Cultural Studies I

Doing Cultural Studies

University College Maastricht

2017/2018, period 4

HUM1003

Course design: Louis van den Hengel

Cover image: Lady Gaga, *Telephone* video (2010)
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INTRODUCTION

Cultural Studies I: Doing Cultural Studies

1. Course Coordinator

Dr. Louis van den Hengel is Assistant Professor in the Department of Literature and Art and the Centre for Gender and Diversity at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Maastricht University. He has a background in Classics with a specialization in Classical Archaeology, and holds a PhD (cum laude) in Gender Studies with a specialization in feminist and cultural theory. His current research addresses the interrelations between affect, materiality, and time in contemporary performance art; his special focus in this research is the work of Serbian and New York-based artist Marina Abramovic. His most recent publications include contributions to journals such as *Criticism: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* and to edited volumes such as *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (Routledge, 2017) and *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture* (Routledge, 2018).

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Communication
The online course environment on the Student Portal and email will be the principal means of official communication and making announcements for this course. The online course environment will also be used to post links to extra-curricular material. Make sure to check both the Student Portal and your university email regularly.

2. Course Description

Objectives
The main aims of this course are:

- To acquaint you with some of the foundational texts and formative debates that have shaped Cultural Studies as an academic field of inquiry.
- To familiarize you with key concepts, themes, and topical debates within contemporary Cultural Studies.
- To introduce you to some of the central theoretical approaches within Cultural Studies, including critical theory, semiotics, material culture studies, gender theory, and critical posthumanism.
- To provide you with a variety of interdisciplinary critical perspectives to examine the diverse and often contested meanings of cultural objects and processes.
- To teach you to develop your own analyses of culture through oral and written modes of communication.

Course description
Cultural Studies is a wide-ranging interdisciplinary inquiry into the ways in which culture, especially contemporary culture, operates and functions. Cultural Studies seeks to explore the manifold ways in which people produce, circulate, use, and transform culture, in a wide variety of geographical and sociopolitical locations. It centers on the question of how the world is socially, materially, and culturally constructed, particularly in relation to the themes of identity and difference, power and politics.

These definitions, however, remain broad and do not take us very far. Even if we assume that we know exactly what 'culture' or 'contemporary culture' entails, it can be studied in various ways – sociologically, historically, economically, philosophically, and so on. It has always been difficult to pin down exactly the boundaries of Cultural Studies as a coherent academic discipline. Nevertheless, to introduce the topics and forms of analysis developed within this field, we can point to two features that characterized Cultural Studies when it first emerged, primarily in Great Britain in the 1950s and 1960s (During 2008).

The first characteristic of early Cultural Studies was that it studied culture in relation to individual experiences and everyday lives. Early pioneers of Cultural Studies such as Richard Hoggart, Edward Thompson, and Raymond Williams, stressed the ordinary, 'lived' character of culture as 'a whole way of life'. Often focusing on the experiences and life-practices of the working class, these writers have produced anthropological, historical, and sociological understandings of particular cultural practices that have, in turn, legitimized the study of popular culture more generally.

Second, Cultural Studies has always been a politically engaged form of analysis. It has its origins in the so-called 'New Left' – 'a Marxian but not communist movement, working towards socialism outside of trade unions or formal political parties and aimed at emancipating lifestyles' (During 2008: 2). Cultural Studies has always tried to develop ways of thinking about culture and power that can serve as vectors of political change and social justice. This engagement with politics, according to Stuart Hall (1992) and many others, distinguishes Cultural Studies from older and other forms of cultural criticism.

The notion of culture as 'ordinary', and the understanding of political questions as central to the appreciation and the analysis of culture, is at the core of Cultural Studies as an academic field. These features stand in direct contrast to the elitist notion of culture as 'High Culture' – the great classical works of literature and art and their supposedly 'civilizing' qualities. Unlike traditional Literary Studies or Art History, the emergent field of Cultural Studies did not limit 'culture' to Shakespeare, Rembrandt, and their peers, but also – and primarily – started dealing with 'less elevated' cultural artifacts. From fashion advertisements to an episode of *Glee*, from the role of the iPod in the distribution of global inequalities to Lady Gaga – Cultural Studies zooms in on the most mundane, yet deeply meaningful, practices of life.

* * *

This course aims to introduce you to several key thinkers, topics, and critical frameworks in Cultural Studies. The first two tasks present you with some of the foundational texts and formative debates within the field, inviting you critically to examine – and historicize – the concept of 'culture'. These tasks cover fundamental texts and ideas by thinkers such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, and Stuart Hall, associated with the Frankfurt School and the Birmingham School respectively. Subsequently, we will take a closer look at several key concepts and topical debates within contemporary Cultural Studies. We will address themes such as consumer culture, advertising, and social networks; the power and politics of representation; material culture and identity; cultural performances of gender; and the transnational cultural flows of globalization. By reading contemporary classics by such authors as Zygmunt Bauman, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, Henry Giroux, Neil Badmington, and Joanna Zylinska, you will familiarize yourself with a variety of critical approaches to cultural theory. Lastly, by looking at the interrelated topics of critical posthumanism, art, and technoscience, the final two tasks of the course will explore some of the most recent and stirring debates within Cultural Studies today, setting out new directions and territories for the future development of the field.

References

During, Simon (2008). Introduction. In Simon During (Ed.), *The cultural studies reader* (third edition) (pp. 1-30). London/New York: Routledge.

Hall, Stuart (2008). Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies. In Simon During (Ed.), *The cultural studies reader* (third edition) (pp. 33-44). London/New York: Routledge.

3. Literature

There is no textbook for this course. Each task is accompanied by a list of required readings, followed by a specification of where this reading can be found:

'**E-reader**'	These readings can be downloaded from the E-reader ('Reference List'), available through the online course environment within the Student Portal.
'**E-journal**'	These readings need to be downloaded from an electronic journal, which can be accessed either by following the link provided in the E-reader or through the UM library catalogue.
'Reading Room'	These readings are available for photocopying at the UCM Reading Room, in a folder that contains all required readings. Please put the articles back into the folder as soon as you have photocopied them.
'**Online**'	These readings are freely available online. Follow the hyperlink in the E-reader or in the course manual.

4. Lectures

This course will facilitate six lectures to deepen your knowledge of the tasks and themes under discussion. Lectures are not mandatory, but they are directly related to and relevant for the tasks under discussion. For that reason, the lecture schedule is attuned to the schedule of the tutorials. In this way, the lectures help you to prepare for your post-discussions, as well as for the exams.

Please note that the schedule below may be subject to change.

Course Week	Date	Lecturer	Title
1	February 6	Louis van den Hengel	The Matter of Culture: Introductory lecture
	Carnival break: February 27 – March 3, 2018		
2	February 20	Louis van den Hengel	Semiotic Analysis and the Politics of Representation
3	No lecture		
4	March 6	Louis van den Hengel	Drag, Camp and Gender Subversion
5	March 13	Codruta Pohrib	(Post)communist Materialities
6	March 20	Louis van den Hengel	For the Love of *Zoe*: Bioart and Posthuman Ethics
7	**Exam week: March 26 – March 30, 2018**		

6. Assessment

The assessment of each student will be based on the following:

- *Participation* in tutorial group meetings / performance as discussion leader (pass/fail and +/- 0.5 participation regulation). See further below under 'Participation and attendance requirements'.
- A mid-term *take-home exam* consisting of open questions about the first five tasks of the course. The exam will be posted in the course environment on the Student Portal on Friday, March 2, 17.00.
  Deadline: Friday, March 9, 2018 – 17.00
  Upload your exam onto SafeAssignment. You do not need to hand in a hardcopy.
  Weight: 50% of the final grade.
- Two *writing assignments* connected to one or more of the last five tasks of the course of 1500-1750 words each (excluding bibliography).
  (See the Appendix for more details)

Deadline: Friday, March 30, 2018 – 17.00
Weight: 2 x 25 = 50% of the final grade.

For an overview of the writing assignments, including the basic grading criteria, see the Appendix to this course manual.

Resit policy
Students have passed the course when the final grade (i.e. the average of all partial results) is a 6 or higher. When the course has been passed, a resit cannot be taken. Students who failed the course or did not participate in one or more of the module's exams need to take a resit for the failed exam(s). The resit version of the midterm take home exam will contain new questions; the writing assignments will remain unchanged unless the course coordinator specifies otherwise.

7. Participation and Attendance Requirements

While a 100% attendance in PBL groups is expected, students must attend at least 85% of all tutorial meetings to meet the attendance requirements for this course. This means that it is not allowed to miss more than two tutorial meetings.

Attendance does not mean just being there, but actively participating in the group discussions (see below). Attendance also means being on time. If you are more than ten minutes late, your attendance for that meeting will not be counted.

