defunct), expanded dramatically the horizons of cultural politics and how class struggle could be conceptualized. These three conceptual frames: structure of feeling, selective tradition, and contested terrain, helped define cultural studies as an intellectual practice in its first two decades.

From all this, cultural studies emerged as a means to investigate the "struggle for meaning" through a study of the more ordinary, overlooked and everyday practices and how those practices are in constant representational negotiation with the dominant culture. Media forms, such as literature, film, and television, became key sites of investigation. Over the years, what began as a historical, descriptive way to analyze class relations became more theoretically and methodologically diverse, incorporating a vast range of intellectual currents and tools of analysis. What gave cultural studies its edge and difference from other continental approaches (such as structuralism and post-structuralism, which were at times absorbed into cultural studies) was its political orientation: cultural studies provided deep descriptions of cultural practices, but it invested these studies with prescriptive as much as descriptive intent. The popular and the contemporary were sites not only to investigate, but also to search out the way that hegemony was articulated into the fibers of contemporary culture and to challenge and undermine the social, political, and institutional practices that constituted hegemony. The objects of analysis ranged from a micro-level analysis of texts and discourse to macro-level considerations of social, political, and institutional structures. Moreover, cultural studies expanded its repertoire of "contested terrains" to include issues around race, ethnicity, and gender, and the representational regimes which work to underpin those categories.

These origins of cultural studies have allowed for an evocative proliferation of studies that this thematic issue of *New Papers in American Cultural Studies* in *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* exemplifies. Although we are well aware of the problematics of hegemony of US-American cultural studies, the title of the thematic issue here refers to cultural studies in the context of "American" as in US-American and Canadian scholarship. Over the years, the cultural studies approach has been appropriated into and adapted for investigations of all cultural practices and the ways in which they engage with audiences. The initial critical project of cultural studies has expanded beyond Britain to become an international movement, with journals, conferences, professional associations, as well as academic programs in any number of countries. Here is a partial list of cultural associations, world wide: the Canadian Association for Cultural Studies <<http://www.culturalstudies.ca>>, the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia <<http://www.csa.asn.au/>>, the Taiwan Cultural Studies Association <<http://csat.org.tw/>>, the

Japan association Cultural Typhoon <<http://w1.nirai.ne.jp/tada/Typhoon2004.htm>>, the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Association <<http://www.inter-asia.org>>, the International Association for Cultural Studies <<http://www.cultstud.org/>>, the United Kingdom Communication and Cultural Studies Association <<http://www.meccsa.org.uk/>>, the United States Cultural Studies Association <<http://www.csaus.pitt.edu/>>, and the Swiss Society for Cultural Studies <<http://www.culturalstudies.ch>> (for an extensive list of cultural studies oriented associations, journals, websites, etc., consult the *Library of CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* at <<http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/library.html>>).

The seven papers in this thematic issue, selected after anonymous peer review from papers presented at the Second Cultural Studies Association Conference held at Northeastern University in Boston in May 2004, expands the arenas of cultural studies within the US-American and Canadian context of the field as they chafe against the disciplinary boundaries of literary, television, film, and even internet studies. They explore new sites of contestation from a number of different theoretical and methodological approaches, while they are linked by the common concerns that have marked cultural studies since its inception. Several of the papers explore the way that specific groups are marginalized by the dominant culture. Kara Lynn Andersen, in "Harry Potter and the Susceptible Child Audience" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss2/2/>> combines scholarship in reception studies, film spectatorship, and literary criticism in her analysis of children as readers and viewers of *Harry Potter* books and films. She argues against common perceptions of children as "passive audiences" who are especially susceptible to the effects of advertising and other media. She suggests that children who are Harry Potter fans are active readers and viewers who creatively encode new meanings as they read books or watch films. Lan Dong, on the other hand, in his paper "Tracing Chinese Gay Cinema 1993-2002" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss2/3/>> deals explicitly with marginalized groups by addressing representations of gay male characters in Chinese films as a reflection of cultural attitudes toward them. He de-naturalizes representations of gay characters by revealing how they are tied to their social and political landscape. Rebecca Romanow also explores marginalized groups in her consideration of the relationship between imperialist and neo-colonialist hegemonies and non-Western cultures in "But... Can the Subaltern Sing?" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss2/6/>>. Her paper addresses the ways that English language rock music, and the cultural values and global power it exports, silences and thus marginalizes non-Western voices. She also demonstrates the range of theoretical currents that can inform cultural studies by framing her arguments through subaltern, Deleuzian and postcolonial theory.

