

# Beginning Cultural Studies

## – Concepts | Texts | Practices –

THU, 10-12 // Philosophie-Gebäude, Ü 10

### Course description:

Building on the introductory lecture in (American or British) cultural studies, this seminar aims to further clarify the central theoretical concepts on which cultural studies draws. However, it is also 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 expected to prepare for the course already *before* the beginning of the lecture period. Here is a sequence of steps (all of which should ideally be taken):

- (1) Closely study the SYLLABUS.
- (2) Brush up your basic knowledge of cultural studies -- especially by REVIEWING the material presented in the INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.
- (3) (Re-)READ an introduction to cultural studies, or at the very least the introductory section of such a book. The following books and texts are especially recommended:
  - ALEIDA ASSMANN, *Introduction to Cultural Studies: Topics, Concepts, Issues*, 2nd ed. (Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2019). [Accessible online through UBW<sup>1</sup> // c. € 20,-.]
  - CHRIS BARKER, "An Introduction to Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice*, 3rd ed. (Sage, 2008) 3-38. → Prepare especially pp. 7-12 (= section "Key Concepts in Cultural Studies"). [WueCampus.]
  - OLIVER MARCHART, *Cultural Studies* (UTB/UVK, 2008). [Accessible online through UBW.]
  - ZIAUDDIN SARDAR and BORIN VAN LOON, *Introducing Cultural Studies: A Graphic Guide* (2010; Icon Books, 2013. [C. € 10,-.]

Additional reading suggestions can be found not only in this syllabus (see the texts listed below as assigned reading) but also in the '**Basic Bibliography**' (which can be downloaded from the website of the Chair for English Literature and British Cultural Studies or from the WueCampus 'room' for this seminar.)

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<sup>1</sup> The university library (UBW) is making more and more books available online. To access the e-books from home one often needs to be hooked up to the university's intranet through a VPN tunnel (see website of the Information Technology Centre [Rechenzentrum] on the procedure).

**PROGRAMME:****I. STARTING****16/10 Introduction / Revision / Motivations**

- ➔ Preparation: Please see the section "Preparing for the course" (above). It is particularly important to brush up your knowledge of cultural studies by reviewing the material presented in the introductory lecture.
- ➔ Everybody is expected to be prepared to give an informed response to questions such as:
  - How have you prepared for this seminar?
  - What is (the point of) cultural studies?
  - How do scholars 'do' cultural studies?

**23/10 'Culture,' 'cultural studies,' and 'Kulturwissenschaften'**

- ALEIDA ASSMANN, "Introduction," *Introduction to Cultural Studies: Topics, Concepts, Issues*, 2nd ed. (Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2019), 11-28. [Accessible online through UBW.]

**30/10 Cultural history and the cultural study of literature**

- STEPHEN GREENBLATT, "Culture," *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 2nd ed. (U of Chicago P, 1995) 225-232. [WueCampus.]

**06/11 Key concepts in cultural studies**

- CHRIS BARKER, "An Introduction to Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice*, 3rd ed. (Sage, 2008) 3-38. ➔ Prepare especially pp. 7-12 (= section "Key Concepts in Cultural Studies"). [WueCampus.]

**13/11 Wrap-up & planning ahead**

- ➔ Preparation: Revisit the work done in the seminar so far. Ponder your preferences and suggestions for the *third* phase of the seminar. In this meeting (13/11), we will already decide on the fields or topics to be dealt with in the three meetings from 18/12 to 15/01. Participants will get the opportunity to sign up for a project group on 13/11.

**II. READING – Key texts from the history of CS****20/11 The provocation of youth/consumer/media culture (1957 & 1964)**

- RICHARD HOGGART, "The Juke-Box Boys," *The Uses of Literacy* (1957; Beacon, 1961) 202-205. – Please see also the front matter of the book (especially the list of contents and the preface). [WueCampus.]
- 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 (Routledge, 1990) 22-30. [WueCampus.]

**27/11 Subcultural studies – Style as politically meaningful signifying practice (1979)**

- DICK HEBDIGE, "Subculture and Style" (1979), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (Routledge, 1993) 429-440.<sup>2</sup> [WueCampus.]

**04/12 Gender, sex, and discourse (1990)**

- [From:] JUDITH BUTLER, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; Routledge, 2007) 1-46 . [Only pp. 1-12 are assigned reading; your preparation of the text may stop at the hard break occurring towards the end of p. 12.] [Accessible online through UBW.]

