

**ENGLISH 466 / A01
CULTURAL STUDIES**

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

Fall Semester 2008
M/W/R 3:30-4:20 PM— Strong C108

Dr. Lincoln Shlensky
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Office Hours: M/R 11:30 AM-1:00 PM
(please make an appointment)
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Course Web site: www.practa.com

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 written essays, reading quizzes, an oral presentation and a final examination.

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. These 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*): 20%

3) THREE SHORT ESSAYS (1000 words each): 30%

4) FINAL RESEARCH ESSAY (3000 words [apx. 10 pp]): 50%

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.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Your essays must offer an *argument* that compares texts (written and film) assigned in the course. The essay should frame its argument in relation to at least two assigned texts. Your work will be graded on the basis of its creativity, theoretical relevance, and the overall persuasiveness of its argument. (For more 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>.)

FINAL ESSAY INSTRUCTIONS

Your final essay will be a 3000 word (apx. 12 page) analysis of a film of your choosing from the course. The final essay must include discussion of at least *two* peer-reviewed academic sources (i.e., scholarly books or academic journals). You also must make significant reference to at least *three* of the theoretical texts discussed in the course. Your essay should be an argumentative essay: that is, in the course of your essay, you will give a brief summary of the film you are discussing, and then make an argument about it that follows from your response to the theoretical texts you are using.

Use your outside sources to help support your argument or to show how your argument differs from others' views. In the introductory section of your essay, you must present your argument in relation to the primary film and secondary texts 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 prove 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 can be in Chicago 15A or MLA in-text citation format (see www.practa.com » Guidelines for Writing and Research, or <http://tinyurl.com/2ybkax> for citation pointers), with a works-cited list at the end.

ESSAY FORMAT

All written work (except any we are to discuss in class) must be submitted in class AND emailed to me in electronic form by email on the due date. When you email me your essay, you must send it in .doc or .rtf format only, with the suffix shown in the file name. No other formats (e.g., .wpd, .pdf, .docx) will be accepted. Your essay should include a title page with your name, date, and the course number. The 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. Electronic submissions will be considered to have been received as soon as the UVic email system gives them a received time-stamp in my inbox; do not wait until the last minute to submit electronically, in case the UVic system is down or delayed. 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 Writing 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](http://www.practa.com) » UVic Resources for information on making appointments at The Writing Centre. There you will also find a form required by the Centre authorizing you to receive tutoring for a given assignment.

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 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://tinyurl.com/35rptl>. 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, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/37x2mc>. 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 have read the material assigned before they come to class, and to arrive prepared to discuss all the material for the day. Occasional 'pop' quizzes will cover materials for the course up to and including the assignments due for that day. I expect you to bring your textbook to every class meeting where a reading assignment from it is due.

Wednesday, September 3

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

In class: Frank O'Hara, "Poem [Lana Turner has collapsed!]" (1964).

Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck" (1973).

Thursday, September 4

Due today:

1) Required: Send an email message with "English 466" and your name in the Subject line, and your phone number(s) 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.

Monday, September 8

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

Wednesday, September 10

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

Thursday, September 11

In class film: Dziga Vertov, *The Man with a Movie Camera* (USSR, 1929, 80 mins.), excerpt.

Monday, September 15

Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (1944), 41-52.

Wednesday, September 17

In class film: Preston Sturges, *Sullivan's Travels* (USA, 1941, 90 mins.), first part.

Thursday, September 18

In class film: Preston Sturges, *Sullivan's Travels* (USA, 1941, 90 mins.), second part.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE:

BENJAMIN & ADORNO (1000 words)

Monday, September 22

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

Wednesday, September 24

Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," pp. 15-31.

Thursday, September 25

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

Monday, September 29

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

Wednesday, October 1

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

Thursday, October 2

In class film: Jean-Luc Godard, *Vivre sa vie* [To live her life] (France, 1962, 85 mins.), part 1.

Monday, October 6

In class film: Jean-Luc Godard, *Vivre sa vie* [To live her life] (France, 1962, 85 mins.), part 2.

SECOND ASSIGNMENT DUE:
BARTHES, ALTHUSSER, WILLIAMS
(1000 words)

Wednesday, October 8

Discussion of *Vivre sa vie*

Thursday, October 9

Class cancelled

Monday, October 13

Thanksgiving Day

Wednesday, October 15

Guy Debord, from *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), "Separation Perfected" (10 pp) (Course Reader).

Thursday, October 16

Guy Debord, from *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), "The Commodity as Spectacle" (9 pp) (Course Reader).

Monday, October 20

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.), first part.

Wednesday, October 22

In class film: Jean-Luc Godard, *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (France, 1967, 90 mins.), second part.

Thursday, October 23

Guy Debord, from *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), "Time and History" (12 pp) (Course Reader).

Monday, October 27

Guy Debord, from *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), "Spectacular Time" and "The Organization of Territory" (16 pp) (Course Reader).

Wednesday, October 29

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

Thursday, October 30

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

Monday, November 3

Discussion of Godard and Debord

Wednesday, November 5

Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" (1980), 130-143.

Thursday, November 6

Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," (1980), 163-173.

Monday, November 10

Reading Break

Wednesday, November 12

Reading Break

Thursday, November 13

THIRD ASSIGNMENT DUE: DE BORD, GODARD, WILLIAMS, HALL (1000 words)

In class film: Jean-Luc Godard, *Numéro Deux* (France, 1975, 88 mins.), first part.

Monday, November 17

In class film: Jean-Luc Godard, *Numéro Deux* (France, 1975, 88 mins.), second part.

Wednesday, November 19
Discussion of *Numéro Deux*

Thursday, November 20
Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," pp. 149-165 (Course Reader)

Monday, November 24
Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," pp. 165-181 (Course Reader)

Wednesday, November 26
In class film: Jean-Luc Godard,
Histoire(s) du cinéma (part 1)

Thursday, November 27
In class film: Jean-Luc Godard,
Histoire(s) du cinéma (part 1)

Monday, December 1
Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," 482-499.

Wednesday, December 3
Course conclusion
Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," 499-519.

FINAL ESSAY DUE DECEMBER 8