Much as the early cultural studies theorists critiqued the divide between high culture and "real life," Jake Kennedy's essay, "Dust and the Avant Garde" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss2/4/>> argues that experimental modernists Gertrude Stein and Marcel Duchamp did not seek to destroy the bourgeois institution of art so much as to reconnect art to the world of lived experience. He theorizes the use of dust as an "abject object" in their work and argues that it marks sites of gender struggle and self-construction. Next, Joanne Morreale's paper, "Reality TV, *Faking It* and the Transformation of Personal Identity" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss2/5/>> uses critical cultural history, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and postmodern theory to link the makeover television program *Faking It* to consumer culture and the processes of fabrication whereby the self is created. Ryan S. Trimm also considers the construction of identity, in this case national and cultural identity, in his paper, "Nation, Heritage, and Hospitality in Britain after Thatcher" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss2/8/>>. Trimm's paper is tied closely to Raymond Williams's notion of selective tradition and the roots of cultural studies in literary analysis. He suggests that the concept of heritage, as used in Margaret Thatcher's Britain, worked to exclude minorities who became "disinherited" by not being part of this past. Yet, Anderson also suggests that the concept of heritage can be re-appropriated and re-imagined to be more inclusive than exclusive, so that images of the past can be re-worked and national and cultural identities can be revised. Trimm concludes his essay by examining the way that heritage is rearticulated in different

ways in the Hanif Kureishi/Stephen Frears film *My Beautiful Launderette* and in Julian Barnes's novel *England, England*. Rebecca Rohmsdahl's paper, "E-participation in Policy-making: Can It Promote Political Deliberation?" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss2/7/>> takes a cultural studies approach to explore the democratic potential of a relatively new media form, the internet. She addresses explicitly the political agenda of cultural studies as she assesses the internet's potential as a tool for democracy. She too is concerned with marginalized and disenfranchised groups and their ability to participate in democratic decision-making. Rohmsdal uses the ethnographic methodology embraced early on by cultural studies scholars as she conducts interviews with public participation practitioners who used the internet to facilitate discussion of land management planning. She concludes, however, that the internet poses great challenges for the essential components of deliberation.

Although a small and selected number, the papers in this thematic issue of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* demonstrate the wide range of American cultural studies today: they highlight the eclecticism, fluidity, and open-endedness of an area of inquiry that stands apart from disciplinary boundaries, and as such, allows for the interconnections and interrelations between media forms, theoretical perspectives, and methodologies that facilitate its project. In closing our brief introduction, we thank the authors for their important work in cultural intervention and we thank the anonymous reviewers of the papers for their comments. Finally, we thank *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* editorial assistant Clare Callaghan for her assistance with the editing of the papers and the editor of *CLCWeb*, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, for giving us the opportunity to engage with such a lively and diverse group of papers. This thematic issue also contains a "Selected Bibliography of Scholarship in (Comparative) Cultural Studies and Popular Culture" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss2/9/>>, compiled by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Yilin Liao.

Guest editor's profile: Joanne Morreale teaches media and communication studies at Northeastern University. Morreale's focus in scholarship is on political film and television criticism and she has written several books and articles on media criticism. Her latest book, *Critiquing the Sitcom* (2002), is an edited compilation of essays addressing race, class, and gender issues in the television situation comedy. She is also the author of two other books, *A New Beginning: A Rhetorical Frame Analysis of the Presidential Campaign Film* (1987) and *A History and Criticism of the Presidential Campaign Film* (1992), and she is contributing author to the volume *The Persuasion Society* (2001). E-mail: <[j.morreale@neu.edu](mailto:j.morreale@neu.edu)>

Guest editor's profile: P. David Marshall teaches media and communication studies at Northeastern University and he is the author of *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (1997), *New Media Cultures* (2004), and co-author, with Robert Burnett, of *Fame Games: The Production of Celebrity in Australia* (2000) and of *Web Theory* (2002). Marshall's interests in scholarship include the study of the public personality and the study of new media forms and he is currently working on an edited collection entitled *Celebrity Culture Reader*. Marshall has been a regular commentator on media and contemporary culture with appearances on CNN, the ABC, Australia's Radio National and other radio and television programs and commentary for newspaper and magazine articles. He is also the founder of *m/c: a journal of media and culture* <[www.media-culture.org.au](http://www.media-culture.org.au)>, an early and by now prominent internet magazine. E-mail: <[d.marshall@neu.edu](mailto:d.marshall@neu.edu)>.