

# Comm 8211: Critical communication studies

Spring 2017

Prof. Gil Rodman (rodman@umn.edu) office hours (Ford 284): TuTh10-11a, Th1:30-3:30p and by appointment

## Course description and objectives

There are a lot of “critical” territories to be found within Communication Studies, and this seminar doesn’t pretend to cover all of them. We will focus on the intellectual and political projects that travel under the banner of “cultural studies”: i.e., one of the most important forms that critical communication studies takes these days.

From the 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 definitions of the project. Cultural studies isn’t completely unbounded, but 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 its 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 the project’s current shape and circumstances. We won’t be able to cover all of the subjects that matter to cultural studies today, but we will spend several weeks surveying some of the most significant. And we won’t be able to map out cultural studies’ current trajectories with absolute precision, but we will engage the question of where the project 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 books are available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union.

- Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*
- Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*

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

## Moodle

If you’re on the course roster, you should already have access to the course’s Moodle site. Point your web browser to the U’s main Moodle page (<https://ay16.moodle.umn.edu/>), log in, and select the “COMM8211\_001S17” 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 forum for mutual support and feedback with respect to your final paper

More information on Moodle can be found at <http://it.umn.edu/course-management-system-moodle-related/students>

## 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 or pad out your schedule with “empty” credit hours. As such, I’m assuming that grades are *not* a primary 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 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 productively to our conversations about the assigned readings. I do *not* expect you to demonstrate perfect and immediate mastery of the issues raised by our readings -- questions and requests for clarification are perfectly welcome contributions -- but I *will* expect you 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 (24 Jan-2 May). For *at least 10* of those 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 aim 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:

14 Feb	Preliminary 1-on-1 meeting
21 Feb	250-500 word proposal
6 May	Full-length draft
13 May (10:30a-12:30p)	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 written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities) with enough lead time for accommodations to be arranged.
- University policy prohibits sexual harassment as defined in the December 1998 policy statement (see <http://policy.umn.edu/hr/sexualharassment>). Questions or concerns about sexual harassment should be directed to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (274 McNamara).
- As some of you may know, I'm the founder/manager of CULTSTUD-L: a cultural studies listserv that has more than 2600 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.gilrodman.com/cultstud-l/>

## Reading/assignment schedule

[Readings should be completed in advance of the dates listed. Except for the Said and Hall books, all the readings will be available on the course Moodle site.]

### 17 Jan Introduction and overview

no readings

### 24 Jan Intellectual work as/and politics

Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*

Morris, "Politics Now (Anxieties of a Petty-Bourgeois Intellectual)"

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

Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies"

Farred, "Thinking in the Vernacular"

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

### 31 Jan Looking back

Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*

Williams, "The Future of Cultural Studies"

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

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

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

### 7 Feb Looking forward

Rodman, *Why Cultural Studies?*

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

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

Grossberg, "Will Work for Cultural Studies"

Morris, "On the Power of Exhilaration"

### 14 Feb Birmingham: In the beginning?

#### DEADLINE -- research paper meeting

Williams, "Defining a Democratic Culture"

Hoggart, "Contemporary Cultural Studies"

Hall, "Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems"

Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms"

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

Hall, "Stuart Hall Interview -- 2 June 2011"

Clarke, "Cultural Studies: A British Inheritance"

Gray, "Formations of Cultural Studies"

Editorial Team, "Introduction" [*CCCS Selected Working Papers*, vol. 2]

### 21 Feb Birmingham: On second thought

#### DEADLINE -- research paper proposal

Vincent, "Space for Cultural Studies: Conversations With the Centre"

Gray, "Cultural Studies at Birmingham 1985-2002 -- The Last Decades"

Carrington, "Decentring the Centre: Cultural Studies in Britain and Its Legacy"

Lewis, "Racializing Culture Is Ordinary"

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"

Hebdige, "The Worldliness of Cultural Studies"

Little, "On Not Being at the CCCS"

Brunsdon, "On Being Made History"

Hall, "Stuart Hall Interviewed by Kieran Connell"

**28 Feb Race, ethnicity, and nation**

Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media"  
hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination"  
Stabile, "Criminalizing Black Culture"  
Awkward, *Burying Don Imus* [selections]  
Wald, "American Studies and the Politics of Life"  
Gilroy, "The Crisis of 'Race' and Raciology"  
Hall, "New Ethnicities"  
Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities"  
Ang, "On Not Speaking Chinese: Diasporic Identifications and Postmodern Ethnicity"  
Campbell, "Policing the Irish: Whiteness, 'Race' and British Cultural Studies"

**7 Mar Gender, sexuality, and feminism**

Brunsdon, "A Thief in the Night: Stories of Feminism in the 1970s at CCCS"  
McRobbie, "The Es and the Anti-Es: New Questions for Feminism and Cultural Studies"  
Balsamo, "Feminism and Cultural Studies"  
Stabile, "The Nightmare Voice of Feminism: Feminism and Cultural Studies"  
Crimp, "Portraits of People With AIDS"  
Henderson, "Queer Visibility and Social Class"  
McRobbie, "Notes on the Perfect"  
Littler, "The Rise of the 'Yummy Mummy': Popular Conservatism and the Neoliberal Maternal in Contemporary British Culture"  
Radway, "Interview With Janice Radway"  
Halberstam, "Go Gaga: Anarchy, Chaos, and the Wild"

