

COURSE ID -- LT120 Introduction to Critical and Cultural Theory

Seminar Leader: Dr Clio Nicastro

Course Times: Tues and Thurs 9.00--10.30

Email: c.nicastro@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours:

Course Description

The course introduces the key concepts and methodological approaches from different traditions of Cultural Studies and Critical Theory, including perspectives from feminism, queer theory, postcolonialism and black studies.

By a close reading of a selection of texts and film excerpts we will 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, reading or filming reflect, bolster or protest power relations? How does the culture we inhabit inform both how we write and read and how we see and perceive reality?

Our second theme, which is deeply intertwined with the previous ones, will be the role of **media 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?

The third part is dedicated to **genre and form**: beginning with a canonical text by Mikhail Bakhtin on the novel we 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?

Our fourth session will delve into the question of **bodily expression** by looking at different narrative forms to account for health issues, symptoms and those bodily experiences that can exceed and challenge the limits of language: What role does empathy play when authors choose the first-person narrative to tell these biographical, bodily stories? How do the non-linear temporal dimensions of some conditions that involve chronicity or relapses (like self-immune disease, cancer, eating disorders) sabotage the narrative need to end a story? What happens when these stories bring up incompatible forms of reason?

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. Students are asked to bring paper copies of the reading to class and to not use laptops.

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 are 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 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.

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

Classroom participation: 30%
Midterm Essay: 30%
Final Essay: 40%

Schedule

Week	Tues 9.00-10.30	Thurs 9.00-10.30	Assignments
Jan 28-30	Intro 1	Intro 2	
Feb 4-6	Intro 3	Intro 4	
Feb 11-13	Subjectivity 1	Subjectivity 2	
Feb 18-20	Subjectivity 3	Subjectivity 4	
Feb 11-13	Subjectivity 1	Subjectivity 2	
Feb 25-27	Subjectivity 5	Subjectivity 6	
Mar 3-5	Mass and Media 1	Mass and Media 2	
Mar 10-12	Mass and Media 3	Mass and Media 4	
Mar 17- Mar 19	Mass and Media 5	Mass and Media 6	
Mar 24- Mar 26	Mass and Media 7	Genre and Form 1	
Mar 31- Apr 2	Genre and Form 2	Genre and Form 3	Midterm Essay due March 14th, 23:59
Apr 6--Apr 13	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK	
Apr 14-16	Genre and Form 4	Genre and Form 5	
Apr 21-23	Genre and Form 6	Genre and Form 7	
Apr 28-30	Bodily Expression 1	Bodily Expression 2	
May 5-7	Bodily Expression 3	Bodily Expression 4	
May 12-14	COMPLETION WEEK	COMPLETION WEEK	Final Essay due May15, 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?

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?

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?

Bodily Expression – What role does empathy play when authors choose the first-person narrative to tell these biographical, bodily stories? How do the non-linear temporal dimensions of some conditions that involve chronicity or relapses (like self-immune disease, cancer, eating disorders) sabotage the narrative need to end a story? What happens when these stories bring up incompatible forms of reason?

Tues 28 January

Introduction 1 – Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms', *What is Cultural Studies* (1996)

Tues 30 January

Introduction 2 – Sarah Ahmed, 'Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality' (2000)

Tues 4 February

Introduction 3 – Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, '*Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization' (2012), and Walter D. Mignolo, excerpts from 'The Idea of Latin America' (2005). Guest seminar with Zairong Xiang (DFG Research Training Group 'Minor Cosmopolitanisms', University of Potsdam)

Thurs 6 February

Introduction 4 – Max Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory' (1937)

Tues 11 February

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

Thurs 13 February

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

Tues 18 February

Subjectivity 3 -- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, excerpts from 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1983)

Thurs 20 February

Subjectivity 4 -- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, excerpts from 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1983)

Tues 25 February

Subjectivity 5 -- Donna Haraway, excerpts from 'A Cyborg Manifesto,' (1984)

Thurs 27 February

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

Tues 3 March

Media and Mass Culture 1 -- Siegfried Kracauer, excerpts from 'The Mass Ornament' (1927)

Thurs 5 March

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

Tues 10 March

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

Thurs 12 March

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

Tues 17 March

Mass and Culture 5 – Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility' (1935)

Thurs 19 March

Mass and Culture 6– Excerpts from *Introduction to Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* by Stuart Hall et al.

Tues 24 March

Mass and Culture 7– Sianne Ngai, 'Theory of the Gimmick', *Critical Inquiry*, 43, 2 (2017), pp. 466-- 505.

Thurs 26 March

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

Tues 31 March

Genre and Form 2 – Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', *The Dialogic Imagination* (1934-- 5)

Thurs 2 April

Genre and Form 3 – Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, 'Sex Without Optimism', *Sex, Or the Unbearable* (2013)

SPRING BREAK

Tues 14 April

Genre and Form 4 – Saidiya Hartman, 'The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner' (2018)

Thurs 16 April

Genre and Form 5 – Excerpts from Paul B. Preciado, 'Countersexual Manifesto' (2002)

Tues 21 April

Genre and Form 6 – Andrea Long Chu, excerpts from 'Females' (2019)

Thurs 23 April

Genre and Form 7- Amy Hollywood 'Gender, Agency, and the Divine in Religious Historiography' and 'Reading as Self-Annihilation', *Acute Melancholia* (2016)

Tues 28 April

Bodily expression 1 – Audre Lorde, excerpts from 'The Cancer Journals' (1980)

Thurs 30 April

Bodily expression 2 - Chris Kraus, excerpts from 'Aliens and Anorexia' (2000) and Gilles Deleuze, Claire Parnet, excerpts from 'Dialogues' (1977)

Tues 5 May

Bodily expression 3 – Helen Malson, Maree Burns, excerpts 'Critical Feminist Approach to Eatings Disorders' (2009) and from Lisa Blackman 'Immaterial Bodies' (2012)

Thurs 7 May

Bodily expression 4 – Screening of Martha Rosler, 'Losing: A Conversation with the Parents' (1977) and Sandra Lahire, 'Arrows' (1984)

Tues 12 May

Completion week

Thurs 14 May

Completion week

Essay Deadlines

Midterm Essay: Sat Apr 4, 23:59

Final Essay: Fri May 15, 23:59

Budget Plan

€150: fee for film screenings

€150: honorarium for Zairong Xiang (4th Februar)