Introduction to Cultural Studies

This lecture course will introduce concepts and methods for the study of culture. Beginning with an overview of central categories such as signs, media, body, time, space, memory and identity, it will then proceed to analyse and interpret a wide variety of practices, texts, media products and popular culture items from the fields of British Studies and Postcolonial Studies in order to demonstrate how theoretically informed 'readings' of culture can enhance our understanding of the world.

Downloads (PDF): http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/angl/
(>Downloads>II Lecture Courses>Introduction to Cultural Studies)
(see also >III Seminars>HS/OS Key Terms for Studying Culture
>Terminology / Case Studies)

A video recording of each lecture will be available under
http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/timms /

Lecture 1:

Introduction:
Cultural Studies, *Kulturwissenschaft* and the Study of Culture

1) Components of 'Culture Studies'
2) What is Culture?
3) How to Observe Culture (Locations of Culture)
4) Course Overview / Course Organisation
(Tutorials etc.)

1) Components of 'Culture Studies'

The Field in Germany:

'Landeskunde' – 'Cultural Studies' – 'Kulturwissenschaften'

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'Culture Studies'? – 'The Study of Culture'?

'Landeskunde':

- traditionally concerned with the factual/historical/cultural knowledge taught as necessary 'background' for the philological study of modern (i.e. national) literatures
- more recently: regional studies

'Cultural Studies':

- '(British) Cultural Studies':
  integrative analysis of culture as institutionalised in Great Britain after WW II on Marxist foundations;
  the focus is on problems of race, class, and gender in contemporary popular culture (Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Birmingham)
  (cf. Christian Huck, "British Cultural Studies," in: Middeke 2012, 271-286).
- 'American Studies':
- interdisciplinary approach to analysing American culture and society as established and developed in US since the 1940s; strong historical focus
  (cf. Winfried Fluck, "American Cultural Studies," in: Middeke 2012, 287-300)

'Kulturwissenschaft':

- term used to designate the new orientation in the humanities emerging in Germany from the 1980s onwards
  (beginning with a shift from 'Volkskunde' to anthropology/ethnology and then spreading to literary studies in particular: 'the cultural turn', followed by various 'cultural turns' such as 'the performative turn', 'the iconic turn', 'the spatial turn', etc. as described in Bachmann-Medick 2016)
- focus is on analysis and interpretation of cultural sign systems and on intercultural competence

► current discussion is drawing on all four traditions, but tends to neglect their differing cultural functions:

- 'Landeskunde': positivistic accumulation of factual knowledge

- 'British Cultural Studies': critical intervention in cultural affairs in GB

- 'American Studies': original affirmative function supporting emergence of American identity according to the melting pot ideal only recently replaced by critical focus on gender/race/class

► 'Kulturwissenschaften' are the most explicitly theoretical enterprise; they attempt to make the most recent stages of theoretical reflection (structuralism, poststructuralism/deconstruction, semiotics, media theory) viable in cultural analysis (→ culture as semiotic/textual/medial 'web' which constitutes reality) and to widen traditional perspectives by establishing new interdisciplinary contacts between the philologies and historiography on the one hand and disciplines which have a longer tradition of cultural analysis such as anthropology, ethnology, sociology on the other.

► 'The Study of Culture' as a favoured new term
(cf. Ansgar Nünning, "Transnational Approaches to the Study of Culture," in: Middeke 2012, 261-270; Birgit Neumann & Ansgar Nünning, eds., *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture*. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2012)

► 'Culture Studies' seems to be another viable alternative for the specifically German mixture of Landeskunde/Regional Studies, Cultural Studies and *Kulturwissenschaft*

but:

I find myself frequently troubled by the word *culture* as a noun but centrally attached to the adjectival form of the word, that is, *cultural*. When I reflect on why this is so, I realize that much of the problem with the noun form has to do with the implication that culture is some kind of object, thing, or substance, whether physical or metaphysical. This substantialization seems to bring culture back into the discursive space of race, the very idea which it was originally designed to combat. Implying a mental substance, the noun *culture* appears to privilege the sort of sharing, agreeing and bonding that fly in the face of the facts of unequal knowledge and the differential prestige of lifestyles, and to discourage attention to the worldviews and agency of those who are marginalized or dominated. Viewed as a physical substance, culture begins to smack of any variety of biologisms, including race, which we have recently outgrown as scientific categories [...]

