ENG 680 Current Trends in Critical Theory: Key Works in Transnational Cultural Studies
Spring, 2006

Call #: 7881
Mon 4:15-7:05, HUM 116
Instructor: Bret Benjamin (bret@albany.edu)
Office: Humanities 340 (442-4054)
Office Hours: W 1:40-2:40, 4:15-5:15
and by appointment
http://www.albany.edu/faculty/bret/642/

Course Description
This course will serve as an introduction to some of the key debates, methods, and thinkers in the field of transnational cultural studies. The class will devote significant attention to the contemporary historical moment, delving into various formulations and analyses of globalization. Looking backwards from the present, however, we will trace a longstanding intellectual engagement with global cultural study that moves from Marx through Gramsci and Lenin, to mid-century anti-colonial thinkers, to the scholarship of British Cultural Studies, and the diasporic intellectual tradition of postcolonial studies. As with any survey course, our investigation will necessarily sacrifice depth for breadth at moments. Even then, there are countless “keyworks” that time will not permit us to examine. The reading selections include landmark works, as well as less frequently cited scholarship from major intellectuals working in this arena. Though the topics are broad, coherent threads will emerge in our focus on the Global South and the legacies of imperialism, as well as in our investigation of the Marxist intellectual tradition and the derivations, extensions, and revisions to radical thought that structure many of the key debates about the study of culture in a global context. While the class is intended as an introduction to seminal texts that constitute “required reading” for students working on projects related to postcolonial or cultural studies, we will attempt to move beyond a “greatest hits” model; the readings and our collective research should provide the opportunity for critical reflection on the challenges and possibilities of intellectual work in transnational cultural studies as a means to analyze, critique, and intervene in the living present.

Required Texts

All books available at Mary Jane’s Books, 215 Western Ave.

Robert Tucker, The Marx-Engels Reader
DuGay, Hall, etc., Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman
CLR James, Beyond a Boundary
Frantz Fanon, Wretched of the Earth
Edward Said, Orientalism
Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri Empire

Course Packet, available at Shipmates Copies in Stuyvesant Plaza
Recommended Texts
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*
Frederic Jameson & Masao Miyoshi, *The Cultures of Globalization*
Lisa Lowe & David Lloyd, *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*
Eric Hobsbawm *The Age of Extremes*
Frank J. Lechner & John Boli *The Globalization Reader*

Working Groups
One of the hallmarks of the “Birmingham School” of British Cultural Studies was a commitment to collective scholarship that analyzed from multiple perspectives the “circuits” or “webs” of cultural significations evident in single, apparently simple or innocuous, artifact or practice. With that model loosely in mind—a model we will explore in detail through the readings for week two—this class will divide into one or more “working groups,” with each collectively orchestrating an investigation around a single topic. This represents something of a departure from most graduate seminars where the individual term paper is the standard model of evaluation. The specific details of the working groups will be negotiated in class—the structure that the working groups will take as well as the topics they choose to examine will need to be hashed out collaboratively. I am expecting, however, that each working group will be responsible for determining a set of readings and for leading a class discussion one day. Further, each working group will present their work publicly, either at the graduate student conference or in a conference-like setting, the details of which will be determined by the class. Each student will write a short essay (in conjunction with the presentation) and a longer essay for the final project. Further, each working group will be responsible for collectively producing an introduction to the project and its methods.
Reading Schedule

1/23  Introductions

1/30  DuGay, Hall, etc., *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* Denning, from *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* 1-50 (packet)

2/6   Jameson, “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue”
      Wallerstein, “Culture as the Ideological Battleground of the Modern World System”
      Henwood, “Globalization”
      • Brainstorm Working Group Projects


2/20  No Class

2/27  Hardt and Negri, *Empire*

3/2   Scott Herring Talk

3/6   Enloe, from *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (packet)
      Grewal, from *Transnational America* (packet)
      Mohanty, from *Feminism Without Borders* (packet)
      • Formalize Working Groups

3/13  Lenin, “Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Capitalism,”
      Hobsbawm, from *Age of Extremes* (packet)
      • Class-time for Working Groups

3/20  James, *Beyond a Boundary*

3/27  Fanon, from *Wretched of the Earth* and *A Dying Colonialism* (packet)
      Cabral “The Weapon of Theory” (packet)
      Mattelart and Dorfman, “Instructions on How to Become a General in the Disneyland Club” (packet)

3/29  Michael Hanes-Garcia Talk

4/3   Working Group Projects—TBA

4/10  No Class

      Hall, from *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (packet)
      Gramsci, from *The Prison Notebooks* (packet)
4/22-4/23 Graduate Student Conference—Working Group Panel(s)?

4/24  Said, *Orientalism*, 1-110, 201-225
     Ahmad, “Orientalism and After” (packet)

5/1   Spivak, from *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*

5/8   Working Group Projects—TBA

5/15  Final Exam Period, *if needed* (5:45-7:45)