

Critical communication studies

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Comm 8211
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294 Ford
W 2:30-5:30p

Course description and objectives

There are a lot of different “critical” territories scattered across the disciplinary terrain of Communication Studies and this seminar can’t (and doesn’t) pretend to cover all of them. Our major focal point this semester will be the various intellectual and political projects that travel under the banner of “cultural studies,” which is arguably one of the most important such “flavors” that critical communication studies takes these days.

The past decade or so has seen the “cultural studies” label used to describe an ever-expanding range of books, journals, conferences, courses, job descriptions, and academic programs. In spite (because?) of the widespread use of the term, there’s also widespread confusion as to just what “cultural studies” really is. From the very beginning, the range of work done in the name of cultural studies has been too diverse to allow for simple and straightforward definitions of the enterprise. While cultural studies isn’t completely unbounded, it also doesn’t have a clearly identifiable center: there is no single object of study, no body of theory, and no methodological paradigm that defines cultural studies completely.

Cultural studies’ inherent “fuzziness” places sharp limits on what we’ll be able to accomplish in less than four months. We won’t be able to examine cultural studies’ tangled and fractious history in its entirety, but we will trace out enough of that backstory to help make sense of cultural studies’ current shape and circumstances. We won’t be able to cover all of the issues and subjects that are prevalent in cultural studies today, though we will spend several weeks surveying some of the most important such concerns. And we won’t be able to map out cultural studies’ current trajectories with absolute precision, but we will engage the question of where cultural studies might -- and should -- head in the future. The best way to think of this course, then, is not so much as a source of definitive answers, but as an opportunity to wrestle with productive and important questions.

Readings

The following books are all available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union.

- Lawrence Grossberg, *Bringing It All Back Home*
- Lawrence Grossberg *et al.*, eds., *Cultural Studies*
- Cary Nelson and Dilip Gaonkar, eds., *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies*
- John Storey, ed., *What Is Cultural Studies?*

There are also several dozen articles available as PDF files. [Reminder: official department policy does *not* allow students to use the copier in 270 Ford to print these PDFs. Sorry.]

Grading policy

Presumably, you’re enrolled in this course because you want to learn about cultural studies, and thus your primary motivation involves a critical engagement with the course material, rather than adding an(other) A to your transcript -- and that’s the way it should be. With this in mind, my default assumption when it comes to graduate-level grades is that it’s counter-productive to worry about how your work for this course translates into a letter grade. As of Day One, you begin the course with an A. And if you show up for all our class meetings, participate intelligently in our discussions (both in class *and* online), and complete the final research paper in satisfactory and timely fashion, you’ll keep that A. That being said, in cases where people are clearly slacking off, I reserve the right to go deeper into the alphabet when I submit final grades (and I’ve actually done so in the past). Under such unfortunate circumstances, your grade will be calculated using the following formula:

Attendance/participation	15%
Course blog	15%
Final research paper	70%

Attendance/participation

Our weekly meetings will be oriented around seminar-style discussions, rather than formal lectures. As such, your primary responsibility each week will be to show up prepared to contribute thoughtfully and productively to our conversations about the assigned readings. You are *not* expected to demonstrate perfect and immediate mastery of the issues raised by our readings -- questions and requests for clarification are more than welcome contributions to bring to the table -- but you *are* expected to be an active and regular participant in our ongoing dialogue. I'll chime in often enough (and at enough length) that you'll certainly get my take on the material at hand, but this course is not a spectator event for any of us.

Course blog

In addition to our Wednesday face-to-face meetings, we will conduct a significant amount of discussion and course business online via a course blog. Full details on how to access and contribute to the blog are available on a separate handout. Here's a partial list of the ways we will use the course blog this semester:

- as a central "bulletin board" for official course announcements and major course handouts
- as an informal discussion space where we will continue and/or augment our in-class conversations
- as a collection point for various online resources relating to cultural studies and/or the course
- as a space for mutual support and feedback with your course-related research and writing

Ideally, the course blog should function as a space that's serious enough for people to share somewhat more extended thoughts on the course material than it may be possible to share in person, but simultaneously casual enough to allow people to post textual fragments, "in progress" ideas, and jovial interaction.