**11/12 Wrap-up / Reflection / Planning**

**III. DOING – Contemporary texts, practices, and issues**

*The two meetings of this phase of the seminar are organized around study projects. These focus on selected key topics in contemporary culture and cultural studies. The topics will be decided on by the seminar group on 13/11. Please see suggestions and explanation below.*

**18/12 Study project I**

[Christmas break]

**08/01 Study project II**

**15/01 Study project III**

**IV. FINISHING**

**22/01 Revision and concluding discussion**

**29/01 Final test**

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<sup>2</sup> The extract comes from DICK HEBDIGE, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979). The entire book is accessible online through UBW.

**Organization of the seminar / Successful participation:****WUECAMPUS 'COURSE ROOM'**

Please visit the virtual course room at least once every week. It features a separate DISCUSSION FORUM for every week. Use this for posting comments and ideas. Here, you can also raise topics or concerns that should be addressed in our meetings.

**SEMINAR MEETINGS & SEMINAR WORK:**

Participants PREPARE FOR SEMINAR MEETINGS primarily by doing the assigned reading (see titles listed in the seminar programme) and by working with respective study questions.

ADEQUATE PREPARATION includes researching the CONTEXTS of the assigned texts as well as difficult TERMS. The goal is not only to achieve a *clear understanding* of the texts but also to *recognize their function* in the context of the seminar and to *work out a position* in relation to their argument. – Make sure to bring your text and notes to the seminar meeting.

**CONTRIBUTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS:**

In addition to REGULAR ATTENDANCE & PREPARATION every participant chooses between two forms of contributing to the seminar:

- a) EITHER acting as member of a PROJECT GROUP (see information below)
- b) OR writing two READING RESPONSES

A reading response is a short (c. 1,5 pp.) essay-like *academic* text that *responds* to the text/s and other material to be discussed in a specific meeting. Important questions to be addressed are:

- How does the topic and material for the meeting tie in with the seminar discussion so far?
- What conceptual and analytical work do assigned texts perform? Where are the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach?
- How should we deal with the cultural documents at hand?

Reading responses are *due two days before the respective meeting*. Please upload your reading response to the appropriate tool/file on WueCampus.

! It is often a good idea to use the reading response to introduce a CONCRETE CULTURAL EXAMPLE that matches the approach to be discussed in the respective meeting.

**ASSESSMENT:**

In addition to the stipulations explained above, participants will need to sit a FINAL TEST. The tasks set in the test will refer to the texts studied in the seminar and to the perspectives established in seminar discussions. There will be factually and conceptually oriented tasks as well as 'essay questions.'

**Suggestions for study projects:**

The list below is a brainstorming of possible fields for study projects. – Ideally, the actual study projects will *define a relatively concrete topic* and *zoom in on a specific example or set of examples* located in such fields.

In each case, the *project work* will be conducted, and the resulting *seminar discussion* will be chaired, by a small *project group* of two or three people. The project group will also *assign a reading* for the respective meeting (usually a theoretical or analytical text of c. 10-15 pp.).

Research should begin by looking at the 'Basic Bibliography.' A key task is in working out *a cultural studies perspective* on the respective topics. Projects groups are asked to come to my office hours in time.

- MAN/ANIMAL STUDIES / LANDSCAPE studies / ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVES
- CLIMATE CHANGE and contemporary cultures (daily life / political culture / protest culture)
- TECHNOLOGICAL CULTURES / Discourses of technology / Representations of the MACHINE
- THE BODY and/in cultures
- GENDER discourses / Stagings of masculinity and femininity / QUEER cultures
- FASHION and/as culture / Fashion and politics / Fashion and social status
- Discourses of 'RACE' and 'ETHNICITY'
- Constructions of NATIONHOOD / Discourses of NATIONALISM
- Discourses of and against 'WOKENESS' / of and against 'CULTURAL APPROPRIATION'
- POPULAR MUSIC culture/s (focus on a specific cultural practice or musical subculture)
- DIGITAL CULTURE/S: Digitalization and (everyday) culture / Smartphone cultures / Contemporary culture and 'artificial intelligence'
- DOMESTICITY / Being at HOME: The culture of PRIVATE SPACES
- CAR cultures / PETROL cultures
- FOOD cultures
- Cultural perspectives on ADDICTION
- 'SHOPPING': Cultural discourses, representations, practices
- Cultures of MEMORY
- Cultures of CHILDHOOD
- LOVE and/as culture
- VIOLENCE, WAR, and culture
- COLONIALISM and culture
- SPACE (and PLACE) / Specific cultural spaces (e.g., megacities) / Cultural studies and ARCHITECTURE
- Theorizing UNIVERSITY LIFE and ACADEMIC CULTURE
- Cultures of CO-OPERATION or COMMONING

ETC. – *further suggestions very welcome!*