

LT118 Introduction to Critical and Cultural Theory

Seminar Leader: Dr Hannah Proctor

Course Times: Tues and Thurs 10.45-12.15

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Office Hours:

Course Description

The course introduces the key texts, concepts and methodological approaches of different traditions of Cultural Studies and Critical Theory, including perspectives from feminism, queer theory, postcolonialism and black studies. We consider these sources under four main headings: the question of human subjectivity and its social, institutional and political arrangement: how might different forms of writing or reading reflect, bolster or challenge power relations? How does the culture we inhabit inform how we read or write? Is there such thing as a stable and coherent subject? Our second theme will be the role of media, spectacle and mass culture in our efforts to understand the world: what does the analysis of seemingly trivial cultural phenomena, everyday commodities or popular culture tell us about the world? Where is meaning located and how is it produced in a world of commercialised mass media, pervasive advertising, globalised markets and rampant consumerism? We also consider the ways in which the technologies we use change our perception and cognition. Situating literature in technological and material contexts, we will explore the ways in which literature has reshaped and redefined itself across time.

Requirements

Class preparation

Preparing for class involves reading thoughtfully and engaging with the set text for each class, for instance, by thinking through the argument of a particular section and taking notes while reading. Try to formulate and address questions before you come to class: What is the argument being made by the author? What terms recur throughout the text? How does it relate to other texts we have read on the course? If you find a particular section difficult to understand underline unfamiliar terms and try to ask yourself what specifically is unclear (don't worry if you find the texts difficult and remember it is always possible that the author is being unclear or contradictory).

Students are expected to participate actively in class. The purpose of the class is to come to a better understanding of it through collective discussion. Students are therefore encouraged to ask questions as well as making statements in class.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. In instances in which students fail to meet the

expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

Attendance

Regular attendance and active participation is essential to the success of this course. Attendance at ALL classes is expected. Missing more than two 90-minute sessions in a semester will reduce the course grade by up to one grade step (e.g., B+ to B). Late arrival or leaving during class time will count as an absence. Missing more than 30% of all sessions may result in failing the course. Consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Assessment

The assessment will be made on the basis of two essays, two shorter writing exercises and class participation (See 'Grade Breakdown' and 'Essay Deadlines' below).

Writing Assignments

The deadlines for all writing assignments can be found under 'Essay deadlines.'

Essays: The midterm essay (1500 words) responds to a thematic question and should represent your understanding of one aspect of the course reading. The Final essay (2500 words) is expected to be more ambitious and somewhat longer, trying to develop a more comprehensive account of a particular conceptual question or topic you will have encountered during the course and drawing on a wider range of sources.

Writing Exercises: You will also prepare one shorter writing exercise in each rotation (500 words), submitted to your seminar leader. The first writing exercise will focus on close reading and the second will require students to experiment with style, genre and form.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

The following policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays applies to this course: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

Grade Breakdown

Seminar grade: 30%
Writing exercises: 20%
Midterm Essay: 20%
Final Essay: 30%

Schedule

Week	Tues 10.45-12.15	Thurs 10.45-12.15	Assignments
Sept 3-7	Intro 1	Intro 2	
Sept 10-14	Intro 3	Intro 4	
Sept 17-21	Subjectivity 1	Subjectivity 2	
Sept 24-28	Subjectivity 3	Subjectivity 4	Writing assessment due Sun Sept 30 23:59
Oct 1-5	Subjectivity 5	Subjectivity 6	
Oct 8-12	Media 1	Media 2	
Oct 15-19	Media 3	Media 4	
Oct 22-26	Media 5	Media 6	Midterm Essay due Sat Oct. 27, 23:59
Oct 29-Nov 2	FALL BREAK	FALL BREAK	FALL BREAK
Nov 5-9	Technology 1	Technology 2	
Nov 12-16	Technology 3	Technology 4	
Nov 19-23	Technology 5	Technology 6	Writing assessment due Sun Nov 25 23:59
Nov 26-30	Genre 1	Genre 2	
Dec 3-7	Genre 3	Genre 4	
Dec 10-14	Genre 5	Genre 6	
Dec 17-21	COMPLETION WEEK	COMPLETION WEEK	Final Essay due Fri. Dec. 21, 23:59

The course will be structured thematically, introducing students to key texts, concepts and methodological approaches from different traditions of Cultural and Critical Theory, including perspectives from feminism, queer theory, postcolonialism and black studies. Readings will cluster around four core themes: subjectivity, media and mass culture, technology and genre/form.

Subjectivity – This section will explore how theories of subjectivity and identity might influence writing and reading practices. How we understand human subjectivity effects how we understand and interpret literary texts and the people who produced them. Does it matter who is writing and who is reading? How might different forms of writing or reading reflect, bolster or challenge power relations? How does the culture we inhabit inform how we read or write? Is there such thing as a stable and coherent subject?