Final research paper

Your major writing assignment for this course is a 25-30 page research paper. Topics can (and will) vary, but your overall project should demonstrate a clear and significant relationship to cultural studies. Ideally, the finished product should be suitable -- at least in terms of its subject matter -- for submission to a conference or a refereed journal. Major deadlines for this project are:

Preliminary 1-on-1 meeting	27 Sep
1-2 page proposal	11 Oct
Full-length draft	6 Dec
In-class group workshopping	19 Dec (1:30-4:30p)

More details about this project are available on a separate handout.

Miscellaneous

As some of you may already know, I'm the founder/manager of a cultural studies listserv -- CULTSTUD-L -- that has more than 1700 subscribers from over 40 countries around the world. You're more than welcome to join the listserv (and some of you are already on it), but are under no formal obligation to do so. If you're interested, you should read the list's FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) first to (1) find out how to subscribe and (2) learn the basic rules of conduct for the list. The FAQ is available online at:

<http://www.comm.umn.edu/~grodman/cultstud/>

Reading/assignment schedule

For each class meeting below, I've arranged the readings in an order that should help you get the most out of the material. This is *not* to say that the first items listed are necessarily the only "must read" articles for any given week (and that the last items listed are somehow "optional"): simply that I've tried to sequence the readings so that you can more readily follow the historical trajectory of the various intellectual conversations and projects represented by the readings.

6 September Introduction and overview

no readings

13 September Defining cultural studies

Johnson, "What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?" [WICS]
Hall, "The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis in the Humanities" [PDF]
Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, "Cultural Studies: An Introduction" [CS]
Bérubé, "Pop Goes the Academy: Cult Studs Fight the Power" [PDF]
Nelson, "Always Already Cultural Studies: Academic Conferences and a Manifesto" [WICS]
Grossberg, "The Circulation of Cultural Studies" [BIABH]
Frow and Morris, "Australian Cultural Studies" [WICS]
Grossberg, "Cultural Studies: What's in a Name (One More Time)" [BIABH]
Morris, "A Question of Cultural Studies" [PDF]
Grossberg, "Introduction: 'Birmingham' in America?" [BIABH]

20 September Historicizing and placing cultural studies

Sparks, "The Evolution of Cultural Studies . . ." [WICS]
Green, "The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies" [WICS]
Grossberg, "The Formations of Cultural Studies: An American in Birmingham" [BIABH]
Carey, "Reflections on the Project of (American) Cultural Studies" [PDF]
Grossberg, "Where Is the 'America' in American Cultural Studies?" [BIABH]
Denning, "Globalization in Cultural Studies: Process and Epoch" [PDF]
Schwarz, "Where Is Cultural Studies?" [PDF]
Ang, "Culture and Communication: Towards an Ethnographic Critique of Media Consumption in the Transnational Media System" [WICS]
Stratton and Ang, "On the Impossibility of a Global Cultural Studies: 'British' Cultural Studies in an 'International' Frame" [PDF]
Ang, "Doing Cultural Studies at the Crossroads: Local/Global Negotiations" [PDF]

27 September Disciplining cultural studies

DEADLINE -- paper meeting

Nelson and Gaonkar, "Cultural Studies and the Politics of Disciplinarity: An Introduction" [D&D]
Dominguez, "Disciplining Anthropology" [D&D]
Rooney, "Discipline and Vanish: Feminism, the Resistance to Theory, and the Politics of Cultural Studies" [WICS]
Pfister, "The Americanization of Cultural Studies" [WICS]
Steedman, "Culture, Cultural Studies, and the Historians" [CS]
Grossberg, "Toward a Genealogy of the State of Cultural Studies: The Discipline of Communication and the Reception of Cultural Studies in the United States" [D&D]***
Diawara, "Black Studies, Cultural Studies: Performative Acts" [WICS]
Coombe, "Is There a Cultural Studies of Law?" [PDF]
Felski, "The Role of Aesthetics in Cultural Studies" [PDF]
Striphas, "The Long March: Cultural Studies and Its Institutionalization" [PDF]

***also available in BIABH, but reading the D&D version minimizes the number of separate books you need to worry about this week

4 October **Birmingham -- part 1**

Steele, "A Lost Genealogy: Adult Education and the Project of British Cultural Studies" [PDF]
Williams, "Defining a Democratic Culture" [PDF]
Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, selections from Annual Reports [PDF]
Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms" [WICS]
Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" [PDF]
Hall, "Reflections Upon the Encoding/Decoding Model" [PDF]
Hall *et al.*, *Policing the Crisis* [selections] [PDF]
Brunsdon, "A Thief in the Night: Stories of Feminism in the 1970s at CCCS" [PDF]
Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview With Stuart Hall" [PDF]

