Cultural Studies originally emerged from a concern over the place of popular cultural forms and subjectivities in relation to dominant cultural practices of schooling, aesthetics, labor, politics. Raymond Williams’ comment that “culture is ordinary,” a reaction against Mathew Arnold’s position in essays like “Cultural and Anarchy,” seems as good a jumping off point as I can locate. Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the “culture industry” might be another. While there is no single position shared by all work in Cultural Studies, the intellectual project is marked out by a few very general but very basic commitments.

First, there is no first philosophy that solves all problems and resolves all disputes. The local politics of theory and of practice change constantly as cultural conditions evolve. But cultural studies is always political, always concerned with the analysis and intervention in cultural practices.

Second, and partly as an extension of the first commitment, cultural studies tries to include itself in its own analysis; it is self-reflexive regarding the purposes, locations and politics of its own practice.

Third, cultural studies is a shape shifter, an intellectual project committed to analysis and intervention, but not to any single set of theoretical tools. As a practice, and I hesitate to say “discipline,” it is bricoleur in the sense Derrida explains in his reading of Levi-Straus; it makes use of the intellectual tools at its disposal to achieve its current project. To quote my friend Rob Brown cultural studies is always asking itself “What is bothering us now?”

Work in Cultural Studies typically explores the ways particular social practices or forms of representation organize cultural power, constitute identity, and condition action. Studies describe the relations between the knowledge a society produces and the material conditions and ideological structures through which it does so. Cultural critics explore the way discourses realize and make available forms of subjectivity and possibilities of action. A long tradition in Cultural Studies examines the cultural work of education (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron, Friere), the institution of the school (e.g. Giroux, Foucault) and the possibilities of pedagogical action (e.g. critical pedagogy, Boal). And throughout the last 20 years, Cultural Studies, like most humanities disciplines was concerned with the question of subjectivity and action or the theory of agency. The theoretical projects of Cultural Studies share many of the assumptions and interests of contemporary Rhetoric: the constitutive power of discourse, rhetorical practices as forms of representation and social action, organizations as sites of cultural production, public speech as performative, the
power of technology in postmodern life, the politics and relations of power within the public sphere, pedagogy as a political practice.

I have four goals in this course.

First, I want to provide you an introduction to Cultural Studies, its history and its central theoretical projects. There are conflicting positions within Cultural Studies driven by the impulse to perform critique and pursue esoteric theory, and a different impulse to intervene in everyday activity and facilitate change. Stuart Hall articulates this conflict in early Cultural Studies work, and it survives today in different forms. While I have omitted many things, I have structured the course as something of a dialogue between materialist theory (Marx through the Coole collection) and psychoanalytic theory, represented by Zizek and Rickert’s appropriation of Zizek. I have positioned Deluze in the middle, not as a mediator, but as a powerful theorist who draws on both traditions. I hope we can map some of the theoretical and political terrain of Cultural Studies over the course of the semester.

Second, I’d like to look at both classic, founding texts like Marx’s *German Ideology* and at current theoretical work that extends that intellectual tradition. We don’t have the luxury of reading everything—though it may seem that way by mid-semester—but I do want to read a couple classic texts in their entirety.

Third, as we work through the material, we will examine important concepts such as hegemony, ideology, culture, practice, subjectivity, agency and resistance. These terms represent nodal points in both Cultural Studies and Rhetoric.

Finally, I want to look at some of the ways cultural studies has influenced or been appropriated by rhetoric and composition. Rickert’s book spends a good deal of time doing just this, but I want to look explicitly at how other theories/theorists have become part of the discussion in our discipline on the last 15-20 years. As I explain below under the heading “work,” each of you will be responsible for a piece of this last project.

The course will be organized as a seminar; class will involve brief lectures and student presentations but mostly be a discussion of the books and articles on our reading list. Given the background that many of you have, I suspect that the Cultural Studies material will be relatively new. Much of the language will be new and the style may be unusual. Many of you have had courses in rhetorical theory already (though this is not a requirement), and I hope you will bring that knowledge to this bear on the material we discuss.

