

Seminar, Level 1 (für Studierende niedriger Semester):

Beginning Cultural Studies: Concepts | Texts | Practices

Time: THU, 16-18 // Room: Philosophie-Gebäude, Ü 6

! Please study the syllabus closely before registering for the seminar, and then again in preparation for the first meeting.

As long as the pandemic situation will allow this, the seminar will meet 'on site' rather than online.

KURS-KATEGORIE (SUV-BESCHREIBUNG):

This course is in the category ('SUV-Kategorie') 'Level 1: Seminare für niedrige Semester / Seminars for advanced beginners.' The SUV catalogue (see website of the Chair for English Literature and British Cultural Studies) describes this category as follows:

Die Kurse dieser Kategorie richten sich an BA- und Lehramtsstudierende im 2.-4. Fachsemester. In ihnen werden die in den Einführungsvorlesungen erworbenen Grundlagenkenntnisse [...] vertieft und gesichert. Sie sollten nach dem Besuch der zugehörigen Einführungsvorlesung und vor dem Besuch eines Seminars für höhere Semester belegt werden.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

"Cultural studies," Stuart Hall explained around the turn of the 21st century, "are based on the assumption that it takes a lot of theoretical work to bring light into the darkness of the obvious."

Building on the introductory lecture in cultural studies (Einführungsvorlesung britische Landeskunde und Kulturwissenschaft), this seminar aims to further clarify the central theoretical concepts on which cultural studies draws. However, it is also high time to put these concepts to use by beginning a lively engagement with actual cultural phenomena.

Accordingly, we will combine the close reading of seminal theoretical texts (on entertainment, youth and media cultures; representation; ethnicity and gender; subjectivity and performance) with discussions on cultural practices and present fields of research. Issues range from human/animal interaction to the sounds, consumption patterns and social practices of popular music culture.

PREPARING FOR THE COURSE:

Participants are urged to engage with and prepare for the course already before the beginning of the lecture period. Here is a checklist of options (all of which should ideally be combined):

- Brush up your knowledge of cultural studies by reviewing the material of the introductory lecture and by studying titles from my 'Basic Bibliography' (the latter can be found on the website of the Chair for English Literature and British Cultural Studies and also in the WueCampus 'course room' for the present seminar) ...
- Familiarize yourself with the seminar programme ...
- Start reading the texts listed in the seminar programme ...

PROGRAMME

AR = assigned reading → Please read (or watch) & prepare these texts/materials carefully.

ADEQUATE PREPARATION includes researching contexts as well as difficult terms. The goal of such preparation is not only to achieve a clear understanding of the texts but also to position them in the context of the seminar and to work out a position in relation to their argument.

Seminar meetings & seminar work:

Participants need to prepare for SEMINAR MEETINGS by doing the assigned reading and working with the study questions or tasks to be found in this syllabus.

In order to allow ample time for writing and study, this seminar will not necessarily meet every week. The weeks listed as 'STUDY AND WRITING WEEKS' will be used for studying, writing and online exchange organized through the WueCampus course room. There will always be tasks (especially writing assignments) for these weeks. Responses to writing assignments (usually in the form of short academic essays of c. 2 pages) generally need to be handed in through WueCampus by Thursday night.

Assessment:

Assessment will be according to the 'PORTFOLIO' PRINCIPLE. Two kinds of work will automatically go into participants' individual portfolios:

- (1) all WRITTEN CONTRIBUTIONS made by participants in the course of the semester
- (2) the END-OF-TERM TEST

! Please visit the WueCampus 'course room' at least once every week.

The 'course room' features a separate DISCUSSION FORUM for every week. Use it for posting questions, comments and ideas. Here, you can also raise topics or concerns that should be addressed in our meetings.

W 1 Meeting on 20/10

Introduction

CONCERNS:

Clarifying the ORGANIZATION of the course. RE-CONNECTING to what has been learned in previous courses (especially in the introductory lecture).

