

**ENGLISH 466 / A01
CULTURAL STUDIES**

“High Tension/Low Fidelity: Cultural Studies and its Discordancies”

CRN 22576
Spring Semester 2010
M/W/R 2:30-3:20 PM CLE C110

Dr. Lincoln Shlensky
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will offer an advanced introductory survey of the field of cultural studies for students with diverse disciplinary backgrounds in the humanities. The course will begin with an overview of the origins of cultural studies in Marxist theory; it will explore the advent of semiotics and the development of identity-based discourses; and it will address the epistemological and related philosophical challenges posed by Marxism, poststructuralism, feminism, postmodernism, and globalization. Along the way, students will gain a basic familiarity with writers widely recognized within the field, including Marx, Gramsci, Adorno, Benjamin, Althusser, Barthes, Hall, Jameson, Haraway. In addition to engaging with some of the seminal theoreticians and discourses in the field, students in the course will also view a number of films chosen for their ability to help explicate, demonstrate, and extend theories and

critical approaches that inform practitioners of cultural studies. A major project of the course will be understanding the tensions – disciplinary and cultural – that gave impetus to the intellectual challenges posed by field. Particular emphasis will be placed on the structural disjunctures and identitarian blind spots in traditional Marxist discourse that sparked a cultural turn among activist political and social theorists. Correspondingly, the course will examine the disciplinary breaking points that, for many cultural theorists, demanded a new approach to the problems posed by increasingly untenable distinctions between “high” and “low” cultural formations. Cultural studies in this course will be understood, therefore, as a response to pressures from within and outside the academy, and we will seek to contextualize the varied responses to such tensions that render much of the work in the field so creative and compelling.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students in this course will gain a basic introduction to the field of cultural studies through reading and discussing theoretical essays written by many of the major figures in the field and by watching films that further extend these theories. By the end of the course, students will understand the field’s critical and theoretical impulses in historical terms and synchronically in terms of vital intellectual debates that expand and complicate the discourses associated with cultural studies. Students’ familiarity with course materials will be evaluated through occasional reading quizzes, short and longer essays, and a final exam.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner, *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* Blackwell Publishing, 2nd ed., 2005 (ISBN: 1405132582)

Additional course materials will be available for purchase as a course reader, or online when possible. Online texts *must be printed* and all materials must be *brought to class* on the due dates. Printing costs for these materials may be considered part of your book costs for the course.

COURSE GRADES

Final course grades will be determined as follows (as a percent of the final grade):

- 1) CLASS PREPARATION & PARTICIPATION, INCLUDING OCCASIONAL 'POP' QUIZZES (NO MAKE-UPS): 10%
- 3) THREE SHORT ESSAYS (500 words each): 30%
- 4) FINAL RESEARCH ESSAY (2000 words): 40%
- 5) FINAL EXAM: 20%

Grades will be assigned according to the following English Department guidelines:

A+	90-100	B-	65-69
A	85-89	C+	60-64
A-	80-84	C	55-59
B+	75-79	D	50-54
B	70-74	F	0-49

For more specific information about my grading criteria, see my document "Assessment Criteria for Student

Research Essays" at www.practa.com » Assignments, or at <http://tinyurl.com/2nsj42>.

Note: Students will be given adequate notification should it become necessary to alter the schedule of assignments or reduce the number of assigned readings. Evening film screenings will be arranged to suit the most students; those unable to attend will need to make arrangements with the library to screen films at a different time.

Students with bona fide disabilities will be afforded reasonable accommodation. If you require such accommodation, please register at the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability and inform me of your needs at the outset of the semester.

WRITING YOUR ESSAYS

Your essays must offer an *argument* that utilizes texts assigned in the course or approved outside research materials. Each essay should frame its argument in relation to assigned texts, course themes, and/or research materials. Your work will be graded on the basis of its creativity, contextualization, and the overall persuasiveness of its argument. If you are unsure of your topic or argument, please see me in office hours. (For more information about my grading criteria, see my document "Assessment Criteria for Student Research Essays" at www.practa.com » Assignments.)

