

Introduction to British Cultural Studies

(Einführung in die britische Landeskunde und Kulturwissenschaft)

WED 16-18 // Philosophiegebäude, H 5



This lecture course introduces the primary OBJECTS, basic THEORIES, and most important METHODS of (British) cultural studies. It prepares the participants for their future course of studies in the domain of English and American Studies.

"Culture is the software that determines our lives" (Rainer Winter). British cultural studies ask how this 'software' shapes us and our social environment. However, cultural studies are just as interested in how *we* – as cultural, social and political agents – shape the 'software'.

The goal is to throw fresh light on ways of representing, feeling and acting that are often simply taken for granted. In consequence, cultural studies are practical and theoretical at the same time.

The lecture course will provide an introduction to both the specific project of British cultural studies *and* to the study of British culture, society and history more generally. We will unravel key concepts in cultural theory and discuss a selection of exemplary cultural phenomena.

Assessment will be through a written exam (on TUE, 09/02).

➔ See the end of this document for information on **HOW TO PREPARE** for this lecture course even before the beginning of the teaching period and on the accompanying **READING AND DISCUSSION COURSE** ('begleitende Übung').

PROGRAMME:

AR = ASSIGNED READING → These texts constitute the MINIMUM READING REQUIREMENT for the lecture course. They need to be studied carefully *before* the respective meetings. Please note that the final exam may draw from *any* section of the assigned readings; students should be prepared accordingly.

FR = FURTHER READING → These are texts for FURTHER STUDY. This category comprises two different kinds of material: (1) basic study aids intended to help students *make sense of the contents of the course* // (2) texts intended to assist students in the process of *deepening their knowledge and widening their horizon*.

! Please note that the first lecture will take place only in the *second* week of the lecture period.

Phase 1: The Basics of Cultural Studies

21/10 Introduction

– The resonance of the term 'culture'

AR:

- CATHERINE BELSEY, "General Editor's Preface," Readers in Cultural Criticism Series; qtd. from *The Body*, ed. Tiffany Atkinson (Palgrave, 2005) vii-viii. [WueCampus.]
- STEPHEN GREENBLATT, "Culture," *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 2nd ed. (U of Chicago P, 1995) 225-232. [WueCampus.]

28/10 The goals and frameworks of cultural studies

– Idealist and materialist paradigms of emancipation

AR:

- [From:] CHRIS BARKER, "An Introduction to Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice*, 3rd ed. (Sage, 2008) 1-12. [WueCampus.]
- The section selected from this seminal book is the first part of the introduction, comprising the following subchapters: "Concerning this Book" / "The Parameters of Cultural Studies" / "Key Concepts in Cultural Studies."

FR:

- SIMON DURING, introduction, *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 1999) 1-28. [WueCampus.]
- This is a more advanced but helpful text. Everybody should read at least the first couple of pages (c. 1-5), where During describes the beginnings of 'British cultural studies' in the post-war period.
- It is also useful to read the missing sections from BARKER's introductory chapter: "The Intellectual Strands of Cultural Studies" (12-25), "Central Problems in Cultural Studies" (25-31), and "Questions in Methodology" (31-38).

04/11 **'British' cultural studies**

– The historical contexts of the project & its shifting perspectives on modern culture

Preparation for the lecture:

- Go back to the readings for last week; pay particular attention to the beginning of During's introduction (see above).
- Do further research on the history of (British) cultural studies. → All participants should be knowledgeable at least in relation to the following topics, terms and names: Britain during and after the Second World War / Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies / Richard Hoggart / Raymond Williams / Stuart Hall / *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) / *The Popular Arts* (1964).

FR:

- KENNETH O. MORGAN, "The Second World War" & "The Post-War World," *The Oxford History of Britain*, rev. ed., ed. Morgan (Oxford UP, 2001) 621-634 & 634-649. [Accessible online through UBW.¹]
→ The two subchapters offer an introduction to British history from the late 1930s to the late 1960s, thus sketching the context from which cultural studies emerged.

11/11 **Signs & sign systems**

– The semiotic foundations of cultural analysis

AR:

- ALEIDA ASSMANN, "Signs," [= chapter 1 of:] *Introduction to Cultural Studies: Topics, Concepts, Issues*, 2nd ed. (Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2019) 29-54. [[Access the book online through UBW!](#)]

→ Focus on the following sections:

- "1.1 The Use of Signs as an Anthropological Basis" (29-38)
- "1.3 Types of Signs" (42-48)
- "Summary" (53)

→ Assmann's book is grounded less in the politicized ethos of British cultural studies than in a German tradition of 'Kulturwissenschaft' and 'Kulturphilosophie.' Moreover, her take is informed by literary studies. Exactly for these reasons, however, the book is a helpful resource for students of English and American Studies. Assmann's *Introduction* will prove useful not only in relation to semiotics but also in relation to many other topics we are going to touch on in the course of the semester. It is actually a good idea to read the entire book.