AR:

- ❖ Consider the material covered in the INTRODUCTORY LECTURE & the resources listed in the 'BASIC BIBLIOGRAPHY.'
- ❖ Catherine Belsey, "General Editor's Preface," Readers in Cultural Criticism Series (Palgrave); qtd. from *The Body*, ed. Tiffany Atkinson (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2005) vii-viii.
- ❖ Oliver Marchart, "Cultural Studies: Eine politische Perspektive (Vorbemerkung)," *Cultural Studies* (UVK / UTB, 2008) 11-16. [The entire book can be accessed online through UBW.]

[See the task outlined on the next page!]

TASK:

- Be prepared to give an informed oral response on the following questions:
- What is cultural studies (or, as Belsey has it, 'cultural criticism')?
 - What is the point of cultural studies?
 - What are some typical objects of analysis in cultural studies? In other words: what kinds of material do scholars in cultural studies actually examine and comment on?

(These questions may look simple, but please be aware that they are in fact relatively demanding.)

W 2 Meeting on 27/10

Cultural studies as a project

CONCERNS:

Establishing an adequate understanding of the PERSPECTIVE & OBJECTIVES of cultural studies.

AR:

- ❖ Oliver Marchart, [from:] "Kultur, Macht, Identität: Annäherung an das 'politische Theorieprojekt' der Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies* (UVK / UTB, 2008) 17-36 [abridged]. [The entire book can be accessed online through UBW.]

TASKS:

- 1.) Reconsider our discussion so far and carefully read the assigned section from Marchart's book. On this basis, ponder the following questions:
 - WHY (i.e., with which AIM or OBJECTIVE) and HOW (i.e., from what PERSPECTIVE) have cultural studies examined 'culture'?
 - What are the POTENTIALS (and perhaps also the problems) of such a form of research in the contemporary world? – Put more simply: What do you hope to learn and achieve by 'doing' cultural studies?

→ Be prepared to give an informed oral response on these questions.
- 2.) Look for a CONCRETE EXAMPLE (i.e., some specific cultural phenomenon, practice, text, song or image) that you actually would like to discuss from the perspective of cultural studies. — If you find something really interesting, please post your material on the DISCUSSION FORUM for the present week. Such a contribution is non-mandatory but will be highly appreciated.

W 3 Meeting on 03/11

Key concepts in cultural studies

CONCERNS:

Establishing an adequate critical understanding of the key CONCEPTS and key APPROACHES used in cultural studies.

AR:

- ❖ Chris Barker, "Key Concepts in Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage, 2008) 7-12.

The file on WueCampus contains pp. 3-12; please read all, but focus in particular on pages 7-12, which contain the following sections:

"Culture and signifying practices" | "Representation" | "Materialism and non-reductionism" | "Articulation" | "Power" | "Popular culture" | "Texts and readers" | "Subjectivity and identity"

TASK:

- While reading & preparing the text, highlight the key concepts mentioned.
- Do further research to make sure that you fully understand these concepts and will be able to work with them.
- From the concepts highlighted, select the *three* that you consider to be most important in the light of your own interests.
- ➔ Be prepared to give an informed oral response on the following questions:
 - Why should the concepts you have selected be regarded as especially important?
 - What can be achieved by using them as 'tools' for an analysis of cultural texts and cultural phenomena?

W 4 Meeting on 10/11

Key concepts in cultural studies (cont'd)

CONCERNS:

Continuing our discussion of the key concepts listed and explained by Barker.

TASK:

- Re-read the text by Barker, making sure that you fully understood all the concepts introduced on pp. 7-12. Use study aids and other resources (see course bibliography for suggestions) to improve your grasp of difficult concepts.
- ➔ If you have found a study aid or other resource that seems particularly helpful, you may want to share this information through the discussion forum. If there should be questions you are still struggling with even after careful autonomous research, you can also share these on the discussion forum.

W 5 Meeting on 17/11

Early cultural studies and post-war entertainment culture

CONCERNS:

Understanding the HISTORICAL CONTEXT (i.e., the specific moment in national, social and cultural history) from which British Cultural Studies emerged | Discussing the ACHIEVEMENTS as well as the LIMITATIONS of a 'foundational text' in cultural studies | Discussing the relationship of that history and that text to our PRESENT CONCERNS.