Participation
This course will operate only through your consistent attendance and sustained, active participation in discussions. As noted above, your participation will be assessed with a pass or a fail. In order to pass, you have actively to participate during group meetings. Active participation means:

- to study the required readings and prepare for discussion.
- properly to fulfill your role as discussion leader – e.g. by determining and structuring the agenda beforehand; starting and stimulating the group discussion; ensure equal and balanced contributions of all group members; asking questions; reformulating the contributions of other students where necessary; check whether the texts and points of debate were understood by all group members; summarizing the main points of a discussion; etc.
- properly to fulfill your role as a note-taker – e.g. by making clear notes and/or diagrams in order to visualize and summarize the exchange of information during a tutorial group meeting.
- to contribute to class discussions in a spirit of constructive and engaging dialogue – i.e. by posing or answering questions; demonstrating an active listening attitude; evaluating the literature; criticizing certain assumptions and arguments; providing and receiving feedback; etc.

Please note that you must bring your copy of the readings and your notes to the tutorial meetings. Since we will engage in close examination of the texts that we read,

you need to have your text with you in order to be properly prepared to engage in class discussions.

Participation assessment
Your participation will be assessed by your tutor. If you participate normally, this will not have an impact on your grade. Students who do not participate well enough will receive a warning by their tutor. Might this not be sufficient to improve the performance, the tutor can take away 0.5 points of your final grade for the course (also if this makes the difference between passing and failing). Students who perform *exceptionally* well during tutorial meetings can be rewarded with 0.5 points added to their final grade.

Your participation will be assessed according to the following criteria: communication skills, analytical skills, team work, time management skills, professional attitude, and attendance record. Note that outstanding skills regard the performance in your tutorial *group*: within PBL, it is not merely individual contributions to a discussion that matter, but rather the extent to which such contributions help to improve the functioning of the group as a whole.

Additional assignment because of insufficient attendance
Students who have failed to meet the attendance requirements, but who have not missed more than 30% of the group meetings, may be eligible to do an additional assignment to receive credits for the course. These students should fill out the request form 'Additional assignment because of insufficient attendance' at the Office of Student Affairs and make sure to the coordinator/tutor that their absence was justified by a valid reason. The course coordinator decides if the student will be given an additional assignment.

8. No-Laptop Policy

The use of laptops, tablets, mini-computers, smartphones, and other wireless devices is not allowed during tutorial meetings.

Why do we maintain this policy? It may seem counter-intuitive to ban laptops and similar devices from a 21st-century classroom – after all, technology is an established part of academic life today. But there are good reasons to do so. Many students (and tutors) experience the presence of laptops as distracting. Students who engage with their devices during class (whether this concerns note-taking or inappropriate activities such as checking Facebook) frequently distract themselves, and those students sitting near them. Although people like to think that they are able to 'multitask' effectively, research suggests that such distractions or interruptions – however brief – divide mental attention, which in turn disturbs quantitative and qualitative processing of incoming information. Put more simply, 'multitasking' in class can actually make you slower and less smart.

Research has indeed shown that the use of laptops and similar devices does not facilitate but in fact *hinders* effective learning:

> Research on learning has consistently and overwhelmingly demonstrated that even the proper use of laptops does not further student learning, but actually distracts students and lessens student engagement. While students using laptops who focus exclusively on class may take more extensive notes, the ability to consult such extensive notes does not compensate for students' lessened classroom participation as they devote more attention to the taking of those notes. Students using laptops may become better at taking notes, but they do not absorb as much of the material in class, nor do they engage in classroom exchanges as frequently, thus depriving the rest of the class of their potential contribution. Other research shows that when students use electronic devices while studying, their learning and understanding is 'shallow' rather than deep and that they are less likely to do well on tests and assignments. Finally, research has shown that the process of writing longhand is superior for creating memory than typing. (Source: click here)

In short, the more students use their laptops in educational settings, the lower their class performance tends to be. Even proponents of laptops have therefore argued that their in-class use needs to be carefully controlled. Also, experience shows that the presence of laptops and other wireless devices can stand in the way of the kind of polite social behavior that is required for effective class discussions.

If you are interested in some of the research that supports these points, here is an accessible article that explains why note-taking on a laptop may not be a good idea, and here is the link to the scientific research on which that article is based. This article discusses the negative effects of in-class laptop use on student learning; and this blog contains links to several studies that confirm the negative effects of (attempts at) multitasking in learning environments such as classrooms or lectures.

Exemptions to this 'no-laptop rule' are possible if there are legitimate (e.g. medical) reasons that might require the in-class use of a laptop or other electronic device (e.g. as an assistive technology for learning disabilities). If this is the case, please contact the course coordinator before the start of the course.

9. Tutorial Method

The tutorial groups will follow the standard method of Problem Based Learning (PBL) as taught at UCM, in which each of the tasks in this course manual is treated according to the 'seven-step approach'. The tasks and assessments are made with this model in mind. The approach is summarized below.

First meeting – Pre-discussion

1. Clarifying concepts; make sure that you do not only take the text of the task into account in your pre-discussion, but also the titles of the readings that are listed.
2. Defining the problem (outcome: one 'umbrella' problem statement).
3. Analyzing the problem: brainstorming.
4. Systematic classification (what belongs to what, B is a sub-question of A etc.).
5. Formulating learning objectives.

Between meetings

6. Self-study: finding answers to learning goals and preparation by presenters.

Next meeting – Post-discussion

7. Reporting (post-discussion)

Tutorial group meetings (with the exception of the first) follow a standard format:
Post-discussion. In the first hour, students discuss the literature on the basis of learning objectives formulated in group discussions in the previous meeting.
Pre-discussion. In the second hour, the group deals with a new task by formulating a problem statement that provides the input for a brainstorming session. This discussion is concluded by formulating learning objectives that provide the basis for the presentations in the following meeting.

This format for instruction and learning requires students to fulfill three roles. Each meeting requires a discussion leader who serves as a chairperson, and a note-taker who takes notes on the whiteboard. The *discussion leader* should not only establish an agenda and keep order, but also guide the discussion, stimulate students to participate, summarize important conclusions, and make sure that the literature is well understood by everybody. The *note-taker* jots down points for clarification and learning objective(s) for further study on the whiteboard. *Ordinary group members* have read the literature and have thought about the learning objectives. They are required to contribute to the discussion on the basis of this preparation. In order to fulfill these roles effectively, students must be *well* prepared. Finally, students are personally responsible for making their own minutes of the pre- and post-discussion.

Discussion leader and note-taking roles will be distributed either during the first session, or successively, as agreed between the group and the tutor.

10. Centre for Gender and Diversity

This course has been developed by the Centre for Gender and Diversity at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Maastricht University. In case you are interested in enriching your education and life with other courses in the field of Gender and Diversity Studies, Literary Studies or Cultural Studies, our staff offers the following courses at UCM:

HUM1003	Cultural Studies I: Doing Cultural Studies
HUM1012	Pop Songs and Poetry: Theory and Analysis
HUM1014	Great Novels: 1850-present
HUM2003	The Making of Crucial Differences
HUM2011	Cultural Studies II: Visual Cultures
HUM2018	Cultural Diversity in a Globalizing World
HUM2047	The Future of Literature
HUM3036	Narrative Media
HUM3040	Crucial Differences in the 21st Century
HUM3050	(Surfing) the Silver Tsunami: A Cultural Critique of our Aging World

TASKS

TASK 1
Foundations of Cultural Studies I: The Birmingham School

The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed an increase in scholarly attention to culture. The most notable outcome of this 'cultural turn' was the emergence of Cultural Studies as a new academic field. Cultural Studies focuses on the pivotal role of culture in the modern world. It seeks to explore the relations between a wide variety of cultural practices, institutions, beliefs, everyday lives, and material, social, economic, and political structures in various geographical and historical locations. But what do we mean by 'culture'?

'Culture,' writes Raymond Williams – one of the pioneers of Cultural Studies – 'is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (1985: 87). Culture is indeed a complex and contested concept, which can be defined in many ways. How would you define or describe culture? Discuss the possible definitions of culture that are listed below (Buikema & Meijer 2004: 4-6). How are they interrelated? Do they match your definitions?