ESSAY SUBMISSION

Completed written work must be emailed to me at assignments.shlensky@gmail.com and, if you are participating in the Learning and Teaching Centre project, cc'd to the LTC's Dr. Li-Shih Huang

<lshuang@uvic.ca> on the due date. I may also request a printed copy. If you are participating in Dr. Huang's LTC project, you will be granted an automatic one-week extension of your paper's final due date, with the proviso that you submit a first draft to me and Dr. Huang by the syllabus due date, and that your final revised version sent to me and Dr. Huang within one week of the original due date differs from the first draft. (If this process does not work out well, I may cancel the extension policy.) Your essay should include a title page with your name, date, and course identifying information. The electronic file you send must include *your last name as part of the document's file name*. Failure to keep a copy of the essay will result in denied credit should the submitted materials be lost.

LATE & MISSING ASSIGNMENTS

If writing assignments are submitted after the beginning of the class period during which they are due, credit will be deducted by 1/3 of a letter-grade per day, starting with the due date. The automatic reply you receive from me once you send in your essay is your acknowledgment of receipt. Extension of a due date must be negotiated with me *in advance*, and medical or other emergency exceptions to this policy must be properly documented. Students are required to complete all assigned course work in order to receive a passing grade for the course.

WRITING IMPROVEMENT

I may require you to seek general writing improvement and/or assignment tutoring at The Learning and Teaching Centre. If so, you will be required to do so and to rewrite your work within three weeks of receiving notice from me. Please consult practa.com » UVic

Resources for information on making appointments at The Learning and Teaching Centre. There you will also find a form required by the Centre authorizing you to receive tutoring for a given assignment.

FINAL ESSAY INSTRUCTIONS

Your final essay will be a 2000 word comparison of two Godard films of your choosing from the course. The final essay must include significant mention of at least *two* peer-reviewed academic sources (i.e., scholarly books or academic journals) and *two* essays from course readings or alternate readings from the *Media and Cultural Studies* text. Your essay should be an argumentative essay: that is, in the course of your essay, you will give a brief summaries of the films you are discussing, and then make an argument about them. Use the outside sources to help support/deepen your argument or to show how your argument differs from others' views. In the introductory section of your essay, you should present your argument in relation to the films you will be discussing, explain why your argument is vitally important, and offer a "road map" of how your essay will prove the argument you are making. The essay must substantiate your claims and reach a conclusion. Be sure to carefully proofread your essay; errors of grammar, diction, and structure will lower your grade. Citations in your essay should use in-text citation format (see www.practa.com » Guidelines for Writing and Research, for citation pointers), with a works-cited list at the end.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

More than four (4) absences shall result in reduction of the student's grade by

half a grade per additional absence. Medical and other emergency exceptions to this policy will be accepted with proper documentation.

COMPUTER POLICY

Please refrain from using computers, hand-held devices, and phones in the classroom, except for specifically designated assignments. Students with documented disabilities who require a computer for note-taking are excluded from this policy.

ELECTRONIC MATERIALS

Some required materials for the course will be available exclusively on the course Web site (www.practa.com). These materials *must be printed out and brought to class* on the due dates. I will expect students to check email at least twice a week for possible course updates. Please alert me immediately of any e-mail address changes.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. Students and faculty members are expected to adhere to the UVic human rights policy, located at: <http://bit.ly/4AuuT2>. Please alert me if you have any questions about this policy and its application, or if you have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students are expected to adhere to the UVic academic integrity policy (search the current UVic Calendar for the “Policy on Academic Integrity”). Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment

and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, you agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

Students are expected to read the material assigned beforehand, to bring all reading assignments to class, and to arrive prepared to discuss the readings. Occasional 'pop' quizzes will cover materials for the course up to and including the assignments due for that day.

Monday, January 4

Introduction: High and Low—from reel to reel to rl.

In class: Adrienne Rich, “Diving into the Wreck” (1973).

Wednesday, January 6

Due today:

1) REQUIRED: Send an email message with “English 466” and your full name in the Subject line, and your phone number in the body of the message to shlensky@uvic.ca.

2) Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas,” from *The German Ideology* (1845), 9-12.

3) Antonio Gramsci, selections from *The Prison Notebooks* (c. 1929-35), 13-17.

Thursday, January 7

Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), 18-25.

Monday, January 11

Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 25-34.

Wednesday, January 13

In class film: Jean-Luc Godard, *A bout de souffle* [Breathless] (France, 1960, 90 mins.), part 1.