If *culture* as a noun seems to carry associations with some sort of substance in ways that appear to conceal more than they reveal, *cultural* the adjective moves one into a realm of differences, contrasts, and comparisons that is helpful. This adjectival sense of culture, which builds on the context-sensitive, contrast-centered heart of Saussurean linguistics, seems to me one of the virtues of structuralism that we have tended to forget in our haste to attack it for its ahistorical, formal, binary, mentalist, and textualist associations.

The most valuable feature of the concept of culture is the concept of difference, a contrastive rather than substantive property of certain things. [...] [I]ts main virtue is that it is a useful heuristic that can highlight points of similarity and contrast between all sorts of categories, classes, genders, roles, groups, and nations. When we therefore point to a practice, a distinction, a conception, an object, or an ideology as having a cultural dimension (notice the adjectival use), we stress the idea of situated difference, that is, difference in relation to something local, embodied, and significant. This point can be summarized in the following form: culture is not usefully regarded as a substance but is better regarded as a dimension of phenomena, a dimension that attends to situated and embodies difference. Stressing the dimensionality of culture rather than its substantiality permits our thinking of culture less as a property of individuals and groups and more as a heuristic device that we can use to talk about difference.

Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* [1996]. Minneapolis/London: U of Minnesota P, 2010: 12-13.

2) What Is Culture?

a) Culture as a Historical Term:

emphatic/rhetorical usage since the 18th century focused on marking social hierarchies and distinctions such as

- 18th C: Western/European culture vs. other cultures
- 19th C: bourgeois culture vs. working-class culture
- 20th C: multiplication/dissolution of hierarchies marked
  by 'culture'; individualisation of 'frames'

Since the end oft he eighteenth century, the concept of culture has carried a reflexive component. It states in all applications that other cultures are possible. […] The concept was able to justify divisions and could at the same time, through a multiplicity of contrary concepts, leave open what it actually meant.

Since the end of the nineteenth century we have witnessed a second wave of noteworthy downward expansions. From culture it was discovered that other cultures existed further below. Native cultures had been a concept for some time. The interest in worker cultures came along. […] Today there are drug cultures and the like. […]

Nevertheless the concept still has a view to the top, something that seems to motivate the move to the bottom. It promises something 'better' […] It furnishes […] a legitimation of distinctions. It is, or at least was until recently, a concept of the middle. But even this immanent limitation by hierarchic connotations could be in the process of dissolution. It presumes standardization, for example, a typical lifestyle or a limited milieu, something that is less and less present. […]

[T]he trend seems to be headed towards the individualization of 'frames' that we take for ourselves.

Niklas Luhmann, *Observations on Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998: 100-101.

b) Culture as a Systematic/Analytic/Functional Term:

culture as 'collectively structured meaning', i.e. the totality of
meaning constructions and symbolic orders in a given society
→ standardisations of
feeling / thought / communication / behaviour
→ three dimensions:
the material dimension (artefacts)
the social dimension (society and its institutions)
the mental dimension (norms and values, structures of feeling and
thinking, collective memory, knowledge)
→ MEDIA – COMMUNICATION – COGNITION

► between 'cognitive autonomy' and 'social orientation' culture emerges as an
'order of symbolic orders'

Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Kognitive Autonomie und soziale Orientierung: Konstruktivistische Bemerkungen zum Zusammenhang von Kognition, Kommunikation, Medien und Kultur*.Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1994.

The combined effect of all communication media – language, dissemination media, and the symbolically generalized media – is to condense what we might overall call 'culture'. Condensation in this context means that the meaning used remains the same through reuse in various situations (otherwise there would be no reuse), but is also confirmed and enriched with implications that can no longer be reduced to a simple formula. This suggests that the overflow of meaning is itself the result of condensation and confirmation of meaning, and that communication is the operation that thus creates its own medium.

Niklas Luhmann, *Theory of Society*. Vol. 1: Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012: 248.

Culture is not
"the sum of all values […] that furnish a society",
but
"a continuous description which makes available possible counter-values to all values."
Culture is
"generating, processing and reducing ambiguity."
"Cultural objections to social stuctures are social structures themselves,"
but culture provides the
"possibility of observing society from within society as if one were observing it from the outside."