AR:

- ❖ [From:] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957; Boston: Beacon, 1961):
 - front matter, including the list of contents and the preface;
 - subchapter on "The Juke-Box Boys" (202-205).

TASK:

Read & prepare the text carefully (don't forget about the front matter, etc!).

- ➔ Be prepared to give an informed oral response on the following questions:
 - Be sure to UNDERSTAND ALL TERMS AND PHRASES in the text. In particular, you should be prepared to explain the somewhat difficult passages on the "eighteenth-century town-house" and the "hedonistic but passive barbarian" riding "in a fifty-horse-power bus for threepence." (Some further research will be required to actually understand these passages ...)
 - Do research on HOGGART and on the HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENT in which he penned his text.
 - Use the information researched as well as Hoggart's text itself to ponder the DEVELOPMENTS and (perceived) PROBLEMS that ORIGINALLY MOTIVATED BRITISH CULTURAL STUDIES. (Do not forget to also consider the title of the book, its list of contents and its preface!)
 - How would you describe the MOOD AND CHARACTER OF THE TEXT? How would you explain and how would you evaluate that mood and character?
 - Is this text totally OBSOLETE? Or does it contain concerns and ideas that are STILL VALID today?

W 6 Study and writing week (assignment due on 24/11)

Contemporary media culture – A first specimen

CONCERNS:

Transferring previous findings to the critical ASSESSMENT OF A CULTURAL DOCUMENT | Establishing a critical understanding of what may be 'at stake' in CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS & DISCOURSES | ➔ Specifically: problematizing cultural constructions of 'CULTURE,' 'CHANGE,' 'AGENCY,' and 'MEDIALITY.'

AR:

- ❖ "The Only Thing That's Changed Is ..." (iPhone 6s Commercial, 2015) [\[LINK\]](#).

TASK:

Watch the clip several times & pen a short but clearly argued academic essay (c. 2 pages) that ponders the following questions (please consult relevant texts and study aids in order to work out satisfactory responses):

- Why might the commercial be interesting, not only to a prospective 'consumer' but also to a scholar of culture?
- What might Richard Hoggart have said in response to this clip?
- Is it enough to lay bare the methods by which the clip tries to 'sell a product' and 'deceive' the public? Or can/should scholars in cultural studies learn more from the clip?
- How does the clip represent contemporary culture? What specific aspects/dimensions/spheres of culture or cultural activity are represented in the clip?
- What 'hot' topics (i.e. potential social or political problems, divisions and conflicts) are alluded to in the clip? And does the clip suggest solutions to such problems / divisions / conflicts?
- How does the clip approach the (interrelated) topics of change, agency and mediality?
- How can key terms from Chris Barker's introduction be brought to bear on the clip?

While all of these questions should 'resonate' in your essay, it is OK to focus on one or two in particular. Moreover, you need not stick to the order in which I have arranged the questions. Please feel free to also introduce your own concerns.

➔ Please upload your essay (as a text file in Word) to WueCampus by Thursday, 01/12, 12 a.m. (= midnight).

W7 Meeting on 01/12

New perspectives on the 'young audience'

CONCERNS:

Understanding how NEW PERSPECTIVES on YOUTH CULTURE & CONSUMER CULTURE were established by introducing the notion of 'CULTURAL WORK' and by developing a theoretically grounded understanding of culture as a domain of (POLYSEMOUS) SIGNIFYING PRACTICES.

AR:

- ❖ Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, "The Young Audience," *The Popular Arts* (1964); rpt. in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (London: Routledge, 1990) 22-30.

TASK:

Read & prepare the text carefully. This includes finding out about the gestation/context of the text.

