

Lecture course:

## **Introduction to British Cultural Studies** **(Einführung in die britische Landeskunde und Kulturwissenschaft)**

WED 16-18 // Philosophiegebäude, H 5

"Culture is the software that determines our lives" (Rainer Winter).

British cultural studies want to understand how this 'software' shapes us and our social environment. However, cultural studies are just as interested in how *we* – as cultural, social and political *agents* – shape the 'software.' The goal is to throw fresh light on ways of representing, feeling and acting that are usually taken for granted. In consequence, cultural studies are practical and theoretical at the same time.

The lecture will provide an introduction to both the specific project of British cultural studies *and* to the study of British culture, society and history more generally. We will unravel key concepts in cultural theory and discuss a selection of exemplary cultural phenomena.

Assessment will be through a written exam.

➔ Please see the end of this document for information on HOW TO PREPARE for this lecture course even before the beginning of the teaching period and on the accompanying READING AND DISCUSSION COURSE ('begleitende Übung').

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### **PROGRAMME:**

**AR** = ASSIGNED READING ➔ These texts constitute the MINIMUM READING REQUIREMENT for the lecture course. Please read & prepare them carefully and *before* the respective meetings.

**FR** = FURTHER READING ➔ These are texts for FURTHER STUDY. The category comprises two different kinds of materials: (1) basic stuff and study aids intended to help students *make sense of the contents of the course* // (2) texts intended to assist students in the process of *deepening their knowledge and widening their horizon*.

! Please note that the first lecture will take place only in the *second* week of the lecture period.

## ***Phase 1: The Basics of Cultural Studies***

### 30/04 **Introduction**

– The resonance of the term 'culture'

AR:

- CATHERINE BELSEY, "General Editor's Preface," Readers in Cultural Criticism Series; qtd. from *The Body*, ed. Tiffany Atkinson (Palgrave, 2005) vii-viii. [WueCampus.]
- STEPHEN GREENBLATT, "Culture," *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 2nd ed. (U of Chicago P, 1995) 225-232. [WueCampus.]

### 07/05 **The goals and frameworks of cultural studies**

– Idealist and materialist paradigms of emancipation

AR:

- [From:] CHRIS BARKER, "An Introduction to Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice*, 3rd ed. (Sage, 2008) 1-12. [WueCampus.]
  - The section selected from this seminal book is the first part of the introduction, comprising the following subchapters: "Concerning this Book" / "The Parameters of Cultural Studies" / "Key Concepts in Cultural Studies."

FR:

- SIMON DURING, introduction, *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 1999) 1-28. [WueCampus.]
  - This is a slightly advanced but helpful text. Everybody should read at least the first couple of pages (c. 1-5), where During describes the beginnings of 'British cultural studies' in the post-war period.
- It is also a useful to read the missing sections from BARKER's introductory chapter: "The Intellectual Strands of Cultural Studies" (12-25); "Central Problems in Cultural Studies" (25-31); "Questions in Methodology" (31-38).

### 14/05 **'British' cultural studies**

– The historical contexts of the project & its shifting perspectives on modern culture

Preparation for the lecture:

- Go back to the readings for last week; pay particular attention to the beginning of During's introduction (see above).
- Do further research on the history of (British) cultural studies. → All participants should be knowledgeable at least in relation to the following topics, terms and names: Britain during and after the Second World War / Centre for Contemporary

Cultural Studies / Richard Hoggart / Raymond Williams / Stuart Hall /  
*The Uses of Literacy* (1957) / *The Popular Arts* (1964).

FR:

- KENNETH O. MORGAN, "The Second World War" & "The Post-War World," *The Oxford History of Britain*, rev. ed., ed. Morgan (Oxford UP, 2001) 621-634 & 634-649. [Wue-Campus; a later edition of the entire book is also accessible online through UBW.<sup>1</sup>]  
 → These two subchapters from *The Oxford History of Britain* offer a concise introduction to British history from the late 1930s to the late 1960s, thus sketching the political and social context from which British cultural studies emerged. This is also a good introduction to our history sessions (which come later in the course of the semester).

## 21/05 Signs & sign systems

– The semiotic foundations of cultural analysis

AR:

- ALEIDA ASSMANN, "Signs," [= chapter 1 of:] *Introduction to Cultural Studies: Topics, Concepts, Issues*, 2nd ed. (Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2019) 29-54. [[Access the book online through UBW!](#)]

→ Focus on the following sections:

- "1.1 The Use of Signs as an Anthropological Basis" (29-38)
- "1.3 Types of Signs" (42-48)
- "Summary" (53)

→ Assmann's book (which was originally published in German) offers a somewhat 'conservative' introduction to cultural studies – one that is grounded less in the politicized ethos of British cultural studies than in a German tradition of 'Kulturwissenschaft' and 'Kulturphilosophie.' At the same time, Assmann's take on the topic is informed by the concerns of literary studies. Exactly for these reasons, however, the book is a helpful resource for most students of English and American Studies. Assmann's *Introduction to British Cultural Studies* will prove useful not only in relation to semiotics but also in relation to many other topics we are going to touch on in the course of the semester. It is actually a good idea to read the entire book.