> (1) The way in which the word culture is used in its broadest sense, distinguishes it from nature. 'Culture' is civilization, and refers to the system of institutions, rules, norms and values that make people behave in a certain (desired) manner. There can be strong normative overtones: 'We have to defend Western Civilization.' To be civilized nowadays means being rational and sufficiently informed, being able to distinguish between personal and general matters of interest and to exercise self-control. It refers to an ongoing process of refining and forming oneself. A civilization 'polishes' a society or individual.
>
> (2) A second use of the term culture stems from anthropology and refers to the customs and rituals that organize daily life in a certain society. Culture is 'the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, customs, morals, law, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society,' the anthropologist Edward Tylor wrote in 1871. The rise of anthropology is partly the reason for the distinction made between 'civilized' and 'primitive' cultures. Later developments in the field of anthropology have criticized this as Eurocentrism. The distinction between so-called higher and lower cultures gave way to the notion of *different* cultures. Cultures came to be seen as equal in the sense that every culture is a coherent system of shared meanings.
>
> (3) A third meaning of the concept of culture is limited to its link with the arts and sciences. In this restricted sense, culture refers to the intellectual and especially the artistic production that forms the basis for a community to identify itself as a group, and often also as a nation state. Culture here represents the most beautiful and outstanding human creations in the fields of philosophy, music, literature, theatre, dance, visual arts, and so on. In this context, the British critic Raymond Williams (1981) speaks of culture as a monument, culture with a capital C.

Can Cultural Studies be the study of artworks by Van Gogh or Monet, and of novels by Shakespeare and Woolf? But have they not been studied before, by art historians and literary theorists respectively? Is Cultural Studies the study of the ways of life of particular people? But have anthropologists not been doing this already for centuries? In what ways, then, is Cultural Studies different from other academic fields?

* * *

The so-called Birmingham School, associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies founded at the University of Birmingham in 1964, is one of the key institutional locations from which Cultural Studies has emerged. Especially under the directorship of Stuart Hall from 1968 to 1979, Cultural Studies became a distinct interdisciplinary field of inquiry. The initial focus of the Birmingham School was on 'lived' culture with a strong focus on class cultures. From this perspective, the purpose of cultural analysis is not so much to define what culture 'is', but rather to ask how and to what extent certain concepts of culture are used.

Indeed, certain forms of cultural knowledge and cultural consumption serve as markers of social status:

> For instance, knowledge of fine arts, literature, and upper-class etiquette signals wealth and prestige. Such knowledge may also serve as a passkey for entrance into elite social life. Bourdieu […] calls this passkey *cultural capital* because it is cultural knowledge that can be translated into real economic gains (Bryson 1996: 885).

Culture, in this view, is not a stable and definable object, but rather a dynamic field where social identities and relations of power are negotiated and renegotiated. Early scholars of Cultural Studies such as Dick Hebdige were especially interested in the relation between mainstream culture and so-called subcultures that are placed outside conventional social norms. Hebdige argued that subcultures such as Teddy boys, skinheads, and punks, challenge dominant ideologies through symbolic forms of resistance, while at the same time 'dominant forces of mass media and commerce work to incorporate, regulate and negotiate subcultural "looks", fashions or styles' (Jasper 2004: 92).

Required reading

• Barker, Chris (2008). Questions of culture and ideology (excerpt). In *Cultural studies. Theory and practice* (third edition) (pp. 39-54). London: SAGE. **E-reader**

• Hall, Stuart (2008). Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies. In Simon During (Ed.), *The cultural studies reader* (third edition) (pp. 33-44). London/New York: Routledge. **E-reader**

• Jasper, Agnes (2004). 'I am not a goth!' The unspoken morale of authenticity within the Dutch Gothic subculture. *Etnofoor*, 17(1-2), 90-115. **E-reader**

References

Bryson, Bethany (1996). 'Anything but heavy metal.' Symbolic exclusion and musical dislikes. *American Sociological Review*, 61.5, 884-899.

Buikema, Rosemarie & Meijer, Maaike (Eds) (2003). *Cultuur en migratie in Nederland. Kunsten in beweging, 1900-1980*. Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers.

Tylor, Edward (1994). *The collected works of Edward Burnett Tylor, 1832-1917*. London/Tokyo: Routledge/Thoemmes Press.

Williams, Raymond (1981). *Culture*. London: Fontana.

Williams, Raymond (1985). *Keywords. A vocabulary of culture and society*. New York: Oxford University Press.

TASK 2
Foundations of Cultural Studies II: The Frankfurt School

In the age of mass media, new means of production have made it possible to reproduce cultural artifacts over and over again. You can decorate your room with reproductions of famous artworks, like the Mona Lisa. And you don't need to go to a live concert to listen to the latest song by, say, Adele or anyone else – you can just download it or listen online.

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940)

Andy Warhol, *Thirty are better than one* (1963)

The German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was one of the first to take a close look at the implications of such new means of reproduction. His essay 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' (1936) is a foundational text in the history of Cultural Studies. Its central thesis is that the meaning of art changes with the possibility of its technological reproduction. Photography, for example, destroys what Benjamin calls the 'aura', the authenticity, of an artwork. From a photographic negative, one can make any number of prints: it makes no sense anymore to ask for the 'authentic' print.

In contrast to Benjamin, members of the *Frankfurter Schule* like Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) were very critical about the consequences of the new means of reproduction, and about what they perceived as the 'popular' or 'mass culture' that was the outcome. According to these writers, such a *culture industry* leads to the standardization of culture and leaves no room for the freedom and autonomy that is needed for geniuses to create High Art. The 'culture industry', moreover, produces a docile, uncreative, uncritical public.

Adorno, for example, was very critical about the popular music of his time. He writes:

> The whole structure of popular music is standardized, even where the attempt is made to circumvent standardization. […] The general types of hits are standardized: not only the dance types, the rigidity of whose pattern is

> understood, but also the 'characters' such as mother songs, home songs, nonsense or 'novelty' songs, pseudo-nursery rhymes, laments for a lost girl. Most important of all, the harmonic cornerstones of each hit – the beginning and the end of each part – must beat out the standard scheme. This scheme emphasizes the most primitive harmonic facts no matter what has harmonically intervened. [As a result], the hit will lead back to the same familiar experience, and nothing fundamentally novel will be introduced (Adorno 1992 [1941]: 212).

With these types of critical studies, Adorno and his colleagues contributed to the founding of Cultural Studies, as they were among the first to focus on culture as an object of study – however negatively. Later scholars have turned away from several aspects of the theories of the *Frankfurter Schule*, and have questioned, among others, the rigid distinction between 'high art' and 'popular culture'. Instead of making value judgments, they want to analyze how existing value judgments are structured.

Today, the notion of a 'culture industry' does not necessarily refer to the work of the *Frankfurter Schule*, but points to the production of popular culture – music, film, television, fashion – by transnational capitalist corporations. In this sense, the concept is useful to think through 'issues of who owns and controls the institutions of economy, society and culture and the way in which the corporate ownership and control of the culture industries moulds contemporary culture' (Barker 2004: 46). The examination of culture industries is consequently a necessary part of Cultural Studies in general.

Required reading

• Adorno, Theodor g Horkheimer, Max (1993 [1946]). The culture industry. Enlightenment as mass deception. In Simon During (Ed.), *The cultural studies reader* (second edition) (pp. 31-41). London/New York: Routledge. **Reading Room**

• Benjamin, Walter (1997 [1936]). The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction (excerpts). In Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay & Keith Negus, *Doing cultural studies. The story of the Sony walkman* (pp. 125-128). London: SAGE. **E-reader**

• Franklin, Marianne I. (2002). Reading Walter Benjamin and Donna Haraway in the age of digital reproduction. *Information, Communication & Society*, 5.4, 591-624. **E-journal**

References

Adorno, Theodor (1992 [1941]). On popular music (excerpt). In Antony Easthope & Kate McGowan, *A critical and cultural theory reader* (pp. 211-223). Toronto/Buffalo: Toronto University Press.

Barker, Chris (2004). *The SAGE dictionary of cultural studies*. London: SAGE.

TASK 3
The Politics of Looking

We live in cultures that are increasingly saturated by visual images, produced and experienced through a wide variety of media and in many different contexts. Every day, we engage in practices of looking to make sense of the world.

To look, according to Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, is more than just passively to observe and recognize the world that surrounds us. Looking is an activity comparable to speaking or writing: a practice with a sense of purpose, direction, and choice. And like other practices, looking is embedded in relationships of power:

> 'To willfully look or not is to exercise choice and compliance and to influence whether and how others look. To be made to look, to try to get someone else to look at you or at something you want to be noticed, or to engage in an exchange of looks entails a play of power. Looking can be easy or difficult, pleasurable or unpleasant, harmless or dangerous.'
>
> 'We invest the visual artifacts and images we create and encounter on a daily basis with significant power – for instance, the power to conjure an absent person, the power to calm or incite to action, the power to persuade or mystify, the power to remember' (Sturken & Cartwright 2009: 9).

To explore the meaning of images, consequently, is to recognize how they are produced and experienced within social dynamics of power. To make sense of the politics of representation, Cultural Studies makes use of *semiotics*, the study of signs and signification that has developed from (post)structuralist linguistics.