- ➔ Be sure to clearly understand especially the following concepts or phrases *and* their function within the essay:
 - "Teenage culture is, in part, an AUTHENTIC response to this situation, an area of COM-

MON SYMBOLS AND MEANINGS, shared in part or in whole by a generation, in which they can WORK OUT OR WORK THROUGH not only the natural tensions of adolescence, but the special tensions of being an adolescent in our kind of society." (22)

- "creative minority" (22)
- "The culture provided by the commercial entertainment market [...] MIRRORS attitudes and sentiments which are already there, and at the same time PROVIDES AN EXPRESSIVE FIELD and a SET OF SYMBOLS through which these attitudes can be PROJECTED." (23)
- "Teenage culture is a contradictory mixture of the authentic and the manufactured [...]." (23)
- "popular art" (26) | "popular culture" (29; 30)
- "And this consideration brings us back to one of the basic problems in POPULAR CULTURE—does the audience get what it likes (in which case, are those likes enough?) and needs (in which case, are the needs healthy ones?), or is it getting to like what it is given (in which case, perhaps tastes can be extended)? Nowhere in this whole field is it so true that the real answer lies in an understanding of how these two factors INTERACT in contemporary popular culture." (30)

W8 Meeting on 08/12

Assessing the development of cultural studies: Hoggart vs. Hall & Whannel

CONCERNS:

Deepening our understanding of the ORIGINAL MOTIVATIONS of and IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS within (British) cultural studies. | Linking the discussion to TODAY'S cultural discourses or phenomena.

AR:

- ❖ Re-read the text by Hoggart as well as the text by Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel.

TASKS:

(1) Carefully consider and research the following questions:

- In which ways are the texts by Hoggart, on the one hand, and by Hall and Whannel, on the other hand, different? In which ways are they similar? How do such similarities and differences reflect developments in cultural studies?
- Select a sentence or short passage from the text that you consider particularly relevant (especially in light of the present situation and of your specific concerns). Be ready to explain the passage selected and give reasons for your choice.
- Consider the following dictum by Edgar Morin, which Hall and Whannel quote in their essay: "In the last analysis it is neither talent nor lack of talent, neither the cinematic industry nor its advertising, but the need for her which creates the star" (qtd. Hall/Whannel 28). → What are the meanings and implications of the dictum in Hall's and Whannel's essay? How does this relate to Hoggart's take on youth and entertainment culture?

(2) Choose a significant contemporary music video or current fashion style that can be

productively discussed in the context of the points and problems raised by Hoggart, Hall and Whannel. → If you find something really interesting, please post your material on the DISCUSSION FORUM for the present week (you might provide a link, for example). – Such a contribution is non-mandatory but will be highly appreciated.

W 9 Meeting on 15/12

'Subcultures, 'hegemony,' and 'style'

CONCERNS:

Continuing the assessment of the history of (British) cultural studies → Assessing the evolution and perspectives of 'SUBCULTURE STUDIES' | Understanding the influence of MARXIST THEORY on (British) cultural studies, especially concerning the concepts of CLASS, IDEOLOGY, and HEGEMONY.

AR:

- ❖ Dick Hebdige, "Subculture and Style," *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993) 429-440.

TASK:

Read & prepare the text carefully. This is the most difficult text so far and you probably will have to read it several times, also consulting study aids etc. However, the text helpfully introduces or re-states many concepts and perspectives that are central to cultural studies as well as to many other kinds of criticism.

- ➔ Please be prepared to explain and comment especially on the following terms, concepts or references:
 - "subversion / subversive" (430; 431; 440) [What is being subverted how?]
 - "mundane objects" taking on "symbolic dimensions" and a "double meaning" (431)
 - Matthew Arnold and/versus Raymond Williams (432-433)
 - Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes and semiotics (434-435)
 - "bourgeoisie" | "ideology" | "systematic distortion" | "dehistoricized" | "naturalized"/"naturalization" | "myth" | "rhetoric of common sense" (434 and passim)
 - "ideology" as "a lived relation" (435-438)
 - Louis Althusser (and his concept of "ideology") (436)
 - "The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. [...] Whenever a sign is present, ideology is present too." (Valentin Volosinov; qtd. on p. 437)
 - Antonio Gramsci and the concept of "hegemony" | "hegemony" as a "moving equilibrium" (438-440)
 - "breakdown of consensus in the post-war period" (439)
 - "Sign becomes the arena of the class struggle." (Volosinov; qtd. on p. 439)
 - "STYLE in subculture is [...] PREGNANT with SIGNIFICANCE. Its transformations go 'AGAINST NATURE', interrupting the process of 'NORMALIZATION'. As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which OFFENDS THE 'SILENT MAJORITY', which challenges

the principle of unity and cohesion, which CONTRADICT THE MYTH OF CONSENSUS." (439-440)

W 10 Meeting on 22/12

Ethnicity & the politics of representation

CONCERNS / KEY TERMS:

'ETHNICITY' (and 'race') | 'IDENTITY' | (the politics of) REPRESENTATION

AR:

- ❖ Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities" (1989), rpt. in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996) 441-449.

