

CHCS

Centre d'histoire culturelle des sociétés contemporaines

RESEARCH

The CHCSC: the original cultural history research centre

The Centre d'Histoire Culturelle des Sociétés Contemporaines (CHCSC) is the only research centre in France focused specifically on the cultural history of the contemporary period (late 18th century to the present day). The CHCSC understands culture as 'the set of collective representations specific to a given society' and cultural history as 'the social history of representations'. It began as a fledgling team in 1992 and obtained the status of 'équipe d'accueil' (government-funded research unit) in 1994 (EA 2448). It is one of two support research centres attached originally to the Institut d'Études Culturelles, which then became the Institut d'Études Culturelles et Internationales (IECI) in 2013 following the restructuring of the SSH UFR (human and social sciences department).

The **CHCSC aims to promote the epistemological reflection on cultural history concepts and methods** in relation to other historical approaches (political, economic, social, religious) and other disciplines reflecting on culture in contemporary societies (civilisation studies, literature studies, sociology, information and communication science,

art history, ethnology, anthropology, political science, etc.). Its objectives are to coordinate a body of collaborative research studies around strategic questions, to help advance individual research (in terms of both theory and practice) and to bring together French and international researchers from all disciplines to form a homogeneous whole.

The areas covered by cultural history have expanded and diversified since the discipline was first established. The CHCSC does not claim to take account of all of them. However, it strives to consolidate the research areas that it has long received recognition for among the scientific community and seeks to explore new research avenues that open up, particularly when new members join the team. The CHCSC thus intends to contribute actively to the historiographical developments that mark cultural history today.

While it endeavours to take into consideration all the vectors underpinning the development of mass culture and media culture in its observations of the evolution of contemporary societies, the CHCSC's aim is not solely to study cultural forms and objects. The '**social history of representations**' should be understood as the study of: cultural customs, practices and habits; shared sensibilities, values, beliefs and imaginations; symbolic norms and universes; and so on. In other words, the 'social history of representations' is the study of everything that sheds light on the collective behaviours of societies. The aim is to understand the ways in which we, in all our diversity both as individuals and as groups forming the social fabric, perceive, regard, experience, interpret and therefore ultimately give meaning to the world that we live in. In dynamic terms, culture is like a circuit in which representation passes through the stages of production, mediation, reception and appropriation. To understand this circuit, we have to understand not just the multiple factors (scientific and technical, economic and social, institutional and political, events and memories, etc.) that determine the cultural system but also the phenomena of flow, transfer, exchange and influence that increase its complexity. This framework determines the structure of the CHCSC's research areas and their expansion at international level.

Due to its very nature, the CHCSC is composed of researchers from a variety of human and social science fields as well as from the exact sciences for some aspects of its scientific activities. Within the CHCSC, history is defined as the foundation for collective reflection, and multidisciplinary as the dynamic that propels it. The CHCSC sustains regular relations with research teams in about 30 countries around the world.

The four thematic areas

1- Cultural and artistic production and practices

- Writing, publishing and printing
- The Arts (visual arts, music, performing arts)

2- Media, images and communication

- Cultural history of the media
- Creation, mediation and reception of knowledge

3- Cultural heritage

- History and valorisation of heritage
- Heritage and environment

4- Cultural flow, cultural transfer and globalisation

- Dynamics of cultural areas
- Construction of an Atlantic space: Europe/the Americas/Africa