* * *

Consider, in this context, the history of Sarah Baartman. Baartman was born to a Khoisan family in 1789 in the Gamtoos Valley in what is presently the Eastern Cape of South Africa. She was a slave of a Dutchman, Hendrick Cesars, who in turn worked for the British doctor Alexander Dunlop. When her owners went back to Europe, they persuaded Sarah to go with them, promising her that she would become rich and prosperous. She left for London in 1810.

Under the name of 'The Hottentot Venus', Sarah Baartman was exhibited as a freak show attraction around Britain, entertaining people by shaking her nude buttocks, and demonstrating what in European eyes were highly unusual bodily features. An attempt to free her from her exhibitors failed, and the image of the Hottentot Venus quickly swept through British popular culture.

In 1814, Baartman was taken to Paris, France, where she performed in theatres and was subsequently sold to an animal trainer named Réaux. She then became the object of scientific and medical research by Henri de Blainville, professor at the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle. Even after her early death in 1815, Baartman's body remained an object for medical investigation, as well as for the public gaze. Her skeleton, brain,

and sexual organs were displayed in the Musée de l'Homme until as recently as 1985. After much legal debates, Baartman's remains were brought back to her homeland in 2002, and she was buried on August 9 of the same year, more than 200 years after her birth.

As a representative of the cruel history of colonialism, Baartman has become an icon in South Africa and beyond. Artists, writers, documentary film makers, and movie directors have been inspired by her story – a recent example being the French movie *Black Venus* (French: *Vénus noire*) directed by Abdellatif Kechiche (2010). But what kinds of 'practices of looking' do such images and representations entail? How to look at Sarah Baartman today?

Required reading

• Sturken, Marita & Cartwright, Lisa (2001). Practices of looking. Images, power, and politics. In Marita Sturken & Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of looking. An introduction to visual culture* (first edition) (pp. 10-43). Oxford: Oxford University Press. **Reading Room**

• Buikema, Rosemarie (2009). The arena of imaginings. Sarah Bartmann and the ethics of representation. In Rosemarie Buikema & Iris van der Tuin (Eds), *Doing gender in media, art and culture* (pp. 70-84). London/New York: Routledge. **E-reader**

Reference

Sturken, Marita & Cartwright, Lisa (2009). *Practices of looking. An Introduction to Visual Culture* (second edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

TASK 4
Consumer Cultures

To 'consume' means to use or to ingest something. Consumer cultures have developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries out of the rise of modernity and the emergence of capitalism as an economic global force. Processes of cultural consumption in (late-)capitalist and postmodern societies concern the manifold ways in which commodities and signs circulating on the global market are used and digested.

Visual images play a key role in contemporary consumer societies. Most notably, images are central to the operation of commerce through advertisements. The globalization of communication technologies and visual media such as television and the Internet has placed the visual imagery of advertising at the heart of a worldwide consumer culture that is constantly expanding and changing.

United Colors of Benetton advertisement (1989)

Raymond Williams, one of the founders of Cultural Studies, has described advertising as a 'magic system'. Drawing on Karl Marx's belief that capitalism turns commodities into 'fetishes' – a process referred to as *commodity fetishism* – Williams argues that advertising is 'magic', because it turns commodities into glamorous signifiers: a car, for example, becomes a sign of masculinity (Williams 1993 [1980]).

Advertisements, then, speak a language of transformation: they (often implicitly) promise consumers that their lives will improve if they buy a particular product or brand. At the same time, the imagery of advertisements, and the use they make of markers of gender, sexuality, and 'race', is often highly complex, multilayered, and ambiguous.

Consider the images accompanying this text. What do they represent? And what exactly do they ask us to consume?

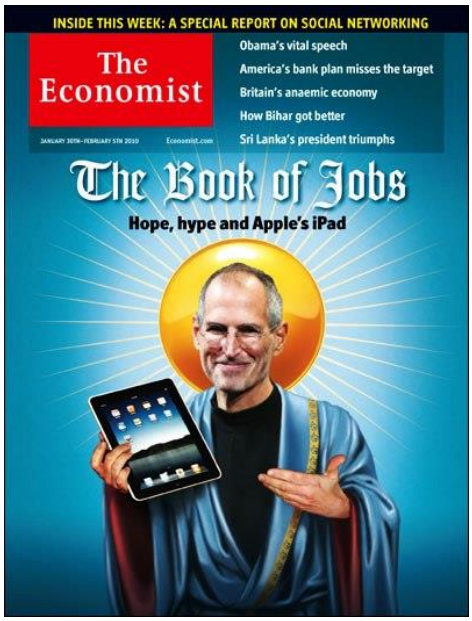


Image of Steve Jobs on the cover of *The Economist* (January/February 2010)

Today, we are confronted with advertising images on a daily basis, in television commercials, in magazines, on billboards, on clothing, on websites, through social media such as Facebook or YouTube, and in many other contexts. We have grown so accustomed to the presence of ads, brands, and logo's that often we don't even notice them anymore. Marketers, in turn, are constantly reinventing the ways in which they address their consumers, for example by using viral marketing techniques.

Images have gained an unprecedented power in shaping the relationship between the self and society in an increasingly commodified world. According to Henry Giroux, 'mass-market advertisers have seized upon the cultural logic of postmodernism to integrate politics and difference within the stylized world of aesthetics and consumption' (Giroux 1994: 3-4). What does this mean?

Dolce & Gabbana advertisement (2007)

Required reading

• Sturken, Marita & Cartwright, Lisa (2009). Advertising, consumer cultures, and desire. In *Practices of looking. An introduction to visual culture* (second edition) (pp. 265-293). Oxford: Oxford University Press. **Reading Room**

• Barker, Chris (2004). 'Postmodernism' and 'Postmodernity'. In *The SAGE dictionary of cultural studies* (pp. 156-159). London: SAGE. **E-reader**

• Giroux, Henry A. (1994). Consuming social change. The United Colors of Benetton. In *Disturbing pleasures. Learning popular culture* (pp. 3-24). London/New York: Routledge. **E-reader**

• Roos, Jerome (October 7, 2011). iDolatry. Obituary for a capitalist revolutionary. In *ROAR (Reflections on a Revolution*), http://roarmag.org/2011/10/steve-jobs-obituary-for-a-capitalist-revolutionary/. **Online**

Reference

Williams, Raymond (1993 [1980]). Advertising. The magic system. In Simon During, *The cultural studies reader* (second edition) (pp. 410-423). London/New York: Routledge.

TASK 5
Subjectivity Fetishism

For a long time, the concept of 'consumption' has had very negative connotations, also within Cultural Studies. One example is the Frankfurt School's pessimistic analysis of consumption and mass culture, which was addressed in task 2. Today, practices of consumption are one of the major subjects of analysis in Cultural Studies. Consumption-oriented studies focus especially on the interconnections between consumption, identity formation, and the generation of meaning. Although the production of popular music, television, film, and fashion lies in the hands of transnational capitalist corporations, individuals actively negotiate the meaning of objects – and of their own 'selves' – as they make use of the commodities available to them.

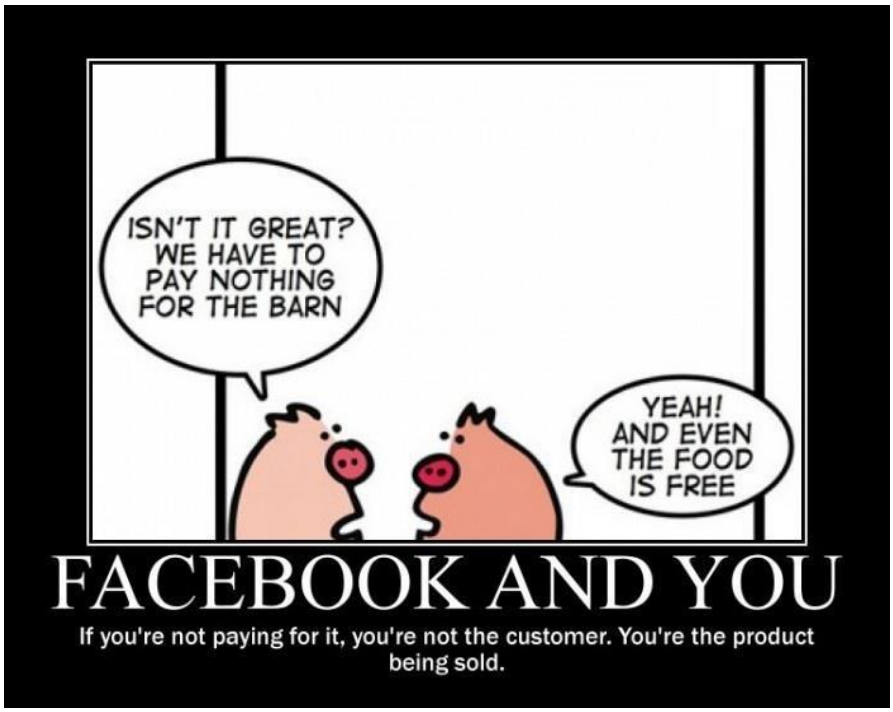
Consumption is thus also a mode of self-production (Smith Maguire & Stanway 2008). We all know statements like: 'Clothes make the (wo)man' or 'You are what you eat / Man ist, was man isst'. The increasing availability of mass-produced goods makes for an increasingly elaborate expression of styles as distinctions between individuals and between groups. At the same time, as philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2006: 3) points out, such individual styles are intimately tied to commercial profit-making, turning 'I shop therefore I am' into the leading refrain of our times.