Further reading (non-mandatory):

- ❖ Stuart Hall and his work on the politics of representation and ethnicity is informally but helpfully contextualized by Andrew Robert on the following website:

Stuart Hall: White and Black Subjects <<http://studymore.org.uk/yhall.htm>>

TASK

Read & prepare the text carefully. This is again a difficult text. The reason is partly in that the text draws on various aspects of structuralist and poststructuralist theory in order to make its point.

➔ Please consider especially the following terms and passages in your preparation:

- Hall speaks of an ongoing "significant shift [...] in black cultural politics" (441). → What does he mean by "black cultural politics"? And what is the shift he talks about?
- "Thatcherism" is mentioned as the context of the argument. So we should find out about this phase in British politics and its significance in relation to the sociocultural situation of black people.
- We need to know about the concept of DISCOURSE in order to understand the following key passage in the essay:

"My own view is that events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and REAL EFFECTS, outside the sphere of the DISCURSIVE; but that it is only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed within meaning. Thus, while not wanting to expand the territorial claims of the discursive infinitely, how things are represented and the 'machineries' and REGIMES OF REPRESENTATION in a culture do play a CONSTITUTIVE, and not merely a REFLEXIVE, after-the-event, role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation – subjectivity, identity, politics – a FORMATIVE, not merely an EXPRESSIVE, place in the constitution of social and political life. I think it is the move towards this second sense of representation which is taking place and which is transforming the politics of representation in black culture." (443)

- "the end of the innocent notion of the ESSENTIAL black subject" (443)
- Why does Hall have such a positive opinion about the film *My Beautiful Laundrette*? (Cf. 444 and 449.)

- "the 'epistemic violence' (Spivak) of the discourses of the Other" (445)
- What is the role of sexuality in the "new politics of representation"? (Cf. 445.)
- What does Hall mean by (re-)theorizing the concept of difference? (Cf. 446-447)
- Why does Hall opt for the term "ethnicity" – and specifically "new ethnicities" – and how does he want to use these terms for a new politics of representation? (Cf. 446-447)

[Christmas break]

W 11 Meeting on 12/01

Gender

CONCERNS / KEY TERMS:

GENDER & SEX | DISCOURSE | (the politics of) REPRESENTATION

AR:

- ❖ [From:] Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999). [AR = only pp. 3-13; your preparation of the text may stop at the hard break on p. 13].

TASK:

Read & prepare the text carefully.

➔ Please prepare informed oral responses to the following questions:

- How does the conceptual pair 'sex'/'gender' compare to the pair 'race'/'ethnicity'?
- What are the objectives of Butler's text? (In other words: what does she want to achieve?)
- In what ways does Butler's text function as a critique of specific kinds of feminism or of identity politics in general?
- What relations between power structures, discourses and subjects/subjectivities does the text observe or construct?
- What does the adjective "prediscursive" mean? And what is Butler's argument in this regard?
- Does Butler argue that the physical and chemical characteristics of the body are irrelevant?

W 12 Study and writing week (assignment due on 19/01)

Subcultures // ethnicity // gender

– Discussing representations & practices

CONCERNS:

Applying the concepts and approaches dealt with so far to the critical ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS AND PRACTICES.

No specific AR

TASK

- Research concrete examples of how subcultures and/or ethnicity and/or gender come to be staged or represented in contemporary culture.
- ➔ Then, select one particularly interesting specimen of textual, visual or audiovisual (re)presentation. Use the concepts discussed in the course of the seminar for discussing your specimen in a short academic essay of c. 2-3 pages.

W 13 Meeting on 26/01

The politics of representation (discussing specimens suggested in last week's essays) / **Concluding the seminar**

W 14 Meeting on 02/02

End-of-term test