FR:

- DAVID CHANDLER, *Semiotics for Beginners* (1994-2023), web. [[LINK](#)]

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<sup>1</sup> The university library (UBW) is making a rising number of books available online. To access the e-books one often needs to be hooked up to the university's intranet through a VPN tunnel (see website of the Information Technology Centre (Rechenzentrum) for further information).

## ***Phase 2: Between cultural studies & area studies***

### 28/05 **Mapping Britain**

– 'Real' and imaginary geographies

- [Sections on Britain and the British Isles from:] JODY SKINNER, "The Where (Geography)," *Anglo-American Cultural Studies*, 3rd ed. (UTB / Narr Francke Attempto, 2022). [[Access the book online through UBW!](#)]

→ The first half of the chapter deals with the geography of the USA. Please focus on the second half of the chapter (21-36). In spite of Skinner's effort to get through to his readers, the chapter will of course prove useless unless you draw on maps and other sources to pin down and flesh out the information provided.

→ Skinner's book offers a good but (very) basic introduction to both area studies (i.e. 'Landeskunde') and cultural studies. Other chapters from the book may also be useful for participants of our lecture course. If you are logged on to the university's intranet, the entire book can be accessed online.

### 04/06 **History (part I)**

a) History and the cultural work of narratives

b) From Stonehenge to the Tudors: Key structures and constructions of pre-modern history

AR:

- [From:] JÜRGEN KAMM and BERND LENZ, "Grundzüge britischer Geschichte," *Großbritannien verstehen* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004):
  - "Das Römische Britannien" (11-13)
  - "Die Angelsächsische Zeit" (14-15)
  - "Das Normannische Reich" (15-17)
  - "Die Tudor-Herrschaft" (17-21)

[WueCampus.]

FR:

- See titles in the course bibliography (section on Culture, history, and life). If you are looking for an Anglophone alternative to Kamm and Lenz, the relevant sections from Skinner's history chapter are a good option.
- JONATHAN CULLER, "Narrative," *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford UP, 1997) 82-93. [WueCampus.]

→ Culler's text can be drawn on as an introduction to the 'story' aspect of hiSTORY as well as to narrative as a key cultural resource. Culler's short book is generally very useful for students of English and American Studies.

**11/06 Discourse, power and subjectivity**

– Masters, servants and slaves in the culture and literature of early modern England

Preparation for the lecture:

- See the HANDOUT provided on WueCampus.
  - The handout features a short but distinctly demanding literary text. Participants will not be able to follow the lecture without preparing this text beforehand.

FR:

- SARA MILLS, introduction, *Discourse, The New Critical Idiom*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2004) 1-25. [Accessible online through UBW.]
  - Highly recommended (as most of the books in the New Critical Idiom series). If you are logged on to the university's intranet, the entire book can be accessed online.
- ZENO ACKERMANN, "'Being your slave': Shakespeares Sonette und die Artikulation der Sklaverei," *Zeitsprünge: Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit* 18.3/4 (2014): 369-396. [WueCampus.]

**18/06 History (part II)**

– Making the British Empire and Making modern Britain

AR:

- [Sections on modern British history from:] JODY SKINNER, "The When (History)," *Anglo-American Cultural Studies*, 72-90. [[Access the book online through UBW!](#)]
  - This section from Skinner's book offers a quite basic account of English/British history from the Tudors and the English revolutions of the 17th century to the present. The text cannot count as scholarly historiography, but it has the advantage of being very much 'to the point.' – Use the text as a jumping board for your own explorations of the modern (and postmodern) history of England, Britain and the British empire!

FR:

- JAMES VERNON, *Modern Britain: 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge UP, 2017), vol. 4 of *The Cambridge History of Britain*.
  - Vernon offers a comprehensive survey of modern British history that puts the emphasis on social history and social politics. Designed for (slightly advanced) students, this is certainly the best book of its kind. Sadly, the book cannot be accessed online (but there are copies both in the departmental and in the central library).
- For additional reading see *The Oxford History of Britain* (especially the two samples provided above for the lecture on 15/11!) & the course bibliography.

### ***Phase 3: Towards 'now'***

#### 25/06 **Popular culture and the media I**

AR:

- [From:] CHRIS BARKER, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (SAGE, 2008):
  - Opener of the chapter "Questions of Culture and Ideology" (39)
  - "Culture with a Capital C: The Great and the Good in the Literary Tradition" (40-41)
  - "Culture Is Ordinary" (41-46)
  - "High Culture / Low Culture: Aesthetics and the Collapse of Boundaries" (46-54)

→ The text quotes from or points at many other important texts and mentions a variety of 'big names.' Please do further reading/research in order to be in the know about the respective scholars, books and concepts.