Dirk Baecker, *Wozu Kultur*? Berlin: Kadmos, 2000: 9/81/83 (my translation)

3) How to Observe Culture (Locations of Culture)

a) The Practice Paradigm
→ analyses routines of action as symptoms of implicit formations of knowledge in a given culture
(e.g. rituals, customs, organisations, institutions etc.)
→ influenced by phenomenology/hermeneutics with regard to relationships between subjectivity/intersubjectivity and practice and by structuralism with regard to the existence of structures of meaning beyond (inter-)subjectivity (plus philosophical influences: Wittgenstein, pragmatism)

b) The Text Paradigm
→ analyses discursive and semiotic processes and structures in a given culture (texts, discourses, media)
→ influence of theory developments outlined under the heading 'The Linguistic Turn', i.e. from de Saussure to Derrida/Foucault

c) The Autopoiesis Paradigm
→ analyses mental constructions in cognitive systems
→ influence of neuro-physiology, cybernetics, cognitive psychology

Andreas Reckwitz, "Praxis – Autopoiesis – Text: Drei Versionen des Cultural Turn in der Sozialtheorie." In: Andreas Reckwitz, Holger Sievert, Hrsg., *Interpretation, Konstruktion, Kultur: Ein Paradigmenwechsel in den Sozialwissenschaften*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999, 19-49.

Fields of culture-oriented theory and practice:

- Gender studies, postcolonial theory, New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Historical Discourse Analysis, systems-theoretical approaches
- literary anthropology (e.g. history of mentalities, functions of fictionality)
- cultural performance (art and other instances of symbolic practice, narrativity, the visual turn)
- memory and identity (the dialectics of identity and alterity, the poetics and politics of cultural memory)
- intertextuality/intermediality
- new forms of cultural history and/or culturally informed literary history

Defining Cultural Studies:

I do not think cultural studies is *about* culture, although culture is crucial to its project. Cultural studies is not the study of texts or textuality; it does not aim to interpret of judge particular texts or kinds of text. It is not about reading social power off of texts, or reading social realities as texts. It is not the practice of reading the world in a grain of sand. Nor is it the study of national cultures, nor a new approach to language or area studies, although I do think it has something to say to all of these. Nor can it be described by a focus on mass culture, or popular culture, or subaltern cultures. It is not about theory as a metaphor for or a guarantee of the inscription of power, whether in texts of social life.

I might begin by describing cultural studies this way: it is concerned with describing and intervening in the ways cultural practices are produced within, inserted into, and operate in the everyday life of human beings and social formations, so as to reproduce, struggle against, and perhaps transform the existing structures of power. That is, if people make history but in conditions nor of their own making, cultural studies explores the ways this process is enacted with and through cultural practices, and the place of these practices within specific historical formations. But this too is inadequate, so I might try again.

Cultural studies describes how people's everyday lives are articulated by and with culture. It investigates how people are empowered and disempowered by the particular structures and forces that organize their everyday lives in contradictory ways, and how their (everyday) lives are themselves articulated to and by the trajectories of economic, social, cultural, and political power. […]

Yet it seems to me that even this misses something crucial about cultural studies; in fact, it misses precisely that which is the heart of cultural studies, what defines its specificity and its passion. […] [I]nstitutional life is […] the most immediate context of our work as intellectuals, and it cannot be separated from its relations to other proximate and concentric contexts of social, political, economic, and cultural life – that is, from the entirety of social formation.

I believe that the project of cultural studies […] involves a commitment to a particular practice of intellectual-political work, and to the claim that such intellectual work matters both inside and outside the academy.

Lawrence Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense.* Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2010: 8-9.

4) Course Overview

27th April	Lecture 1	Introduction: Cultural Studies, *Kulturwissenschaft*, and the Study of Culture	

4th May   Lecture 2   Guest Lecture by
Lawrence Grossberg
(University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill):
"Making Culture Matter, Making Culture Political"

11th May   Lecture 3   Mimesis – Representation – Signs
18th May   Lecture 4   Changing Media Changing Cultures /
Culture as Text / Textual Culture

(25th May: Ascension Day)

1st June   Lecture 5   Guest Lecture by
Angelika Zirker (University of Tuebingen):
"High and Popular Culture: Theatre in Britain"

(8th June/15th June: Whitsun Holiday/Corpus Christi)

22nd June   Lecture 6   Visual Culture 1: Painting & Photography
29th June   Lecture 7   Visual Culture 2: Film

6th July   Lecture 8   The Body – Time – Space
13th July   Lecture 9   Memory and Identity

20th July   Lecture 10   Conclusion: Studying Cultures

27th July   Written Exam

Bibliography Lecture 1:

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