

CULT 804: Histories of Cultural Studies, Part Two**SPRING 2017**

W 4:40—7:10 PM

Robinson Hall B205

Office Hours: W, 2—4, or by appointment, 3rd Floor Enterprise

WHAT IS CULTURAL STUDIES? This course is Part Two of a yearlong exploration. An underlying assumption of this course is that “culture” is deployed to construct and contest various forms of inequality and social control, and that this business has *something* to do with means and modes of production. In this class, then, we will examine key texts addressing how signs signify; how various kinds of publics are made in the circuits of mass communication; how power dynamics structure practices, identities, and sentiments within institutional frameworks; and what kinds of subject citizens come into being under different regimes of power. In the course of our readings we will also consider the scope of human agency and the possibilities for radical transformation. At the end of the course, our work will have provided you with:

- a guided tour of important works in the field;
- an opportunity to think about culture from a variety of perspectives;
- an understanding of recent changes in the production, consumption, and analysis of cultural objects of various kinds;
- a framework to consider the trajectory of recent and new directions in the field, especially on US soil.

APPARATUS: In this course, you will seminar about the reading materials, producing one professional-grade, standard-format (800-1,000 word) book review of any one book of your choice (to be presented to class, 15 min) with written essay due Friday, 5 PM, the week after the book is listed); and four short (2,500 word) essays, assaying the readings (due Friday, 5 PM, the week of the listing). (Naturally, you will be expected to attend to supplementary texts in at least some of your essays.)

EVALUATIONS:

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| ▪ Book Review: | 15% |
| ▪ Class Participation (including any class presentations): | 25% |
| ▪ Four short essays (15% each): | 60% |

CLASS DISCUSSION and class presentations of significant texts should address the following issues:

- 1) What are the text’s *key arguments*? (This can sometimes include the author’s engagement with other thinkers.) Are they internally consistent? What sort of *system* do they posit or presuppose?
- 2) What are the social or cultural *objects* that the text purports to address?
- 3) What *methods* are utilized by the author and are they adequate to the objects under examination and the arguments in play?
- 4) What is the *evidence* for the author’s arguments?
- 5) Where is “*the political*”? How is it defined, shaped, called-out, or postponed in the text? Does the text maintain an adequate distance between *evidence* and *political expediency*, or does it cobble together soothing stories for its intended audience?
- 6) Does the text have significant *blind spots*? What issues does it sidestep or leave out? Do these impede or enhance its ability to do a certain work?
- 7) How does the text lay claim to the attention of *cultural studies scholars* or otherwise help us to think about an ever-mutating field?
- 8) Does the text lend itself to a *present-day research agenda*? How so or how not?

Having a set script like this might seem mechanistic, but it will give our presentations and discussions some consistency *and* will help you to develop habits of mind that will be useful for future work. I underscore: What distinguishes doctoral from pre-doctoral studies is that the former involves the preparation of a viable dissertation proposal: a disciplined inquiry that will ultimately produce new knowledge. Your dissertation proposal (and the dissertation itself) will address many of the above elements (especially 1—4: It will pose a question that probes objects and tests theory by way of some appropriate method). With this in mind, we begin in Part Two of Histories to identify key elements of the research process in the works that we read.

CLASS PRESENTATIONS: In my dotage, I grow weary of seeing poorly prepared presentations, both at program dissertation proposal presentations and in professional venues (e.g., association meetings). So I hope to train you for a brave new future of crisp, clear, and engaging presentations. There are ample supplemental readings scattered throughout the syllabus. You will pick one or two of them for fifteen-minute class presentations: summarize, synthesize, link to other issues, and prod class discussion. You may use PowerPoint; you may use audiovisual props; you might script your presentation; or you might even make a video. But try to keep to the standard-issue fifteen-minute window.

REQUIRED BOOKS

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

OPTIONAL BOOKS (your choice of one for a book report):

- Jarrett Kobek, *i hate the internet*
- María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *Indian Given: Racial Geographies Across Mexico and the United States*
- Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity*
- David Halperin and Trevor Hoppe, eds., *The War on Sex*
- Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*
- Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*
- Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?*

BOOK REVIEWS: See these simple instructions on book reviews:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2015/03/27/essay-writing-academic-book-reviews>

CLASS SCHEDULE

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

1. Semiology For Beginners (25 Jan)

What is a sign and how does it signify? A very short introduction to the Linguistic Turn

- Ferdinand de Saussure, Part I: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 65—78), from *Course in General Linguistics*
- Jakobson, “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Speech Disturbance”
- Voloshinov/Bakhtin, “Critique of Saussurean Linguistics”

Supplement: Terry Eagleton, “Structuralism and Semiotics,” *Literary Theory*, 79—109

2. Structuralism & Poststructuralism (1 Feb)

Is meaning “in” the sign, or does it flicker along endless chains of signifiers? We, too, traipse briskly across the great divide....