FR:

- THEODOR W. ADORNO, "Résumé über Kulturindustrie" (1963); rpt. in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2003) 337-345. // English translation: "Culture Industry Reconsidered." *New German Critique* 6 (1975): 12-19. [Both on WueCampus.]

→ A very important 'real' (i.e. not explicitly student-oriented) text. It is not so difficult to read, however, and highly recommended.

#### 02/07 **Popular culture and the media II**

AR:

- JONATHAN CULLER, "Literature and Cultural Studies," *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford UP, 1997) 42-54. [WueCampus.]

→ This text is relatively easy to read but still substantial. If required, use it as an introduction to the assigned text by Barker. Note that Culler's text is a chapter from an introduction to *literary* studies and should be read as an 'excursion' into the field of cultural studies undertaken from that direction. Culler's short book is generally very useful for students of English and American Studies.

#### 09/07 **(Im)Migration, identity, and the politics of representation**

AR:

- ASSMANN, "Identity," [= chapter 7 of] *Introduction to Cultural Studies: Topics, Concepts, Issues* (Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2019) 191-217. [[Access the book online through UBW!](#)]

→ Focus on the following sections:

- [Opener/introduction] (191-192)

- "Person" (192-194)
- "Subject" (194-197)
- "Collective identity – race, nation, culture" (204-207)
- TONY KUSHNER, "Immigration and Race Relations in Postwar British Society," *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change*, ed. Paul Johnson (Longman, 1994) 411-426. [WueCampus.]

FR:

There is lots of further reading. In terms of historical information, I would recommend the relevant chapters in Vernon's *Modern Britain* (see above). In terms of cultural scholarship more narrowly speaking, one of the most important 'classics' is Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (originally published in 1987). See the course bibliography for additional titles.

#### 16/07 **Wrap-up / Conclusion**

No assigned reading for this week.

TUE, 29/07, 10-12: **Final test** (room TBA)

! Please note that the final test takes place in the second 'examination week' – on a different weekday and at a different time than the regular meetings of the course.

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#### **READING & DISCUSSION COURSE ('BEGLEITENDE ÜBUNG'):**

This introductory lecture is accompanied by a reading and discussion course ('begleitende Übung'). This additional course – which takes place immediately after the lecture and in the same room – provides an opportunity of engaging with the texts, contents and concepts discussed in the lecture in a less formal and more dialogical setting. Attending the reading and discussion course has been shown to significantly improve participants' performance in the final test. The course is therefore strongly recommended for all participants of the lecture.

**PREPARING FOR THE COURSE / BACKGROUND READING:**

The introduction to cultural studies should not be considered as 'simply' a lecture but rather as a lecture *course* in the full sense of the term. Indeed, to achieve good results in the final test – and to lay the foundations for their further course of study – **participants will need to constantly prepare for lectures** (by going back to the last lecture and by doing the reading assigned for the upcoming lecture). It is also vital that participants **do some preparatory work even before the beginning of the teaching period.**

➔ Start out by closely familiarizing yourself with this syllabus, then do an adequate amount of research and thinking on the basic keywords (such as 'culture,' 'cultural studies,' and 'British cultural studies') and continue by reading respective texts listed in the programme above (the texts by BELSEY, GREENBLATT, BARKER, and DURING listed for the first two meetings are especially recommended).

A SEPARATE BIBLIOGRAPHY (provided in the virtual course room on WueStudy) gives detailed suggestions for reading and research. The following titles are suggested as particularly helpful resources for starting out in the field:

- The most reliable handbook for students is **CHRIS BARKER's *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice***. The book is now available in the 5th edition (Sage, 2016), which features Emma A. Jane as a second author. However, earlier editions may also be consulted.
- The following book is written in German; it offers a quite concise but also intellectually somewhat sophisticated introduction to cultural studies: **OLIVER MARCHART, *Cultural Studies*** (UVK / UTB, 2008). [Accessible online through UBW.]
- Another useful introduction – one that approaches cultural scholarship from a perspective informed by literary studies – is **ALEIDA ASSMANN's, *Introduction to Cultural Studies: Topics, Concepts, Issues***, 2nd ed. (Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2019). [Accessible online through UBW.]
- For a brief 'graphic' introduction to the topic see: **ZIAUDDIN SARDAR and BORIN VAN LOON, *Introducing Cultural Studies: A Graphic Guide*** (2010; Icon Books, 2013).
- For information on British history, institutions and life see especially:
  - **JÜRGEN KAMM and BERND LENZ, *Großbritannien verstehen*** (Primus, 2004).
  - **JODY SKINNER, *Anglo-American Cultural Studies***, 3rd ed. (Francke / UTB, 2022). [Accessible online through UBW.]

! Note that the books by Assmann, Marchart and Skinner can be accessed **online** through the university's intranet and the website of the university library (use the VPN tunnel from outside the university).