The Polish-British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues that we have reached a new stage in consumerist society, in the sense that people *themselves* have become consumer goods: they treat and judge themselves and others as commodities. Coining the term *subjectivity fetishism*, Bauman (2007: 12) writes that 'in the society of consumers no one can become a subject without first turning into a commodity.' What does this mean?

Consider, in this context, the role that social networking sites such as Facebook play in the construction of identities and the life stories that shape them. How do social media affect the ways in which individuals represent themselves, how they relate to themselves and to others both online and offline?

Since its launch in 2006, Facebook has established itself as the predominant social network, currently hosting 2 billion monthly active users, 66% of whom log in every day. Its pervasive reach allows Facebook to shape and reshape cultural practices of 'selves' and communities, as well as relations of friendship, in significant ways. How are individual and social identities produced through Facebook? To what extent does

this production of 'selves' reflect the corporate mandates of the social networking site? And to what extent does Facebook enable new configurations of identity, friendship, and care?



Required reading

• Bauman, Zygmunt (2007). Introduction. Or, the most closely guarded secret of the society of consumers. In *Consuming life* (pp. 1-24). Cambridge: Polity. **E-reader**

• McNeill, Laurie (2012). There is no "I" in network. Social networking sites and post/human autobiography. *Biography. An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 35.1, 65-82. **E-reader**

• Hamington, Maurice (2010). Care ethics, friendship and Facebook. In Dylan E. Wittkower (Ed.), *Facebook and philosophy. What's on your mind?* (pp. 135-145). Chicago/La Salle: Open Court. **E-reader**

References

Braidotti, Rosi (2006). *Transpositions. On nomadic ethics*. Cambridge: Polity.

Smith Maguire, Jennifer & Stanway, Kim (2008). Looking good. Consumption and the problems of self-production. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11.1, 63-81.

TASK 6
Performances of Gender

Visuality – the conditions of how we engage in practices of looking and give meaning to what we see – is 'one of the key modes by which gender is culturally inscribed' (Jones 2003). Visual media such as the Internet, television, magazines, advertisements, and film reflect and construct common cultural ideas and ideals of masculinity and femininity. At the same time, visual culture can function as a site where prevailing notions of gender may be challenged or undermined.

Popular culture is a particularly vital field where cultural norms of gender are reproduced, appropriated, contested, and transformed. Consider the following examples:

• In the late 1990s, soccer player David Beckham became an icon of the then-fashionable 'metrosexuality'. In many advertisements, his body was eroticized and depicted in ways traditionally associated with the visual representation – and objectification – of women's bodies.

David Beckham in an ad for Emporio Armani underwear (2008)

• Lady Gaga, who has been hailed in the *Sunday Times* as 'the future of pop', is one of the biggest icons of popular culture today. Her fast-changing public image often involves the performance of an outrageous femininity or the blurring of gender boundaries with a sensibility traditionally described as *camp*. So, while in 2009 the artist both confirmed and denied the rumors that she had a penis, her 2010 music

video *Telephone* combines a visual extravaganza of sex, violence, and fashion with an abundance of *camp* and *queer* imagery.

Lady Gaga, still from the music video *Telephone* (2010)

American theorist Judith Butler has argued that gendered identities are a kind of performance, a 'doing' rather than a 'being'. Her notion of (gender) performativity has become centrally important to contemporary cultural theory, and has been widely utilized within Cultural Studies. In her influential book *Gender trouble* (1990), Butler explains that we perform masculinity or femininity according to certain cultural scripts and social norms. The most pervasive norm for the cultural construction of gender, according to Butler, is the norm of heterosexuality. In societies where heterosexuality is the norm or standard, 'real' or 'proper' men are required to desire women, and vice versa.

At the same time, however, Butler points to the possibility – and importance – to 'do' gender differently, in ways that *subvert* prevailing norms. Drag kings and queens, for example, perform gender in exaggerated and parodic ways that expose the constructedness of gender and sexuality itself. Also, visual artists, such as the American photographers Catherine Opie and Del LaGrace Volcano, produce ambiguous images of gender that move beyond the binary categories of 'masculinity' and 'femininity,' or that – to use the words of cultural theorist Jack Halberstam – make gender 'unreadable' (Halberstam 1996: 185).

Required viewing

• Take a look at the website of Del LaGrace Volcano: www.dellagracevolcano.com.

Required reading

• Alsop, Rachel, Fitzsimons, Annette & Lennon, Kathleen (2002). Judith Butler: 'The queen of queer'. In *Theorizing gender* (pp. 94-105). Cambridge: Polity. **E-reader**

• Horn, Katrin (2010). Camping with the stars. Queer performativity, pop intertextuality, and camp in the pop art of Lady Gaga. *Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies*, 11. **Online**
Link: http://www-copas.uni-regensburg.de/articles/issue_11/11_11_text_horn.php.

• Halberstam, Judith (1997). The art of gender. Bathrooms, butches, and the aesthetics of female masculinity. In Jennifer Blessing (Ed.), *Rrose is a rrose is a rrose. Gender performance in photography* (pp. 176-189). New York: Guggenheim Museum.
E-reader / Online
Link: https://archive.org/stream/rroseisr00bles#page/176/mode/2up.

Catherine Opie, four portraits from the *Being and Having* series (1991)

References

Butler, Judith (1990). *Gender trouble. Feminism and the subversion of identity*. London/New York: Routledge.

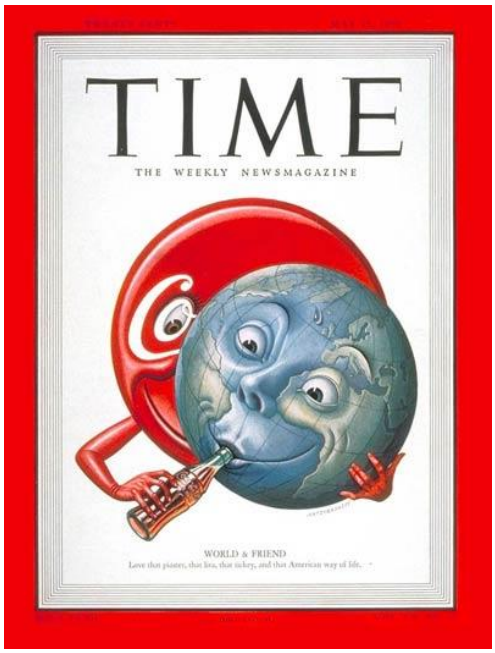
Jones, Amelia (2003). Introduction. Conceiving the intersection of feminism and visual culture. In Amelia Jones (Ed.), *The feminism and visual culture reader* (pp. 1-7). London/New York: Routledge.

TASK 7
Global Flows of Culture

The concept of globalization refers to 'the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole' (Robertson 1992: 8). While the 'compression' of the world can primarily be understood in an economic and sociopolitical sense, our increasing consciousness of the world can productively be perceived in cultural terms (Barker 2002: 131).

Visual culture, which transcends differences in language and literacy, plays a vital role in the contemporary climate of globalization. Today, images move around the globe with unprecedented speed, as satellite transmission and the Internet have replaced print media and national television networks as main sites for the circulation of information and communication. Transnational cultures, moreover, are to a large extent linked by consumption patterns and media cultures (Sturken & Cartwright 2009: 389).

Image taken from Google Earth app for iOS, 2017



Cover of *Time*, May 15, 1950 (Title cover article: 'The sun never sets on Cacoola')

There are several frameworks that we can use to understand the flows of culture in an increasingly interconnected, yet unevenly developed, world. One influential framework is the concept of 'cultural imperialism':

> 'Cultural imperialism refers to how an ideology, a politics, or a way of life is exported into other territories through the export of cultural products. Twentieth-century communications theorists Armand Mattelart and Herbert Schiller argued that television is a means through which world powers such as

> the United States and the Soviet Union invaded the cultural and ideological space of a country with images and messages in place of an all-out military invasion' (Sturken & Cartwright 2009: 397).