- Claude Levi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth”
- Voloshinov/Bakhtin, “Language as Dialogic Interaction”
- Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” and “From Work to Text,” from *Image—Music—Text*
- Jacques Derrida, “Semiology and Grammatology: An Interview with Julia Kristeva,” from *Positions*
- Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense”

Supplement: Terry Eagleton, “Post-Structuralism,” *Literary Theory*, 110—130

3. Practices & Tactics (8 Feb)

What is ‘sensuousness as a practical activity’ and what difference could it make? Or, *Habitus, Schmachitus: praxis as liberation, constraint, and making-do*

- Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach”
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Marxism and Philosophy”
- Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body”
- Pierre Bourdieu, “Structures, Habitus, Practices,” from *The Logic of Practice*
- De Certeau, “Part III: Spatial Practices,” from *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Question # 1: Once upon a time, it was imagined that words *expressed* meanings, and that speaking subjects said what they *meant*. Since Saussure, however, signification has been theorized differently (and the rolling implications of this changeover take in much of twentieth century cultural theory). Lay out a survey of key concepts or an argument about them using readings from weeks 1—3. Make sure you cast a glance at theories of practice: How might marxian ideas about practice mesh with, or depart from, structuralism? Due Friday, 10 February, 5 PM.

DOMINATION

4. Normalization & Self-Restraint (15 Feb)

What is biopolitics and why is it the current catchword of the academic Left? Biopower and other models

- Michel Foucault, Chapter 11, *Society Must Be Defended*
- Giorgio Agamben, “The Politicization of Life,” from *Homo Sacer*
- Norbert Elias, Part Four, “Synopsis,” from *The Civilizing Process*

- Daniel Zamora, "Foucault, The Excluded, and the Neoliberal Erosion of the State"

Supplement: Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self,"

<http://foucault.info/documents/foucault.technologiesOfSelf.en.html>

5. On Culture & Imperialism (22 Feb)

Have we ever been post-colonial? A very quick introduction to a very big subject

- Edward Said, "Introduction," *Orientalism*
- CLR James, "The Property," *The Black Jacobins*
- W.E.B. du Bois, "The Souls of White Folk"
- Aimé Césaire, "The Tempest"
- Roberto Fernandez Retamar, "Caliban"
- Ricardo Ortiz, "Revolution's Other Histories: The Sexual, Cultural, and Critical Legacies of Roberto Fernández Retamar's 'Caliban'"

Supplementary Reading: Aimé Césaire, "Discourse on Colonialism"; VI Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*

Book Report: María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *Indian Given: Racial Geographies Across Mexico and the United States*

6. Race & Racecraft (1 March)

If identities are fictions, how are they made up? Race and class in perspective

- Frantz Fanon, Chapter 5, "The Fact of Blackness," from *Black Skin, White Masks*
- Barbara J. Fields and Karen Fields, "Introduction" and Chapter 4 from *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*
- Robin Kelley, "When History Sleeps" and "Dreams of the New Land," from *Freedom Dreams*
- Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities"
- Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Identity in Question," from *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*

News Item: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/12/12/theres-a-new-bitter-battle-over-whether-slave-torture-was-the-foundation-of-the-american-economy>

Book Report: Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity*

7. Bodies & Embodiments (8 March)

Is it possible to theorize from a gay perspective? Notes on the rise and fall of queer theory

- Didier Eribon, "The Shock of Insult" and "Existence Precedes Essence," from *Insult*
- Henry Abelow, "How Stonewall Obscures the Real History of Gay Liberation"
- Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?"
- Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality"
- Judith Butler, "Introduction" to *Bodies That Matter*, from *The Gender/Sexuality Reader*
- Judith Halberstam, "Introduction: Low Theory," from *The Queer Art of Failure*
- Roger Lancaster, "Might it be time to demand a tad more from cultural studies?"
<http://culturalstudies.gmu.edu/articles/8808>
- Michael Warner, "Queer and Then: The End of Queer Theory?"
<http://www.chronicle.com/article/QueerThen-/130161/>

Point/Counterpoint: Jasbir Puar, “Homonationalism and Biopolitics”; Roger Lancaster, “Innocents Abroad,” from *Sex Panic and the Punitive State*

Book Report: Erica Meiners, *For the Children? Protecting Innocence in a Carceral State*

Question # 2: At least since Max Weber, the concept of “power” aligned with the idea of force or coercion; it has traditionally meant the ability to get others to do something they would not have done on their own. “Authority,” by contrast, referred to power baptized by *legitimacy*, that is, the exercise of power viewed as proper and right by both ruler and ruled. Weeks 4—7 map out somewhat different—or are they?—kinds of power relations and develop new notions of what “power” might be or do. Discuss the readings, laying out an argument or typology. Due Friday, 10 March, 5 PM. (And then have a nice spring break!)

