

# Critical communication studies

Comm 8211

office hours (253 Ford):

TuTh 10-11:15a, W 10-11:30a, and by appointment

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## 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. This semester, our focus will be on the various intellectual and political projects that travel under the banner of “cultural studies,” which is arguably one of the most important such forms that critical communication studies takes these days.

From the very beginning (regardless of where one believes that to have been), 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 lies at the endeavor’s core. Cultural studies’ inherent open-endedness 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 subjects that are prevalent in cultural studies today, though we will spend several weeks surveying some of the most significant of those issues. 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 required book is available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union.

- John Storey (ed.), *What Is Cultural Studies?*

Other required readings will be made available via the course Moodle site.

## Moodle

If you are on the official course roster, you should already have access to the course’s Moodle site. Simply point your web browser to the U’s main Moodle page (<http://moodle2.umn.edu>), log in using your University X.500 ID, and select the “COMM8211\_001S13” link from the “My Courses” menu in the “Navigation” box.

We will use Moodle for several things this semester:

- a course blog where you can contribute (required) discussion questions about the course material
- access to our required non-book readings
- occasional business-related announcements about the course
- a space for mutual support and feedback with respect to your final paper

More information on using Moodle can be found at <http://www.oit.umn.edu/moodle/student-guides/index.htm>

## Grading policy

Presumably, you’re enrolled in this course because you genuinely want to learn about cultural studies, rather than because you need to fulfill distributional requirements of some sort, or to pad out your schedule with “empty” credit hours. As such, I’m willing to assume that grades are *not* a terribly meaningful incentive for you. If anything, grades may be counterproductive, since they encourage you to focus on numbers (e.g., how do I turn an 89 into a 90?), rather than on the substantive issues at the core of the course. With this in mind, you should assume that successfully completing the graduate-level requirements for this course will earn you an A as a final grade. That said, in cases where people are clearly slacking off, I reserve the right to go deeper into the alphabet when I submit final grades.

## 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 perfectly welcome contributions to our conversations -- 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 our readings, but this course is not designed to be a spectator event.

## Discussion questions

We have 14 weeks of scheduled reading this semester (30 Jan-8 May). For **at least 10** of those 14 weeks, you should post 2-3 discussion questions related to those readings to the course blog **by 2:30 pm the day before** the relevant class meeting. Exactly what those questions should look like will vary from topic to topic (and from student to student), but you should be aiming for questions that serve as productive jumping-off points for our in-class discussions.

The course blog is accessible via the "Course blog" link on the main page of the course Moodle site. From there, you can start a new thread by clicking on the "Add a new topic" button. You can comment on an existing thread by clicking on the "Discuss this topic" link at the bottom right corner of that thread's box.

## Research paper

Your major project for the semester is a 6250-7500 word 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 as follows:

20 Feb	Preliminary 1-on-1 meeting
27 Feb	250-500 word proposal
7 May	Full-length draft
14 May (1:30-3:30p)	In-class group workshopping

Proposals and final drafts should be posted to the appropriate forums on the course blog.

## Miscellaneous

- You may make audio and/or video recordings of class meetings for your personal use, provided you can do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or recordings of class meetings is strictly prohibited.
- I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students' needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. By University policy, you must provide me with written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities), and you must do so with enough lead time for such accommodations to be arranged.
- As some of you may already know, I'm the founder/manager of CULTSTUD-L: a cultural studies listserv that has nearly 2500 subscribers from over 40 countries around the world. You're welcome to join the listserv, 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 here: <http://www.comm.umn.edu/~grodman/cultstud/>

## Reading/assignment schedule

[Readings should be completed in advance of the dates listed. Readings marked with asterisks (\*\*\*) are available in the Storey book. All other readings are available on the course Moodle site.]

### **23 Jan Introduction and overview**

no readings

### **30 Jan Defining cultural studies**

\*\*\*Johnson, "What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?"