With the rapidly increasing global marketing of American brands such as Coca-Cola or McDonalds in the late twentieth century, the notion of a U.S.-dominated cultural imperialism or 'colonization' gained widespread currency.

Today's globalizing forces, however, make transnational cultural flows far more complex than what the one-way model of cultural imperialism allows us to understand. Mass media and global brands foster diversification, producing new and hybrid cultural, national, and local identities. The concept of 'glocalization' – originally a marketing term – points to these processes: 'the global production of the local and the localization of the global' (Barker 2004: 77).

* * *

American anthropologist Tom Boellstorff uses the term 'dubbing culture' to explain how globally mobile understandings of identity, in particular sexual identity, become localized (or, rather, glocalized). He points to the important role that globalizing mass media play in shaping, and possibly transforming, local regimes of sexuality and gender. Consider the following conversation between Boellstorff (2003: 34) and Abdul, a Muslim man who grew up in a small town in Sulawesi, Indonesia:

> TB: When you were in your teenage years, did you already know the term *gay*?
> A: In my environment at that time, most people didn't yet know. But because I read a lot, read a lot of news, I already knew. I already knew that I was *gay*. Through reading I knew about the *gay* world…
> TB: What kinds of magazines?
> A: Gossip magazines, you know, they always talk about such-and-such a star and the rumors that the person is *gay*. So that broadened my concepts (*wawasan*), made me realize, 'Oh, there are others like me.'

How could something like sexuality, which most people experience as a powerful *natural* force in human life, be shaped or co-shaped by global cultural forces?

Required reading

• Barker, Chris (2004). 'Globalization' and 'Glocalization'. In *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (pp. 76-78). London: SAGE. **E-reader**

• Sturken, Marita & Cartwright, Lisa (2009). The global flow of visual culture. In Marita Sturken & Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of looking. An introduction to visual culture* (second edition) (pp. 389-417). Oxford: Oxford University Press. **Reading Room**

• Boellstorff, Tom (2003). I knew it was me. Mass media, 'globalization' and lesbian and gay Indonesians. In Chris Berry, Fran Martin & Audrey Yue (Eds), *Mobile cultures. New media in queer Asia* (pp. 21-51). **Reading Room**

References

Barker, Chris (2002). *Making sense of cultural studies. Central problems and critical debated.* London: SAGE.

Robertson, Roland (1992). *Globalization. Social theory and global culture*. London: SAGE.

Sturken, Marita & Cartwright, Lisa (2009). *Practices of looking. An introduction to visual culture* (second edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

TASK 8
Material Culture: (My) Life Among Things

Discuss your individual relation with material objects. Why do you find certain things desirable, or even necessary? Can you be manipulated by commercials, by the needs an object or commodity promises to fulfill? Some objects may hold great significance for you personally: your old teddy bear, shoes you cannot part with, your guitar, your favorite childhood toy, a particular photograph, your bike, your laptop, your new phone, your favorite food, and so on. How do such material objects impact your life, your relations to others, your desires, your identity, your body, your sense of self? How do they structure your memories of a particular time? Or how do they affect your daily life today, and your relation to the world around you?

* * *

The mutual relations between people and objects are the primary concern of material culture studies. Our lives are marked by innumerable encounters with the material things that we interact with and use:

> 'We pick objects up, use them in myriad ways, act with them to achieve ends as mundane as whisking an egg, sending an e-mail, playing a board game and drinking a cup of coffee, and move on to our next object-mediated encounter. Objects are routinely, mundanely, part of everyday existence. Moreover, beyond this pragmatic view, even the most commonplace object has the capacity to symbolise the deepest human anxieties and aspirations' (Woodward 2007: vi).

It is clear that we, as human beings, shape, manipulate, and transform the material world around us. Less obvious are the ways in which material objects, in turn, shape and reshape human identity itself.

As social anthropologist Igor Kopytoff (1986) points out, a stubborn dichotomy exists in Western thought between persons and things, between individuals and commodities. This binary opposition not only limits our understanding of the relation *between* people and objects, but also obscures the ability of things *themselves* to 'act'.

One of the basic insights of material culture studies is that of *material agency*: the notion that objects, things, or matter as such are not only acted upon but also *actively* shape, impact, and transform the world. The concept of material agency has a long history, ranging from the writings of Karl Marx to archaeological theory, and from anthropological discussions of 'animism' and 'fetishism' to contemporary science and technology studies. But what does it mean to say that material artifacts have the capacity to act? How, if at all, is the agency of things different from that of humans? Some scholars have insisted that 'material culture is like a text' (Hodder 1986: 126), a symbolic medium through which meaningful social practices and realities are constituted. Others have approached material objects as 'indexes' of social agency, that is, as the media through which a primary human agency is distributed.

Recently, cultural theorists have started to (re-)conceptualize material agency by thinking through 0the interdependence between (human) life and (nonhuman) matter in more radical ways. Jane Bennett, for example, shifts her focus from the human experience of things to the vital power of things themselves, to re-imagine both agency and materiality itself (Bennett 2010). In this context, she challenges the common notion of food as passive stuff at the disposal of consumers, and argues for the *active* power of edible matter. Bennett approaches food as 'an actant within an agentic assemblage' that is able to influence and induce the moods and cognitive dispositions of humans (Bennett 2007: 145).

* * *

Assignment
For the post-discussion, you are asked to choose <u>one</u> 'thing' that is meaningful to you personally. While studying the required readings for this task, try to reflect on how you could 'think through' your relationship to this object from the various theoretical perspectives offered in the texts. Try, in other words, to apply the thoughts and theories presented in the readings to your own relation to a particular material object. Your thoughts about how to approach and *theorize* your own life among things – and possibly the lives of things themselves – will, in part, guide the post-discussion.

Required reading

• Woodward, Ian (2007). Material culture and identity. Objects and the self. In *Understanding material culture* (pp. 133-150). London: SAGE. **E-reader**

• Jones, Andrew M. & Boivin, Nicole (2010). The malice of inanimate objects. In Dan Hicks & Mary C. Beaudry (Eds), *The Oxford handbook of material culture studies* (pp. 333-351). Oxford: Oxford University Press. **Reading Room**

• Bennett, Jane (2007). Edible matter. *New Left Review*, 45 (May/June), 133-145.
E-reader

References

Bennett, Jane (2010). *Vibrant matter. A political ecology of things*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.

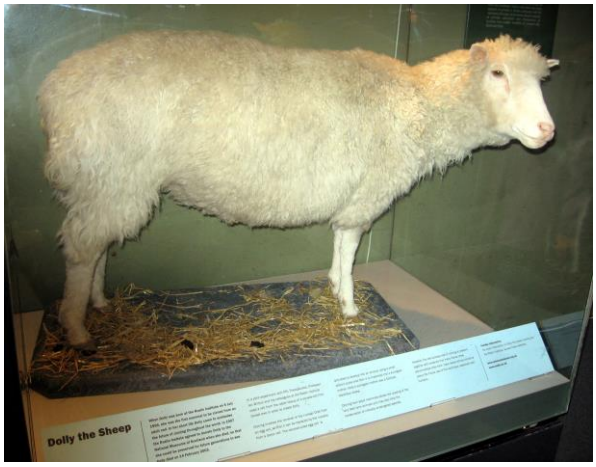
Hodder, Ian (1986). *Reading the past. Current approaches to interpretation in archaeology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kopytoff, Igor (1986). The cultural biography of things. Commoditization as process. In Arjun Appadurai (Ed.), *The social life of things. Commodities in cultural perspective* (pp. 64-91). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

TASK 9
The Posthuman Predicament

What does it mean to be 'human' in the twenty-first century?

Definitions of the human – and of life itself – have shifted extensively under the impact of advanced biomedical and digital technologies. *Biotechnological* developments such as genetic engineering and cloning challenge traditional notions of what counts as 'human nature' – think, for example, about the cloned sheep Dolly, or about the practice of xenotransplantation, where the heart valves of pigs are used to repair human hearts. Also, *digital* technologies have become inextricably linked to individual human lives – one can only imagine the (literally) fatal consequences if every computer on earth were to crash tomorrow.



The remains of Dolly the Sheep (1996-2003), the first mammal to be cloned from an adult cell. Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh

Technological innovation has always been closely related to social and cultural change. For example, the industrial revolution created new patterns of work and leisure, leading in turn to changes in popular culture. Yet, as Elaine Graham argues, the impact of contemporary technologies is even more profound:

> 'They have called into question the immutability of boundaries between humans, animals and machines, artificial and natural, 'born' and 'made'. In challenging the fixity of human nature in this way, the digital and biotechnological age engenders renewed scrutiny of the basic assumptions on which matters such as personal identity, the constitution of community, the grounds of human uniqueness and the relationship between body and mind are founded' (Graham 2002: 1-2).