11 October **Birmingham -- part 2**

DEADLINE -- paper proposal

Clarke, "Cultural Studies: A British Inheritance" [PDF]
Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies" [CS]
Hall, "Race, Culture, and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies" [WICS]
Fiske, "Opening the Hallway: Some Remarks on the Fertility of Stuart Hall's Contribution to Critical Theory" [PDF]
Stabile, "Conspiracy or Consensus?: Reconsidering the Moral Panic" [PDF]
Wright, "Dare We De-centre Birmingham?: Troubling the 'Origin' and Trajectories of Cultural Studies" [PDF]
McNeil, "De-centring or Re-focusing Cultural Studies: A Response to Handel K. Wright" [PDF]
Gray, "Cultural Studies at Birmingham: The Impossibility of Critical Pedagogy?" [PDF]
Webster, "Cultural Studies and Sociology at, and After, the Closure of the Birmingham School" [with subsequent debate] [PDF]

18 October **Race, ethnicity, and nation**

Gilroy, "Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism" [CS]
Wallace, "Negative Images: Towards a Black Feminist Cultural Criticism" [CS]
hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination" [CS]
Michaels, "Bad Aboriginal Art" [PDF]
Valaskakis, "Indian Country: Negotiating the Meaning of Land in Native America" [D&D]
Hall, "New Ethnicities" [PDF]
Carbado, "Racial Naturalization" [PDF]
Carby, "What Is This 'Black' in Irish Popular Culture?" [PDF]
Winant, "Teaching Race and Racism in the Twenty-First Century: Thematic Considerations" [PDF]
Berlant, "The Face of America and the State of Emergency" [D&D]
Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains* [selections] [PDF]

25 October **Gender, sexuality, and feminism**

Franklin, Lury, and Stacey. "Feminism and Cultural Studies: Pasts, Presents, Futures" [WICS]
Long, "Feminism and Cultural Studies" [WICS]
Mani, "Cultural Theory, Colonial Texts: Reading Eyewitness Accounts of Widow Burning" [CS]
Kipnis, "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*" [CS]
Crimp, "Portraits of People With AIDS" [CS]
Warner, "Spectacular Action: Rambo and the Popular Pleasures of Pain" [CS]
Treichler, "How to Use a Condom: Bedtime Stories for the Transcendental Signifier" [D&D]
Stabile, "'A Garden Inclosed Is My Sister': Ecofeminism and Eco-Valences" [PDF]
McRobbie, "The Es and the Anti-Es: New Questions for Feminism and Cultural Studies" [PDF]
Deem, "The Scandalous Fall of Feminism and the 'First Black President'" [PDF]

1 November **Popular culture, mass media, and entertainment**

- Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc, "Defining Popular Culture" [PDF]
Fiske, "British Cultural Studies and Television" [WICS]
Morris, "Banality in Cultural Studies" [WICS]
Grossberg, "Mapping Popular Culture" [PDF]
Rodman, "Elvis Culture" [PDF]
Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture" [CS]
Brunt, "Engaging With the Popular: Audiences for Mass Culture and What to Say About Them" [CS]
Rodman and Vanderdonckt, "Music for Nothing or, I Want My MP3: The Regulation and Recirculation of Affect" [PDF]
Miller, "A View From a Fossil: The New Economy, Creativity and Consumption -- Two or Three Things I Don't Believe In" [PDF]
Jenkins, "The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence" [PDF]

8 November **Everyday life, lived experience, and cultural space**

- Seigworth, "Everyday Life Is Always Somewhere Else" [PDF]
Seigworth, "Sound Affects" [PDF]
Gregg, "A Mundane Voice" [PDF]
Fiske, "Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life" [CS]
Clifford, "Traveling Cultures" [CS]
Morris, "Things to Do With Shopping Centers" [PDF]
Frith, "The Cultural Study of Popular Music" [CS]
Saldanha, "Music, Space, Identity: Geographies of Youth Culture in Bangalore" [PDF]
Pezzullo, "Touring 'Cancer Alley,' Louisiana: Performances of Community and Memory for Environmental Justice" [PDF]
Hebdige, "Redeeming Witness: In the Tracks of the Homeless Vehicle Project" [PDF]
Wise, "Home: Territory and Identity" [PDF]