Hall, "The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis in the Humanities"

Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies"

Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, "Cultural Studies: An Introduction"

Bérubé, "Pop Goes the Academy: Cult Studs Fight the Power"

\*\*\*Nelson, "Always Already Cultural Studies: Academic Conferences and a Manifesto"

Grossberg, "Cultural Studies: What's in a Name (One More Time)"

Morris, "A Question of Cultural Studies"

\*\*\*Frow and Morris, "Australian Cultural Studies"

Felski, "The Role of Aesthetics in Cultural Studies"

Rodman, "Cultural Studies and History"

### **6 Feb Historicizing and placing cultural studies**

\*\*\*Williams, "The Future of Cultural Studies"

Steele, "A Lost Genealogy: Adult Education and the Project of British Cultural Studies"

Nelson and Gaonkar, "Cultural Studies and the Politics of Disciplinarity: An Introduction"

Striphas, "The Long March: Cultural Studies and Its Institutionalization"

Carey, "Reflections on the Project of (American) Cultural Studies"

Sterne, "James Carey and Resistance to Cultural Studies in North America"

Grossberg, "Toward a Genealogy of the State of Cultural Studies: The Discipline of Communication and the Reception of Cultural Studies in the United States"

Cruz, "Cultural Studies and Social Movements: A Crucial Nexus in the American Case"

Schwarz, "Where Is Cultural Studies?"

Ang, "Doing Cultural Studies at the Crossroads: Local/Global Negotiations"

Schäfer, "The Re-articulation of Cultural Studies in Japan and Its Consequences for Japanese Studies"

Shome, "Post-colonial Reflections on the 'Internationalization' of Cultural Studies"

### **13 Feb Birmingham: In the beginning . . .**

\*\*\*Sparks, "The Evolution of Cultural Studies . . ."

\*\*\*Green, "The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies"

Williams, "Defining a Democratic Culture"

Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, selections from Annual Reports

\*\*\*Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms"

Hebdige, *Subculture* [selections]

McRobbie, "Settling Accounts With Subcultures: A Feminist Critique"

Hebdige, "Contemporizing 'Subculture': 30 Years to Life"

Hall *et al.*, "The Law-and-Order Society: Towards the 'Exceptional State'"

Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview With Stuart Hall"

**20 Feb Birmingham: On second thought . . .**

**DEADLINE -- research paper meeting**

Gray, "Formations of Cultural Studies"  
Editorial Team, "Introduction" [*CCCS Selected Working Papers*, vol. 2]  
Hall, "Preface" [*CCCS Selected Working Papers*, vol. 1]  
Hall, "Preface" [*CCCS Selected Working Papers*, vol. 2]  
Grossberg, "CCCS and the Detour Through Theory"  
Clarke, "Cultural Studies: A British Inheritance"  
Carrington, "Decentring the Centre: Cultural Studies in Britain and Its Legacy"  
Wright, "Dare We De-centre Birmingham?: Troubling the 'Origin' and Trajectories of Cultural Studies"  
McNeil, "De-centring or Re-focusing Cultural Studies: A Response to Handel K. Wright"  
Hall, "Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* and the Cultural Turn"  
Grossberg, "Rereading the Past From the Future"  
Moran, "Milk Bars, Starbucks and the Uses of Literacy"  
Lewis, "Racializing Culture Is Ordinary"  
Gray, "Cultural Studies at Birmingham: The Impossibility of Critical Pedagogy?"  
Webster, "Cultural Studies and Sociology at, and After, the Closure of the Birmingham School"  
Marsh, "Sociology and Cultural Studies at Birmingham and Beyond: A Response to Frank Webster"  
Webster, "A Reply to David Marsh"

**27 Feb Race, ethnicity, and nation**

**DEADLINE -- research paper proposal**

\*\*\*Hall, "Race, Culture, and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies"  
Carby, "Lost in Translation"  
hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination"  
Berlant, "The Face of America and the State of Emergency"  
Rodman, "Race . . . and Other Four Letter Words: Eminem and the Cultural Politics of Authenticity"  
Stabile, "Criminalizing Black Culture"  
Rossing, "Deconstructing Postracialism: Humor as a Critical, Cultural Project"  
McPherson, "Why Are the Digital Humanities So White? or Thinking the Histories of Race and Computation"  
Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities"  
Hall, "New Ethnicities"  
Ang, "On Not Speaking Chinese: Diasporic Identifications and Postmodern Ethnicity"  
Sharma, "Taxi Cab Publics and the Production of *Brown Space* After 9/11"  
Shome, "'Global Motherhood': The Transnational Intimacies of White Femininity"