FR:

- DAVID CHANDLER, *Semiotics for Beginners* (1994-2023), web. [[LINK](#)]

¹ To access 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: [LINK](#).

[18/11 No meeting: TAG DER LEHRE]

Phase 2: Between cultural studies & area studies

25/11 Mapping Britain

– 'Real' and imaginary geographies

- [Sections on Britain and the British Isles from:] JODY SKINNER, "The Where (Geography)," *Anglo-American Cultural Studies*, 3rd ed. (UTB / Narr Francke Attempto, 2022). [[Access the book online through UBW!](#)]

→ The first half of the chapter deals with the geography of the USA. Please focus on the second half of the chapter (21-36). In spite of Skinner's efforts to get through to his readers, the chapter will prove useless unless you draw on maps and other sources to pin down and flesh out the information provided.

→ Skinner's book offers a good but (very) basic introduction to both area studies (i.e. 'Landeskunde') and cultural studies. Other chapters from the book may also be useful for participants of our lecture course.

02/12 History (part I)

a) History and the cultural work of narratives

b) From Stonehenge to the Tudors: Key structures and constructions of pre-modern history

AR:

- [From:] JÜRGEN KAMM and BERND LENZ, "Grundzüge britischer Geschichte," *Großbritannien verstehen* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004):
 - "Das Römische Britannien" (11-13)
 - "Die Angelsächsische Zeit" (14-15)
 - "Das Normannische Reich" (15-17)
 - "Die Tudor-Herrschaft" (17-21)[WueCampus.]

FR:

- See the COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY (→ section on 'Culture, history, and life') for FR. If you are looking for an Anglophone alternative to Kamm and Lenz, the relevant sections from Skinner's history chapter are a good option.
- JONATHAN CULLER, "Narrative," *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford UP, 1997) 82-93. [WueCampus.]
 - Culler's text can be drawn on as an introduction to the 'story' aspect of hiSTORY as well as to narrative as a key cultural technique and resource. Culler's short book is generally very useful for students of English and American Studies.

09/12 Discourse, power and subjectivity

– Masters, servants and slaves in the culture and literature of early modern England

Preparation for the lecture:

- See the HANDOUT provided on WueCampus.
→ The handout features a short but distinctly demanding literary text. Participants will not be able to follow the lecture without preparing this text beforehand.

FR:

- SARA MILLS, introduction, *Discourse, The New Critical Idiom*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2004) 1-25. [Accessible online through UBW.]
→ Highly recommended (as most of the books in the New Critical Idiom series).
- ZENO ACKERMANN, "'Being your slave': Shakespeares Sonette und die Artikulation der Sklaverei," *Zeitsprünge: Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit* 18.3/4 (2014): 369-396. [WueCampus.]

16/12 History (part II)

– Making the British Empire and Making modern Britain

AR:

- [Sections on modern British history from:] JODY SKINNER, "The When (History)," *Anglo-American Cultural Studies*, 72-90. [Access the book online through UBW!]
→ This section from Skinner's book offers a basic (!) account of English/British history from the Tudors and the English revolutions of the 17th century to the present. The text cannot count as scholarly historiography, but it has the advantage of being very much 'to the point.' – Use the text as a jumping board for your own explorations of the history of England, Britain and the British empire.

FR:

- JAMES VERNON, *Modern Britain: 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge UP, 2017), vol. 4 of *The Cambridge History of Britain*.
→ Vernon offers a comprehensive survey of modern British history that puts the emphasis on social history and social politics. Designed for (slightly advanced) students, this is certainly the best book of its kind. Regrettably, the book cannot be accessed online (but there are copies both in the departmental and in the central library).
- For additional reading see *The Oxford History of Britain* (especially the two samples provided above for the lecture on 15/11!) & the course bibliography.

23/12 INTERIM SUMMARY / Information on the FINAL TEST

[Christmas break]

Phase 3: Towards 'now'

13/01 Popular culture and the media

AR:

- [From:] CHRIS BARKER, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (SAGE, 2008):
 - Opener of the chapter "Questions of Culture and Ideology" (39)
 - "Culture with a Capital C: The Great and the Good in the Literary Tradition" (40-41)
 - "Culture Is Ordinary" (41-46)
 - "High Culture / Low Culture: Aesthetics and the Collapse of Boundaries" (46-54)
- The text quotes from or points at many other important texts and mentions a variety of 'big names.' Please do further reading/research in order to be in the know about the respective scholars, books and concepts.