15 November **Science, technology, and digital culture**

- Sterne, "A Machine to Hear for Them: On the Very Possibility of Sound's Reproduction" [PDF]
Kearney, "Birds on the Wire: Troping Teenage Girlhood Through Telephony in Mid-Twentieth-Century US Media Culture" [PDF]
Stabile, "Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance" [PDF]
Carey, "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet" [PDF]
Rodman, "The Net Effect: The Public's Fear and the Public Sphere" [PDF]
Rodino-Colocino, "Laboring Under the Digital Divide" [PDF]
Best, "Beating Them at Their Own Game: The Cultural Politics of the Open Software Movement and the Gift Economy" [PDF]
Gates, "Identifying the 9/11 'Faces of Terror': The Promise and Problem of Facial Recognition Technology" [PDF]
Everett, "The Revolution Will Be Digitized: Afrocentricity and the Digital Public Sphere" [PDF]
Jacobs, "Pornography in Small Places and Other Spaces" [PDF]

22 November **NO CLASS**

29 November **The university, cultural institutions, and pedagogy**

- Nelson and Watt, "Between Meltdown and Community: Crisis and Opportunity in Higher Education" [PDF]
Rutherford, "Cultural Studies in the Corporate University" [PDF]
Messer-Davidow, "Whither Cultural Studies?" [PDF]
Appadurai, "Diversity and Disciplinarity as Cultural Artifacts" [D&D]
Bennett, "Putting Policy Into Cultural Studies" [CS]
Radway, "Mail-Order Culture and Its Critics: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Commodification and Consumption, and the Problem of Cultural Authority" [CS]
Striphas, "A Dialectic With the Everyday: Communication and Cultural Politics on Oprah Winfrey's Book Club" [PDF]
Giroux, "Resisting Difference: Cultural Studies and the Discourse of Critical Pedagogy" [CS]
Grossberg, "Bringing It All Back Home: Pedagogy and Cultural Studies" [BIABH]
Henderson, "Communication Pedagogy and Political Practice" [PDF]

6 December **Public policy, public intellectuals, and the public sphere**

DEADLINE -- full-length draft

- Morris, "Politics Now (Anxieties of a Petty-Bourgeois Intellectual)" [PDF]
Grover, "AIDS, Keywords, and Cultural Work" [CS]
West, "The Postmodern Crisis of the Black Intellectuals" [CS]
Hanchard, "Cultural Politics and Black Public Intellectuals" [D&D]
Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* [selections] [PDF]
Graff, "Academic Writing and the Uses of Bad Publicity" [PDF]
Moran, "Cultural Studies and Academic Stardom" [PDF]
Bérubé, "Bite Size Theory: Popularizing Academic Criticism" [PDF]
Bérubé, "Cultural Criticism and the Politics of Selling Out" [PDF]
Penley, "From NASA to *The 700 Club* (With a Detour Through Hollywood): Cultural Studies in the Public Sphere" [D&D]

13 December **Cultural studies: Now and in the future**

- Williams, "The Future of Cultural Studies" [WICS]
Rodman, "Subject to Debate: (Mis)Reading Cultural Studies" [PDF]
Gray, "Is Cultural Studies Inflated? The Cultural Economy of Cultural Studies in the United States" [D&D]
Morley, "So-Called Cultural Studies: Dead Ends and Reinvented Wheels" [PDF]
Johnson, "Reinventing Cultural Studies: Remembering for the Best Version" [PDF]
Morris, "Truth and Beauty in Our Times" [PDF]
Morris, "The Truth Is Out There . . ." [PDF]
Baetens, "Cultural Studies After the Cultural Studies Paradigm" [PDF]
D'Acci, "Cultural Studies, Television Studies, and the Crisis in the Humanities" [PDF]
Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc, "The Culture That Sticks to Your Skin: A Manifesto for a New Cultural Studies" [PDF]
Grossberg, "Does Cultural Studies Have Futures? Should It? (or What's the Matter With New York?): Cultural Studies, Contexts and Conjunctures" [PDF]

19 December **Workshops for final papers**

1:30-4:30p

Reference list
(PDF readings only)

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- Bérubé, Michael. 1998. Cultural criticism and the politics of selling out. In *The employment of English: Theory, jobs and the future of literary studies*, 216-242. New York: New York University Press.
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- Gray, Ann. 2003. Cultural studies at Birmingham: The impossibility of critical pedagogy? *Cultural Studies* 17(6), 767-782.
- Gregg, Melissa. 2004. A mundane voice. *Cultural Studies* 18(2-3), 363-383.
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