Media and Mass Culture – What does the analysis of seemingly trivial cultural phenomena, everyday commodities or popular culture tell us about the world? Where is meaning located and how is it produced in a world of commercialised mass media, pervasive advertising, globalised markets and rampant consumerism?

Technology – How do the technologies we use change our perception or cognition? What impact do technologies have on how we use language, transmit and communicate ideas, or store and consume data? How has literature survived, transformed or reflected broader transformations in print and digital media?

Genre and Form– beginning with a canonical text by Mikhail Bakhtin on the novel, this section will take

a literary approach to texts produced within cultural and critical theory, texts that deviate from the conventions of essay writing, self-consciously experimenting with form and genre and flouting disciplinary boundaries. What is the relationship between the style of these texts and their theoretical content? How is language and genre deployed for political or polemical ends?

Tues 4 September

Introduction 1 – Definition of ‘Culture’ from Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (1976)
Stuart Hall, ‘Life and Times of the First New Left’, *New Left Review*, 2010
<https://newleftreview.org/II/61/stuart-hall-life-and-times-of-the-first-new-left>

Thurs 6 September

Introduction 2 – Max Horkheimer, ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’ (1937)

Tues 11 September

Introduction 3 – Terry Eagleton, Chapter 1, *After Theory* (2003)

Thurs 13 September

Introduction 4 – Terry Eagleton, Chapter 2, *After Theory* (2003)

Tues 18 September

Subjectivity 1 - Michel Foucault ‘What is an author?’ (1969)

Thurs 20 September

Subjectivity 2 - Hélène Cixous ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, *Signs*, 1, 4 (1976), pp. 875-893.

Tues 25 September

Subjectivity 3 - Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1983)

Thurs 27 September

Subjectivity 4 - Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1983)

Tues 2 October

Subjectivity 5 - Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto,’ (1984)

Thurs 4 October

Subjectivity 6 – Hortense Spillers, ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book’, *Diacritics*, 17, 2, (1987), pp. 64-81

Tues 9 October

Media and Mass Culture 1 - Siegfried Kracauer, ‘The Mass Ornament’ (1927)

Thurs 11 October

Media and Mass Culture 2 - excerpts from Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (1951)

Tues 16 October

Media and Mass Culture 3 - excerpts from Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957)

Thurs 18 October

Media and Mass Culture 4 - Jean Baudriallard, 'The Precession of Simulacra' and 'Simulacra and Science Fiction' in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981)

Tues 23 October

Media and Mass Culture 5 – Marissa Brostoff, 'Missing Time: As Usual Mulder Was Right' (2018)
<https://nplusonemag.com/issue-31/essays/missing-time-2/>

Thurs 25 October

Media and Mass Culture 6 – Paul Gilroy, "'Jewels Brought From Bondage": Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity', *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) and Fred Moten, 'Duke Ellington's Sound of Love', *In The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003)

BREAK WEEK

Tues 6 November

Technology 1 – Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility' (1935)

Thurs 8 November

Technology 2 - Excerpts from *Introduction to Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* by Stuart Hall et al (1996)

Tues 13 November

Technology 3 - Susan Sontag, 'In Plato's Cave' from *On Photography* (1977)

Thurs 15 November

Technology 4 - Friedrich Kittler, 'Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,' *October*, 41 (1987), pp. 101-118.

Tues 20 November

Technology 5 – Alexander Galloway, 'Introduction: The Computer as a Mode of Mediation', *The Interface Effect* (2012)

Thurs 22 November

Technology 6 – Sianne Ngai, 'Theory of the Gimmick', *Critical Inquiry*, 43, 2 (2017), pp. 466-505.

Tues 27 November

Genre and Form 1 – 'Discourse in the Novel', *The Dialogic Imagination* by Mikhail Bakhtin (1934-5)

Thurs 29 November

Genre and Form 2 – Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, 'Sex Without Optimism', *Sex, Or the Unbearable* (2013)

Tues 4 December

Genre and Form 3 – Excerpts from Michel Serres, *Angels: A Modern Myth* (1995)

Thurs 6 December

Genre and Form 4 – Excerpts from Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick* (1997)

Tues 11 December

Genre and Form 5 – Saidiya Hartman, ‘The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner’ (2018)

Thurs 13 December

Genre and Form 6 – ‘Manifesto on Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation’ by Laboria Cuboniks (2015)
<http://www.laboriacuboniks.net/>

Essay Deadlines

Writing Assessment 1: Sun Sept 30 23:59

Midterm Essay: Sat Oct. 27, 23:59

Writing Assessment 2: Sun Nov 25 23:59

Final Essay: Fri Dec 21, 23:59