In a world of advanced biotechnologies, virtual realities, and digital manipulation, we witness the collapse of clear boundaries between the human and the nonhuman,

between nature and culture, between bodies and technologies, between what is real and what is virtual.

* * *

Popular culture is one area in which our 'posthuman condition' is brought into representation (Halberstam & Livingston 1995). Popular cultural forms like television and film, consequently, may provide us with the images necessary to rethink the human subject as a posthuman subject, extending our perceptions of the self beyond the limits of the human.

Consider the images from the *Star Trek* series depicted here. One of the most successful examples of popular entertainment in the late 20th century, *Star Trek* used the visual language of science fiction as a vehicle to explore contemporary themes of human diversity, conflict, and change.

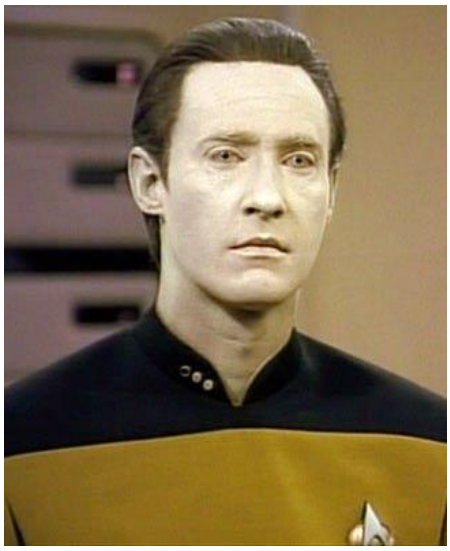
Seven of Nine (former Borg drone), fictional character from *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001)

* * *

Some cultural theorists are very critical about today's posthuman predicament. The neo-conservative writer Francis Fukuyama (2002), for example, thinks that biotechnological advancements will change 'human nature' in terrible ways, putting liberal democracy itself at risk.

Others, such as Donna Haraway (1991) and Rosi Braidotti (2013), welcome the liberating potential of posthumanism. According to Haraway, the contemporary breakdown of the boundaries between nature and culture, organism and technology, suggests that there *is* no such thing as 'human nature', and there never has been. She says (Haraway 1991:150): 'We are all theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism, in short: we are cyborgs.'

If the 'human' can no longer be understood as the unique source of meaning, what could be the implications for the field of Cultural Studies? And what are the consequences for the Humanities more generally?



Data (android), fictional character
from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994)

Required reading

• Nayar, Pramod K. (2014). Terms and definitions (humanism, transhumanism, critical posthumanism). In *Posthumanism* (pp. 5-11). Cambridge: Polity. **E-reader**

• Badmington, Neil (2006). Cultural studies and the posthumanities. In Gary Hall & Clare Birchall (Eds), *New cultural studies. Adventures in theory* (pp. 260-272). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. **E-reader**

• Graham, Elaine (2002). Much ado about Data. In *Representations of the post/human. Monsters, aliens and others in popular culture* (pp. 132-153). Manchester: Manchester University Press. **Reading Room**

References

Braidotti, Rosi (2013). *The posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity.

Fukuyama, Francis (2002). *Our posthuman future. Consequences of the biotechnology revolution*. London: Profile Books.

Halberstam, Judith & Livingston, Ira (1995). *Posthuman bodies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Haraway, Donna (1991). A cyborg manifesto. In *Simians, cyborgs, and women. The reinvention of nature* (pp.149-181). London/New York: Routledge.

TASK 10
Naturecultures

The convergence between advanced biotechnologies and new technologies of information, communication, and visualization profoundly challenges our perception of our bodies and ourselves. From stem cell research to Dolly the Sheep, from interspecies organic transplants to genetically modified tomatoes – the technological redesign of bodies and environments has increasingly become part of contemporary culture and of everyday life. In late-capitalist, technologically advanced societies, the traditional distinction between nature and culture has collapsed into what cultural theorist Donna Haraway (2008) has called 'naturecultures'.

* * *

New media art – biotechnological art or bioart in particular – has become a key site for the exploration of today's shifting connections between bodies, technologies, and environments (Hengel 2012). *Bioart* is a contemporary kart form in which the primary medium is living matter in all its diversity – from human skin cells to bacteria and transgenic organisms. Bioartists work at the intersection of art and science, using advanced biotechnologies such as genetic engineering and cloning to create works of art that are as artificial as they are organic.

Eduardo Kac, *GFP Bunny* (2000)

In the year 2000, Brazilian-American artist Eduardo Kac created what is probably the most well-known work of bioart: the *GFP Bunny*. By inserting genetic material from the jellyfish *Aequorea victoria* into the living body of an albino rabbit named Alba, Kac created a bunny that supposedly glows green under a certain type of ultraviolet light. Since then, Kac has produced many other bioartworks, including a new life form

called *Edunia* (2009), a genetically engineered flower that is a hybrid of himself and a petunia.

ORLAN, *Harlequin Coat* (2008)

Similarly, French multimedia artist ORLAN has created the 'living installation' *Harlequin Coat* (2008). The central element of the work is a tissue culture bioreactor, in which different cell types are co-cultured in a process of potential hybridization. These cell types include the artist's own skin cells, muscle cells from a fat-tailed dunnart (a sort of mouse), and so-called WS1 type skin fibroblast cells from a twelve weeks old female fetus of African origin.

Artworks like these blur the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman and raise complex questions about 'life' in today's bio-techno-culture. We could describe bioartists as 'story-tellers exploring what it means to be embodied in high-tech worlds' (Haraway 1991: 173). At the same time, bioart draws a considerable amount of criticism because of the moral and ethical problems presented by scientific and artistic experiments with living beings. Renowned cultural theorist Paul Virilio (2004), for example, describes transgenic art as a 'pitiless art'. For him, the use of genetic engineering for artistic purposes parallels the Nazi's 'experimentation' on animals and human beings with the aim of creating a new 'humanity'.

* * *

Ethical and ontological questions about human and nonhuman lives are also at stake in relation to the treatment of so-called surplus laboratory animals, healthy animals who are routinely killed when they are no longer needed. Specifically, the growing

demand for genetically engineered animals, such as transgenic mice, has in recent years significantly increased the production of surplus laboratory animals worldwide. Although some surplus laboratory animals are adopted, and a few are even legally entitled to "retirement" (as in the case of the chimpanzee), for most there is no life after the laboratory.

Transgenic animals even appear to be categorically destined to be killed. Take, for example, the case of the Enviropigs. Enviropig™ is the industry name for a pig that has been genetically engineered to excrete less phosphorous in its feces than conventional, unmodified pigs, thus potentially reducing phosphorous water pollution. Developed by scientists at the University of Guelph in Canada, the Enviropig™ was presented as the first line of livestock engineered to be more environmentally friendly. After losing the main source of funding for the project in 2012, the University of Guelph decided to discontinue it. Even though an organization called Farm Sanctuary offer to help place the pigs in permanent homes, the entire herd of Enviropigs, then in its tenth generation, was exterminated or, as a university spokesperson put it, 'humanely euthanized' (Clark 2014: 99).

Required viewing

• Take a look at the website of Eduardo Kac: www.ekac.org.

Required reading

• Virilio, Paul (2004). *Art and fear* (excerpt; pp. 49-55). London/New York: Continuum. **E-reader**

• Zylinska, Joanna (2009). Green bunnies and speaking ears. The ethics of bioart. In Joanna Zylinska, *Bioethics in the age of new media* (pp. 149-167). Cambridge/London: The MIT Press. **E-reader**

• Clark, Jonathan L. (2014). Living with transgenic animals. *Humanimalia*, 6(1). https://www.depauw.edu/humanimalia/issue%2011/clark.html. **Online**

References

Haraway, Donna (1991). *Simians, cyborgs, and women. The reinvention of nature*. London/New York: Routledge.

Haraway, Donna (2008). *When species meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hengel, Louis van den (2012). *Zoegraphy*. Per/forming posthuman lives. *Biography. An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 35.1, 1-20.

Virilio, Paul (2004). *Art and fear*. London/New York: Continuum.

APPENDIX

The Writing Assignments

The final assessment in this course consists of two writing assignments. For these assignments, you are asked to write a short paper about a specific topic connected to one or more of the last five tasks of the course.

Length: Each paper should be **1500-1750 words** in length (excluding bibliography).

Format: The papers should be typed in Word, font Times New Roman, font size 12, 1.5 line-spacing, margins on all sides at least 2.54 cm (1 inch), with page numbers throughout. Please use a cover page. In-text citations and bibliography need to be formatted in accordance with **APA-style**.