**6 Mar Gender, sexuality, and feminism**

Brunsdon, "A Thief in the Night: Stories of Feminism in the 1970s at CCCS"  
Winship, "Introduction" [section on "Women's Studies and Feminism" in *CCCS Selected Working Papers*, vol. 2]  
\*\*\*Franklin, Lury, and Stacey. "Feminism and Cultural Studies: Pasts, Presents, Futures"  
\*\*\*Long, "Feminism and Cultural Studies"  
Balsamo, "Feminism and Cultural Studies"  
Stabile, "The Nightmare Voice of Feminism: Feminism and Cultural Studies"  
McRobbie, "The Es and the Anti-Es: New Questions for Feminism and Cultural Studies"  
Wallace, "Negative Images: Towards a Black Feminist Cultural Criticism"  
Crimp, "Portraits of People With AIDS"  
Kipnis, "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*"  
Kearney, "Pink Technology: Mediamaking Gear for Girls"  
Banet-Weiser, "Branding Consumer Citizens: Gender and the Emergence of Brand Culture"  
Driscoll and Gregg, "Convergence Culture and the Legacy of Feminist Cultural Studies"

**13 Mar            Popular culture, mass media, and entertainment: Theory**

Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc, "Defining Popular Culture"

Grossberg, "Mapping Popular Culture"

Morley, "Introduction" [section on "Media" in *CCCS Selected Working Papers*, vol. 2]

Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"

Hall, "Reflections Upon the Encoding/Decoding Model"

\*\*\*Fiske, "British Cultural Studies and Television"

\*\*\*Morris, "Banality in Cultural Studies"

Radway, "Reception Study: Ethnography and the Problems of Dispersed Audiences and Nomadic Subjects"

Grossberg, "Wandering Audiences, Nomadic Critics"

\*\*\*Ang, "Culture and Communication: Towards an Ethnographic Critique of Media Consumption in the Transnational Media System"

Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'"

Rodman, "Notes on Reconstructing 'the Popular'"

Caldwell, "Industrial Reflexivity and Common Sense"

**20 Mar            NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK**

**27 Mar            Popular culture, mass media, and entertainment: Analysis**

Acland, "Matinees, Summers, and the Practice of Cinemagoing"

Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture"

Radway, "Mail-Order Culture and Its Critics: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Commodification and Consumption, and the Problem of Cultural Authority"

Striphas, "A Dialectic With the Everyday: Communication and Cultural Politics on Oprah Winfrey's Book Club"

Hesmondhalgh, "Audiences and Everyday Aesthetics: Talking About Good and Bad Music"

Rodman and Vanderdonck, "Music for Nothing or, I Want My MP3: The Regulation and Recirculation of Affect"

Ouellette and Hay, "Introduction" [from *Better Living Through Reality TV*]

Teurlings, "Media Literacy and the Challenges of Contemporary Media Culture: On Savvy Viewers and Critical Apathy"

Miller, "A View From a Fossil: The New Economy, Creativity and Consumption -- Two or Three Things I Don't Believe In"

Jenkins, "The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence"

Mato, "All Industries Are Cultural: A Critique of the Idea of 'Cultural Industries' and New Possibilities for Research"

Miller, "From Creative to Cultural Industries: Not All Industries Are Cultural, and No Industries Are Creative"

Harney, "Unfinished Business: Labour, Management, and the Creative Industries"

**3 Apr            Everyday life, lived experience, and cultural space(s)**

Probyn, "The Politics of Experience"

Seigworth, "Everyday Life Is Always Somewhere Else"

Seigworth, "Sound Affects"

Gregg, "Communicating Investment: Cultural Studies, Politics and Affect"

Gregg, "A Mundane Voice"

Clifford, "Traveling Cultures"

Frith, "The Cultural Study of Popular Music"

Morris, "Things to Do With Shopping Centers"

Wise, "Home: Territory and Identity"

Sharma, "Baring Life and Lifestyle in the Non-place"

Scroop, "The Anti-chain Store Movement and the Politics of Consumption"

Makagon, "Bring on the Shock Troops: Artists and Gentrification in the Popular Press"

Ross, "The Quandaries of Consumer-based Labor Activism: A Low-wage Case Study"

**10 Apr            Science, technology, and digital culture**

Stabile, "Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance"  
Carey, "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet"  
Rodman, "The Net Effect: The Public's Fear and the Public Sphere"  
Rodino-Colocino, "Laboring Under the Digital Divide"  
Ross, "Technology and Below-the-Line Labor in the Copyright Over Intellectual Property"  
Smith, "Nigerian Scam E-mails and the Charms of Capital"  
Packer, "Safety and Security: Future Orientations of Automobility"  
Andrejevic, "The Discipline of Watching: Detection, Risk, and Lateral Surveillance"  
Robertson, "A Documentary Regime of Verification: The Emergence of the US Passport and the Archival  
    Problematization of Identity"  
Striphas, "The Abuses of Literacy: Amazon Kindle and the Right to Read"  
Sterne, "Format Theory"