**14 Mar NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK**

**21 Mar Popular culture and media studies: Theory**

Jenkins, McPherson, & Shattuc, "Defining Popular Culture"  
Grossberg, "Mapping Popular Culture"  
Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"  
Hall, "Reflections Upon the Encoding/Decoding Model"  
Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'"  
Rodman, "Notes on Reconstructing 'the Popular'"  
Morris, "Banality in Cultural Studies"  
Radway, "Reception Study: Ethnography and the Problems of Dispersed Audiences and Nomadic Subjects"  
Grossberg, "Wandering Audiences, Nomadic Critics"  
Felski, "The Role of Aesthetics in Cultural Studies"  
Morley, "Cultural Studies, Common Sense and Communications: The Infra-Ordinary, the Interdisciplinary and the Particular"  
Miller, "Cinema Studies Doesn't Matter; or, I Know What You Did Last Semester"

**28 Mar Popular culture and media studies: Analysis**

Radway, "Mail-Order Culture and Its Critics: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Commodification and Consumption, and the Problem of Cultural Authority"  
Kipnis, "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*"  
Berlant, "The Face of America and the State of Emergency"  
Acland, "Matinees, Summers, and the Practice of Cinemagoing"  
Morris, "Learning From Bruce Lee: Pedagogy and Political Correctness in Martial Arts Cinema"  
Hesmondhalgh, "Audiences and Everyday Aesthetics: Talking About Good and Bad Music"  
Rodman & Vanderdonck, "Music for Nothing or, I Want My MP3: The Regulation and Recirculation of Affect"  
Hayes & Rodman, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Film: What Does It Mean to Be a Black Film in Twenty-First Century America?"  
Littler, "#Damsplaining and the Unbearable Whiteness of Merit"  
Morgan Parment, "Media as a Spatial Practice: *Treme* and the Production of the Media Neighbourhood"

#### **4 Apr            Everyday life and cultural space(s)**

Seigworth, "Everyday Life Is Always Somewhere Else"

Seigworth, "Sound Affects"

Gregg, "A Mundane Voice"

Highmore, "Feeling Our Way: Mood and Cultural Studies"

Morris, "Things to Do With Shopping Centers"

Wise, "Home: Territory and Identity"

Spigel, "Object Lessons for the Media Home: From Storagewall to Invisible Design"

Sharma, "Because the Night Belongs to Lovers: Occupying the Time of Precarity"

Hartley, "Housing Cultural Studies: A Memoir of Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, and Terence Hawkes"

Mayer, "Signs of Home"

Thompson, "The Micro-Ethics of Everyday Life"

#### **11 Apr            Technology and digital culture**

Slack & Wise, *Culture and Technology* [selections]

Carey, "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet"

Rodman, "The Net Effect: The Public's Fear and the Public Sphere"

Sterne, "Format Theory"

McPherson, "Why Are the Digital Humanities So White? or Thinking the Histories of Race and Computation"

Davis, "E-Books in the Global Information Economy"

Ross, "Technology and Below-the-Line Labor in the Copyright Over Intellectual Property"

Striphas, "Algorithmic Culture"

Ingraham & Reeves, "New Media, New Panics"

#### **18 Apr            The university, academic labor, and critical pedagogy**

Striphas, "Acknowledged Goods: Cultural Studies and the Politics of Academic Journal Publishing"

Jones, "A University, If You Can Keep It: James W. Carey and the University Tradition"

Ross, "The Mental Labor Problem"

Striphas, "Performing Scholarly Communication"

Henderson, "Communication Pedagogy and Political Practice"

Watt, "What Would an Ethical Graduate Program Be?"

Liu, "Where Is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities?"

Jackson, "Theorizing Production/Producing Theory (Or, Why Filmmaking Really Could Count as Scholarship)"

Morris & Hjort, "Instituting Cultural Studies"

Hjort & Morris, "Institutional Culture: A Manifesto With Rules"

Davidson, "Why Higher Education Needs a Paradigm Shift"

#### **25 Apr            Public policy, public intellectuals, and the public sphere**

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"

Giroux, "Cultural Studies, Public Pedagogy, and the Responsibility of Intellectuals"

Halberstam, "Low Theory"

Ang, "Stuart Hall and the Tension Between Academic and Intellectual Work"

Fredriksson, "Copyright Culture and Pirate Politics"

Quinn, "Occupy Wall Street, Radical Neoliberalism, and New York's Hip-Hop Moguls"

#### **2 May            So what now?**

Hall, "The Neo-Liberal Revolution"

Grossberg, "There Are No Guarantees in History: A Cultural Studies Perspective on the Current Crisis"

. . . plus readings t.b.d.

**6 May            NO CLASS -- DEADLINE: full-length draft of research paper (10:30a)**

**13 May           Workshop for final research papers (10:30a-12:30p)**

## Reference list

[PDF readings only]

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