8. SPRING BREAK (15 March)

MASS MEDIATIONS

9. Publicity & Counterpublicity (22 March)

What was the liberal public sphere? And what happens when “public emotion” replaces public opinion?

- Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article,” *New German Critique*
- Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” *Social Text*
- Michael Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” from *Publics and Counterpublics*
- Paul Virilio, “Public Emotion,” from *The Original Accident*

Supplement: Régis Debray, “Socialism: A Life-Cycle,” *New Left Review*; Roger Lancaster, “Panic: A User’s Manual”

10. Spectacle & Simulation (29 March)

“None of our societies know how to manage their mourning for the real.” Wherein we briskly review more “greatest hits” of media studies.

- Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message” and “Hot and Cold Media,” from *Understanding Media*
- Guy Debord, “Separation Perfected,” from *Society of the Spectacle*
- Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations,” from *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*
- Jean Baudrillard, “The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media,” *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*
- Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”

Supplement on New Media: Jodi Dean, “Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics”; Jodi Dean, “Society Does Not Exist”

Book Report: Jarett Kobek, *i hate the internet*

11. Risk & Control (5 April)

What comes after postmodernism? What new forms of power do algorithms draw in tow?

- Ulrich Beck, “Preface” and Chapter 1: “On the Logic of Wealth Distribution and Risk Distribution,” *The Risk Society* (Sage, 1992), 19-50
- Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October*
- Engin Isin, “The Neurotic Citizen”

- Roger Lancaster, “The New Pariahs: Sex, Crime, and Punishment in America,” from *The War on Sex*

Book Report: Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*

Question # 3: Habermas’ theory of the liberal bourgeois public sphere suggests that, once upon a time, democratic institutions were possible. Other, mostly later, works in media studies have discerned increasingly untidy, unruly, and schizogenic processes at work. Does the sweep of history favor poststructural jouissance, late capitalist decay, or something altogether different? Lay out an argument or typology drawing on materials from weeks 9, 10, and 11. Due Friday, 7 April, 5 PM.

NEW DIRECTIONS AND OLD

12. Neoliberalism, Hybridization, and Globalization (12 April)

Neoliberalism strips away “protections” and places the state at the service of an economy defined by efficiency, profits, and private interests. But that is not all. It is also associated with a relatively cosmopolitan ethos of “openness.” Here, then, scattered notes on the second “Great Transformation”....

- David Harvey, “Freedom’s Just Another Word,” from *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*
- Pierre Bourdieu, “Neo-liberalism, the Utopia (Becoming a Reality) of Unlimited Exploitation”
- Wendy Brown, “Sacrificial Citizenship: Neoliberalism, Human Capital, and Austerity Politics”
- Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy”
- Nestor Garcia Canclini, “Hybrid Cultures, Oblique Powers”
- Carlos Monsiváis, “Would So Many Millions of People Not End Up Speaking English? The North American Culture and Mexico,” from *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*
- Stuart Hall, “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities”

Supplements: Karl Polanyi, Chapter 3, “Habitation versus Improvement,” from *The Great Transformation*. Stuart Hall and Alan O’Shea, “Common-Sense Neoliberalism”

13. Play & Games (19 April)

What do we do when we play? If the answer to the question keeps getting away from us, is this part of the nature of the game?

- Johannes Huizinga, “Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon,” from *Homo Ludens*
- Mikhail Bakhtin, excerpts from *Rabelais and His World*
- Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful”
- Roger Lancaster, “Guto’s Performance: Notes on the Transvestism of Everyday Life,” from *The Gender/Sexuality Reader*
- **Supplement on Popular Culture / Mass Culture and Politics:** Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular’”; Meaghan Morris, “Banality in Cultural Studies”

14. Image & Imaginary (26 April)

What do we do when we contemplate a photograph? How might politics align, or not, with visual and performance art?

- Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Supplement: Jacques Rancière, “The Distribution of the Sensible” (pp. 7-46) from *The Politics of Aesthetics*; “The Future of the Image” from *The Future of the Image*; Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator” from *The Emancipated Spectator*

Supplemental Packet on Theatre, Film, Politics, & Camp: Sergei Eisenstein, “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” from *Film Form* (1949) [1929]; Bertolt Brecht, “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” from “The Theater of Bertolt Brecht;” Walter Benjamin, “Conversations with Brecht,” *Understanding Brecht*; Roland Barthes, “The Tasks of Brechtian Criticism,” *Critical Essays*; Roland Barthes, “The Poor and the Proletariat,” *Mythologies*; Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp;’” Roger Lancaster, “When I Was A Girl (Notes on Contrivance),” *Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiments*

Book Report: Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*

15. Disaster & Utopia (3 May)

These are the Best of Times, The Worst of Times.

- Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”
- Francis Spufford, “Mr. Chairman, 1959” from *Red Plenty*
- Ernst Bloch, “The Principle of Hope”
- Jose Muñoz, “Introduction,” from *Cruising Utopia*
- Carlos Monsiváis, “Identity Hour, or, What Photos Would You Take of the Endless City?” from *Mexican Postcards*
- Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”

Supplements on Despair & Hope: David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *New Left Review*; Mike Davis, “Planet of Slums,” *New Left Review*; Mike Davis, “Who Will Build the Arc?” *New Left Review*; Erik Olin Wright, “Socialism and Real Utopias,” from Hahnel and Wright, *Alternatives to Capitalism*

Book Report: Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?*

Question # 4: Kafka affirmed that there was hope, even worlds of hope—alas, but not for us. Is there hope, yet, for us? Whence might it come? What forms might it take? Thread an argument from weeks 12—15. Be as pessimistic or as utopian as you dare. Due Friday, 5 May, 5 PM.

House Rules, Fine Print, and Miscellanea

Classroom Environment: We aim for a respectful learning environment in which everyone can participate. It is okay for us to disagree with one another in class discussion, in fact, it is expected; but let's do so in the spirit of dialogue and let's remember to substantiate assertions. In short, let's keep the conversation as open and informative for everyone as possible.

Email: GMU faculty and students are required to use GMU email accounts to communicate. You must regularly check your GMU email address, as important updates will be sent that way. I will not announce any major changes to the syllabus with less than 24 hours notice. I will respond to emails within 24 hours. I do not respond to emails on the weekends; an email sent on Friday will receive a response by Monday.

Diversity: Diversity is one of the university's core values. See <http://ctfe.gmu.edu/professional-development/mason-diversity-statement/>

ACADEMIC HONESTY: When submitting work under your own name, keep in mind that plagiarism is a violation of the GMU Honor Code. The Honor Code states, "Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work." Plagiarism means using words, ideas, opinions, or factual information from another person or source without giving due credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books and articles consulted is not sufficient. Nor does rearrangement of another person's phrasing (paraphrase) release one from the obligation to document one's sources. Plagiarism is a form of fraudulently claiming someone else's work as your own, and as such is the equivalent of cheating on an exam. A serious academic offense, plagiarism is grounds for failing at least the assignment, if not the whole course. If you are unclear about what you should document, consult with me. When in doubt, document. (*Adapted from the English Department Statement on Plagiarism*)

LAPTOPS AND CELLPHONES:

- Laptops are not allowed in class, unless as part of an accommodation provided by the Disability Resource Center, or as part of one of your class presentations.
- Cell phone use is also not allowed. This includes texting, Facebooking, Snapchatting, Tweeting, Instagramming, hunting Pokémon, and anything else you might do with a cell phone outside of class. If you are anticipating a special circumstance in which you might need access to your phone during class, just check in with me.

SOME CAMPUS RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU:

- **Writing Resources:** You may wish to use the Writing Center to assist you with an assignment. Tutors at the Writing Center can help you brainstorm, structure, and revise your written work. The Writing Center is located in Robinson A 114; 703-993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>.

- **Counseling Services:** Professional counselors provide individual and group sessions for personal development and assistance with a range of emotional and relational issues. Counseling Services are located in SUB I, Rm.364; 703-993-2380; <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/csdc>. In addition, the Learning Services Program (703-993- 2999) offers academic skill-building workshops as well as a tutor referral service.
- **Student Technology Assistance and Resource Center (STAR):** The STAR Center is available to help students with technology needs, such as video, multimedia, desktop publishing, and web skills. The STAR Center is located in Johnson Center, Rm.229; 703993-8990; <http://media.gmu.edu>.
- **Division of Instructional and Technology Support Services (DoIT):** If you have any difficulties with accessing the campus network or on-campus computers, please contact the help desk. DoIT is located in Innovations Hall, Rm.416; 703-993-3178; <http://www.doit.gmu.edu>.
- **Last but not least, I am your resource!** I am available during office hours and by appointment to discuss and support any and all aspects of your learning and development in this course. We can go over assignments before and after you've turned them in; we can review concepts from class; and we can extend discussions just because you're interested and curious. If you are experiencing difficulties, please come to me for assistance before you fall behind. I will be glad to match your efforts.

DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.