**17 Apr            The university, (anti-inter-meta-multi-)disciplinarity, and critical pedagogy**

Striphas, "Acknowledged Goods: Cultural Studies and the Politics of Academic Journal Publishing"  
Rutherford, "Cultural Studies in the Corporate University"  
Appadurai, "Diversity and Disciplinarity as Cultural Artifacts"  
Readings, "Culture Wars and Cultural Studies"  
Nelson and Watt, "Between Meltdown and Community: Crisis and Opportunity in Higher Education"  
Ross, "Global U"  
Bousquet, "Students Are Already Workers"  
Jones, "A University, If You Can Keep It: James W. Carey and the University Tradition"  
Giroux, "Resisting Difference: Cultural Studies and the Discourse of Critical Pedagogy"  
Henderson, "Communication Pedagogy and Political Practice"  
Watt, "What Would an Ethical Graduate Program Be?"  
Liu, "Where Is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities?"

**24 Apr            Public policy, public intellectuals, and the public sphere**

Bennett, "Putting Policy Into Cultural Studies"  
Morris, "Politics Now (Anxieties of a Petty-Bourgeois Intellectual)"  
Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* [selections]  
West, "The Postmodern Crisis of the Black Intellectuals"  
Graff, "Academic Writing and the Uses of Bad Publicity"  
Moran, "Cultural Studies and Academic Stardom"  
Bérubé, "Bite Size Theory: Popularizing Academic Criticism"  
Bérubé, "Cultural Criticism and the Politics of Selling Out"  
Penley, "From NASA to *The 700 Club* (With a Detour Through Hollywood): Cultural Studies in the Public Sphere"  
Carey, "Configurations of Culture, History and Politics"  
Halberstam, "Low Theory"  
Pezzullo, "Contextualizing Boycotts and Buycotts: The Impure Politics of Consumer-Based Advocacy in an Age  
    of Global Ecological Crises"

**1 May Cultural studies: So now what? (part 1)**

Rustin, Massey, Gilbert, and Hall, "Cultural Studies Now"

Storey, "Cultural Studies: The Politics of an Academic Practice; an Academic Practice as Politics"

Smith, "Introduction" [from *The Renewal of Cultural Studies*]

Couldry, "The Project of Cultural Studies: Heretical Doubts, New Horizons"

Turner, *What's Become of Cultural Studies?* [selections]

Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* [selections]

Chang, Clarke, Seigworth, Miller, and Gunkel, "Forum: On *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* by Lawrence Grossberg"

Grossberg, "Will Work for Cultural Studies"

Hall, "The Neo-Liberal Revolution"

Hall and Back, "At Home and Not at Home"

**7 May (NOT a scheduled class day)**

**DEADLINE: full-length draft of research paper**

**8 May Cultural studies: So now what? (part 1)**

Rodman, "Cultural Studies Is Ordinary"

Rodman, *Why Cultural Studies?* [manuscript version]

**14 May Workshop for final research papers (1:30-3:30p)**

## Reference list

[PDF readings only]

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- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. Diversity and disciplinarity as cultural artifacts. In *Disciplinarity and dissent in cultural studies*, ed. Cary Nelson and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, 23-36. New York: Routledge.
- Balsamo, Anne. 1991. Feminism and cultural studies. *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 24(1): 50-73.
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- Bérubé, Michael. 1994. Pop goes the academy: Cult studs fight the power. In *Public access: Literary theory and American cultural politics*, 137-160. New York: Verso, 1994.

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- Caldwell, John Thornton. 2008. Industrial reflexivity and common sense. In *Production culture: Industrial reflexivity and critical practice in film and television*, 1-36. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
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- Carey, James W. 1997. Reflections on the project of (American) cultural studies. In *Cultural studies in question*, ed. Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding, 1-24. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
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- Carey, James W. 2006. Configurations of culture, history and politics. In *Thinking with James Carey: Essays on communication, transportation, history*, 199-225. New York: Peter Lang.
- Carrington, Ben. 2001. Decentering the Centre: Cultural studies in Britain and its legacy. In *A companion to cultural studies*, ed. Toby Miller, 275-297. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
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- Chang, Briankle G.; John Clarke; Gregory J. Seigworth; Toby Miller; and Ann Hetzel Gunkel. 2011. Forum: On *Cultural studies in the future tense* by Lawrence Grossberg. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 8(3): 307-329.
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