FR:

- JONATHAN CULLER, "Literature and Cultural Studies," *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford UP, 1997) 42-54. [WueCampus.]

→ This text is relatively easy to read but still substantial. If required, use it as an introduction to the assigned text by Barker. Note that Culler's text is a chapter from an introduction to *literary* studies and should be read as an 'excursion' into the field of cultural studies undertaken from that direction. Culler's short book is generally very useful for students of English and American Studies.
- THEODOR W. ADORNO, "Résumé über Kulturindustrie" (1963); rpt. in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2003) 337-345. // English translation: "Culture Industry Reconsidered." *New German Critique* 6 (1975): 12-19. [Both on WueCampus.]

→ A very important 'real' (i.e. not explicitly student-oriented) text. It is not so difficult to read, however, and highly recommended.

20/01 (Im)Migration, identity, and the politics of representation

AR:

- ASSMANN, "Identity," [= chapter 7 of] *Introduction to Cultural Studies: Topics, Concepts, Issues* (Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2019) 191-217. [[Access the book online through UBW!](#)]

→ Focus on the following sections:

 - [Opener/introduction] (191-192)
 - "Person" (192-194)
 - "Subject" (194-197)
 - "Collective identity – race, nation, culture" (204-207)
- TONY KUSHNER, "Immigration and Race Relations in Postwar British Society," *Twen-*

tieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change, ed. Paul Johnson (Longman, 1994) 411-426. [WueCampus.]

FR:

There is lots of further reading. For gaining more historical information, I recommend the relevant chapters in Vernon's *Modern Britain* (see above). In terms of cultural scholarship more narrowly speaking, one of the most important 'classics' is Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (originally published in 1987). See the course bibliography for additional titles.

27/01 **Wrap-up / Conclusion**

No assigned reading for this week.

TUE, 09/02, 10-12: **Final test** (room TBA)

! Please note that the final test takes place in the second 'examination week' – on a different weekday and at a different time than the regular meetings of the course.

READING & DISCUSSION COURSE ('BEGLEITENDE ÜBUNG'):

The introductory lecture is accompanied by a reading and discussion course ('begleitende Übung'). This additional course – which takes place immediately after the lecture and in the same room – provides an opportunity of engaging with the texts, contents and concepts discussed in the lecture in a less formal and more dialogical setting. Attending the reading and discussion course has been shown to significantly improve participants' performance in the final test. The course is therefore strongly recommended for all participants of the lecture.

PREPARING FOR THE COURSE / BACKGROUND READING:

The introduction to cultural studies should not be considered as 'simply' a lecture but rather as a **lecture course** in the full sense of the term. Indeed, to achieve good results in the final test – and to lay the foundations for their further course of study – **participants will need to constantly prepare for lectures** (by going back to the last lecture and by doing the reading assigned for the upcoming lecture).

Moreover, it is *vital* that participants **do adequate preparatory work even before the beginning of the teaching period:**

- ➔ **(1)** Begin your preparation for the semester by carefully studying this SYLLABUS.
- (2)** Then, do an adequate amount of research and thinking on the basic KEYWORDS of cultural studies (such as 'culture,' 'cultural studies,' and 'British cultural studies').
- (3)** As a third step, it is important to do an appropriate amount of general introductory READING (see suggestions immediately below).

Suggestions for general INTRODUCTORY READING (before the beginning of the semester):

- The texts by **BELSEY**, **GREENBLATT**, and **BARKER** listed for the first two lecture meetings are especially recommended for the purpose of gaining a first access to the topics of the lecture.
- For a brief and easily accessible 'graphic' introduction to the topic see: **ZIAUDDIN SARDAR and BORIN VAN LOON, *Introducing Cultural Studies: A Graphic Guide*** (2010; Icon Books, 2013).
- The most useful and reliable handbook for students is **CHRIS BARKER's *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice***. The book is now available in the 5th edition (Sage, 2016), which features Emma A. Jane as a second author. However, earlier editions may also be consulted.
- The following book (written in German) offers a concise but also intellectually stimulating introduction to cultural studies: **OLIVER MARCHART, *Cultural Studies*** (UVK / UTB, 2008). [Accessible online through UBW.]
- Another useful introduction – one that approaches cultural scholarship from a perspective informed by literary studies – is **ALEIDA ASSMANN's, *Introduction to Cultural Studies: Topics, Concepts, Issues***, 2nd ed. (Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2019). [Accessible online through UBW.]

! Note that the books by Assmann, Marchart, Sardar/Van Loon, and Skinner can be accessed **online** through the university's intranet and the website of the university library (use the VPN tunnel from outside the university).

A SEPARATE BIBLIOGRAPHY (provided in the virtual course room on WueStudy) gives ample further suggestions for reading and research.