Deadline: The deadline for submitting the papers is **Friday, March 30, 2018, 17.00**.
Upload both papers to SafeAssignment in the course environment on the Student Portal. You do not need to hand in a hardcopy.

Weight: Each paper contributes 25% to the final grade, which means that together they constitute **50%** of your grade for the course.

Topics

As to the theme of your papers, you have to choose **two** of the following three topics:

A. Doing Gender Differently (connected to task 6)
B. My Life Among Things (connected to task 8)
C. Representing the Posthuman (connected to tasks 9 and 10)

On the following pages, the instructions for each of these assignments are outlined in more detail.

Grading criteria

The following list gives an overview of the basic grading criteria. It may also serve as a checklist of things to keep in mind when writing your papers.

Formal requirements
• Does the paper have an appropriate length?
• Does the paper have a cover page?
• Is the text (font size, margins, line spacing, etc.) formatted correctly?
• Are the quotations and in-text references formatted according to APA guidelines?
• Is the bibliography complete and formatted according to APA guidelines?
• Has the paper been uploaded onto SafeAssignment before the deadline?

Topic
• Is the topic of the paper in line with the assignment? Is the paper well positioned vis-à-vis the general theme of this course?
• Is the topic of the paper sufficiently focused?
• Is there a clear research question or aim that helps to direct the writing process and structure the paper?
• Tip: avoid topics that are too broad (e.g. 'Gender performance in the 20th century') by narrowing them down to more specific subjects (e.g. 'Gender performance in contemporary art photography') and/or cases (e.g. 'Gender performance in the work of contemporary art photographer Del LaGrace Volcano').
• Tip: don't wait too long to talk with each other and with your tutor about possible topics or cases.

Structure
• Does the paper have a proper introduction, body and conclusion?
• Is it made clear in your introduction what the paper is going to be about and what your aim is?
• Does the conclusion return to the central problem, question or topic (present the main findings and their significance)?
• Does the text consist of coherent parts, which are well connected to each other and presented in a logical sequence?
• Tip: if you use subtitles, do not call the body of your text 'body', but use a proper subtitle instead.

Analysis
• Is the object of analysis properly introduced, explained and/or contextualized?
• Does the paper make a correct and productive use of theory and/or analytical concepts?
• Does the analysis reach a sufficient degree of depth and complexity? Does the paper demonstrate an adequate grasp of the kinds of cultural analysis discussed throughout this course?
• Does the relevance of your analysis become sufficiently clear? Do you clearly explain why you have decided to focus on this or that specific object or case?
• Tip: beware that your paper has a clear line of argument and does not become a random patchwork of observations.
• Tip: do not make sweeping statements that you cannot support with arguments.
• Tip: do not use abstract expressions that you are not able to explain or understand yourself.

Language
• How is the quality of spelling, grammar, and punctuation?
• How is the quality of sentence structure, transition between sentences, and paragraph development?
• Does the paper have an appropriate (i.e. academic) tone of voice?
• Tip: construct complete and grammatically correct sentences.
• Tip: ask someone to proofread your paper.

Writing Assignment Option A
Doing Gender Differently

Introduction
In her influential book *Gender trouble* (1990), Judith Butler argues that gender is a kind of performance, a 'doing' rather than a 'being'. She explains that we perform masculinity and femininity according to certain cultural scripts and social norms, focusing especially on how common notions of gender are shaped by the norm of heterosexuality. At the same time, Butler points to the possible subversion or 'troubling' of existing gender norms by 'doing' gender differently. Making 'gender trouble' means to perform gender in ways that challenge or even undermine prevailing norms of gender and sexuality. Subversive gender performances may open up new possibilities of gender that move beyond the binary framework of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'.

The purpose of this assignment is to apply Butler's notion of gender performativity in a cultural analysis. In other words: you will try to relate Butler's gender theory to the cultural domain in which we all perform our gender in relation to dominant, yet ever shifting, structures of power: the very world in which we live.

Assignment
For this assignment, you are asked to find and analyze a contemporary example of such a 'subversive' kind of gender performance as described above. How is gender 'done' or performed 'differently' in contemporary culture? What genders can we see today that blur the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, or that even move beyond this binary frame altogether? How do such performances of gender work? To what extent do they destabilize and/or reinforce existing norms of gender and sexuality?

In choosing a case study, you may concentrate on all kinds of different cultural domains, ranging from visual and popular culture (advertising, movies, TV, Internet, popular music, etc.) to less mainstream forms of art and culture (high fashion, art photography, art house cinema, etc.). In other words, you are free to choose any example, ranging from queer art to David Beckham's earrings, as long as you can explain how and why it presents an interesting way of 'doing gender differently'.

Your paper should include (at least) the following:
- An explanation of Judith Butler's theory of gender
- A description of your chosen case study (if necessary, include images and/or hyperlinks)
- An analysis of your chosen example: how and to what extent does this performance of gender subvert existing norms of gender and sexuality?

<u>Your paper has to draw upon and refer to at least one of the required readings from task 6.</u>

Writing Assignment Option B
My Life Among Things

Introduction
Who we are, and how we express ourselves, is intimately connected to the material objects that we encounter, relate to, consume and use. As Ian Woodward (2007, p. 134) argues: 'We are defined as people not only by what we think and say, but by what material things we possess, surround ourselves with, and interact with: our clothes, shoes, motor vehicle or other forms of transportation, pens, computer and other personal technologies like mobile telephones […], and so on. These material things all help to establish, mediate and assist us in the performance of our personal and social identities.' As carriers of emotional and sociocultural meanings, material objects have the ability to facilitate both interpersonal interactions and the formation of subjective identities. Material Culture Studies examines this capacity of material things to affect human lives, and vice versa.

Assignment
For this assignment, you will write an essay about your own experiences of the relation between material culture and identity, between objects and your own sense of self. Choose one 'thing' that is meaningful for you personally. This can range from your childhood teddy bear to the smartphone that structures your social life, from the specific thing or 'look' with which you demonstrated (not) belonging to a certain group in high school to the 'matter' of the food that you eat. How does this object shape your life, your relations to others, your desires, your identity, your body? How does it structure your memories of a particular time? Or how does it affect your daily life today, and your relation to the world around you? In which individual/social/global contexts does your chosen object acquire its meaning?

You are required not only to reflect on your relation to your object of choice from a personal or autobiographical viewpoint, but also to analyze it by selecting and using one or more of the theoretical perspectives on material culture, identity, and agency that you have encountered during this course. In other words, the assignment asks you to examine your personal experiences with material culture in terms of the scholarly discourse of Cultural Studies.

Your paper has to draw upon and refer to (at least) one of the required readings from task 8.

In addition, you can – if you want – use literature from thematically related tasks in this course, or any other sources that you find relevant.

Writing Assignment Option C
Representing the Posthuman

Introduction
Definitions of the human have shifted profoundly under the impact of advanced biotechnologies and biomedicine, as well as new technologies of information and communication. From stem cell science to the artificial intelligence of machines and robots, from interspecies organic transplants to genetically modified food: contemporary technologies have collapsed the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines. This requires a reconsideration of what it means to be human (and nonhuman) in the twenty-first century. In cultural theory, the notions of the 'posthuman' and 'posthumanism' have opened new ways of addressing this question.

Art and popular culture are primary domains in which the 'posthuman condition' is brought into representation. Popular cultural forms (like television, film, or comics) and contemporary art forms (such as bioart or high fashion) provide us with a wealth of images, practices, and figurations that extend our perceptions of ourselves and of the world beyond the limits of the human.

Assignment
For this assignment, you are asked to find and analyze a contemporary example from within popular culture and/or the arts that expresses or represents the 'posthuman'. How is the posthuman figured in contemporary culture? What cultural representations can we see that interrogate or play with the boundaries between humans, animals, and technologies? How do such representations work? To what extent do they destabilize and/or reinforce conventional notions of what it means to be a human subject?

You are free to choose any example, as long as it engages with the question of what it means to be 'human' in contemporary culture. Possible topics include (but are not limited to): the aesthetics and ethics of biotechnological art (e.g. the *Tissue Culture and Art Project*); the representation of cyborgs/aliens/monsters/vampires or other posthuman species in popular culture (e.g. the *Twilight* series, music videos); cultural representations of technoscience in science fiction (e.g. *Star Trek*, *Black Mirror*), etc.

Your paper should include (at least) the following:
- An explanation of the concept of the posthuman
- A description of your chosen case study (if necessary, include images and/or hyperlinks)
- An analysis of your chosen example: how does your case represent or express the notion of the 'posthuman'? What ideas or ideals does your example convey about the position of the human in relation to the nonhuman world of animals and technology? How does it challenge and/or confirm conventional definitions of the human?

Your paper has to draw upon and refer to at least one of the required readings from task 9 and/or 10.