Thursday, January 14

In class film: *A bout de souffle*, part 2.

Monday, January 18

Discussion of *A bout de souffle*

Wednesday, January 20

Theodor W. Adorno, “The Concept of Enlightenment” (1944), 1-34 (Course Reader).

Thursday, January 21

Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” from *Mythologies* (1957), pp. 1-14 (Course Reader).

Monday, January 25

Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” pp. 15-31.

Wednesday, January 27

In class film: Jean-Luc Godard, *Vivre sa vie* [My Life to Live] (France, 1962, 85 mins.), part 1.

Thursday, January 28

In class film: *Vivre sa vie*, part 2.

Monday, February 1

Discussion of *Vivre sa vie*
FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE:
BENJAMIN & ADORNO (500 words)

Wednesday, February 3

Raymond Williams, “Marxism and Culture” (1958), pp. 265-284 (Course Reader)

Thursday, February 4

In class film: Jean-Luc Godard, *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* [2 or 3 Things I Know About Her] (France, 1967, 90 mins.), part 1.

Monday, February 8

In class film: *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, part 2.

Wednesday, February 10
Discussion of *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*

Thursday, February 11
Guy Debord, from *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) (Course Reader).

Monday, February 15
Reading break

Wednesday, February 17
Reading break

Thursday, February 18
Reading break

Monday, February 22
In class film: Jean-Luc Godard, *Week End* (France, 1967, 105 mins.), part 1.

Wednesday, February 24
In class film: *Week End*, part 2.
SECOND ASSIGNMENT DUE:
BARTHES, WILLIAMS, DEBORD
(500 words)

Thursday, February 25
Finish screening and discuss *Week End*

Monday, March 1
Louis Althusser, from "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970), 79-87.

Wednesday, March 3
Stuart Hall, "The State and Society: 1880-1930," Chapter 7 in *The Hard Road to Renewal* (1988), pp. 95-122 (Course Reader).

Thursday, March 4
In class film: Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, *Numéro deux* [Number two] (France, 1975, 90 mins), part 1.

Monday, March 8
In class film: *Numéro deux*, part 2.

Wednesday, March 10
Discussion of *Numero deux*.

Thursday, March 11
Stuart Hall, "The Battle for Socialist Ideas in the 1980s," Chapter 11 in *The Hard Road to Renewal* (1988), pp. 177-195 (Course Reader).

Monday, March 15
Stuart Hall, "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988), pp. 35-57 (Course Reader).

Wednesday, March 17
Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, *Ici et ailleurs* (France, 1976, 53 mins).

Thursday, March 18
Discussion of *Ici et ailleurs*.

Monday, March 22
Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and New Political Subjects," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988), pp. 89-101 (Course Reader); Ellen Willis, "We Need a Radical Left," in *The Nation*, June 29, 1998, 5 pp. (Course Reader).

Wednesday, March 24
Ellen Willis, "Escape from Freedom: What's The Matter With Tom Frank (And The Lefties Who Love Him)?," in *Situations: Project of the Radical Imagination*, Vol 1, No 2 (2006), pp. 5-20 (Course Reader); "Why I'm not for Peace," in *Radical Society*, pp. 13-19 (Course Reader).

Thursday, March 25

“The Origins of the Third World,” in
Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (2001), pp. 279-210
(Course Reader).

Monday, March 29

In-class film: Jean-Luc Godard, *Notre Musique* (France, 2004, 80 mins.), part 1.

THIRD ASSIGNMENT DUE: HALL,
MOUFFE (500 WORDS)

Wednesday, March 31

In-class film: *Notre Musique* (France, 2004, 80 mins.), part 2.

Thursday, April 1

DUE IN CLASS AND BY EMAIL:
PROPOSAL, OUTLINE, AND
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR
FINAL RESEARCH ESSAY ON
GODARD.

Peer editing

Monday, April 5

Easter break

Wednesday, April 7

Discussion of *Notre Musique*

Thursday, April 8

Michael Bérubé, “What’s the Matter with Cultural Studies,” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 14, 2009, 7 pp. (Course Reader).

FINAL RESEARCH ESSAY (2000
WORDS) DUE APRIL 13, 12:00
NOON

FINAL EXAM: DAVIS, BÉRUBÉ,
OTHER ESSAYS & GODARD FILMS