**Required Work**

**Talk**
As you may have noticed, there is a good deal of reading in the course, some of it somewhat alien and pretty difficult. But it is also very exciting material and some
hip, cool, very current theoretical stuff (the self-parody flag is waving frantically here). I do not want to completely dictate what you do; you will all have different interests and ways of engaging the material. Your primary responsibility is to read the material, to come to class and to participate in the discussion. Class discussion is the biggest measure for me of how you are progressing in the course and with the material. **I will not give an “A” in the course to anyone who does not participate in the class discussion substantially and regularly.** I say this for a number of reasons:

First, class will be more interesting and “profitable” for all of us if I do not do all the talking. I will lecture from time to time as necessary. But I have a very specific take on the material and an agenda of my own and that may not match your interests and concerns. It also means that like all ideology, my teaching will have blind spots and exclude lots of things for various reasons.

Second and more pragmatic. When you take oral exams and especially when you have a job interview, you have to be articulate and poised talking about difficult material to groups of senior colleagues. In a job interview, you may have 20-30 minutes to convince a committee to bring you to their campus for an on-campus interview. Below the initial interview and you lose a chance at the job, and a good job is hard to find (apologies to Flannery O’Connor). People who have sat quietly through graduate classes are not going to do well in oral exams and on the job market.

If you aren’t in class, you aren’t participating in the discussion. There are times when an individual has to miss class, but we only meet once a week. So, missing more than one class will reduce your participation grade. Missing 4 or more classes constitutes grounds for an “F” in participation.

**Written Work**

Each of you should do a substantial writing project, but I do not want to dictate exactly what form that takes. Because the reading load is pretty heavy, I am not going to require both a reading log (25-30 pages) and a seminar paper (15-20+ pages), though I think both are very useful work. You can choose between the two, or make me a serious alternative proposal. I’m happy to let you modify the writing assignment to your individual intellectual or programmatic purposes. Anyone writing a thesis or dissertation or dissertation proposal, for example, might propose that their written work in the course be part of that larger task. Folks for whom this is completely new material which is unrelated to what they already know may find that the reading log is a good learning tool and wonderful preparation for orals, written exams, theses, and dissertations. A reading log is a lot of work, but spread out, and it pays off in a lot of ways. If you choose to take this option, we should talk about what form your log takes; I think that analytic logs that synthesize material are vastly more useful than individual summaries. You might also want to write a
sustained paper that might be in a portfolio or a draft of an article. At any rate, I want you to determine the form your written work will take and make me a written proposal by the end of the third week of the semester.

In addition to your written project, each of you will be responsible for locating and bringing into class an article or book chapter that connects what we are reading in cultural studies—a specific theorist, a concept, a critical project or intellectual tradition—with work in rhetoric and composition. This does not have to be a brand new piece of scholarship, but if it is older, make sure it is a significant contribution to the disciplinary conversation; take it from a leading journal or influential book, pick a piece written by a major scholar, pick a piece that participates in a substantial conversation in rhetoric and composition. In the interests of time, I want each of you to present the article of book chapter to the class in 15 minutes and provide a one-page (single spaced) handout explaining the essays’ argument, its use of or connection to something we’ve read from cultural studies, and how representative the essay or book chapter you choose is of other work in Rhetoric and Composition. This last pretty general criteria asks that you briefly locate the essay in the context of other appropriations of the same theorist, concept, theory, etc. This would be a great opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and put together a somewhat longer, more robust presentation. (These three criteria along with how well written the page is, are the evaluation criteria for the written portion of the assignment. The oral portion will be evaluated on how accurately you present the material, and how clear and organized and efficient you are in doing so.)

In the ideal world, you should present this brief overview of an outside reading on the day we discuss the relevant reading in class. It may be that you have to do this in the week following our reading of the relevant material on the syllabus. But don’t delay the presentation more than a week; the presentation must be “contemporaneous” with the relevant course reading. Your goal here is two-fold: first, to illustrate the way scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition has articulated material from Cultural Studies; and second, to provide a succinct analysis of a significant article or book chapter in Rhetoric and Composition to colleagues who will not have read it.

**Grades**
Participation in class discussion  40%  
Presentation (written and Oral) of outside reading  10%  
Substantial written project  40%  

**Books**


**Articles and Book Chapters**


Santos, Marc. "Something Smart about Rhetoric and Cynicism." coming to a journal near you soon.


Schedule

Wed. 8/24 Introduction:
  Grossberg et. al., Cultural Studies “Introduction”;
  Scott et. al., Critical Power Tools “Introduction”;
  Hall, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms”;
  Johnson, ‘What is Cultural Studies Anyway?”;
  Herndl and Brown “Marxist Rhetoric”


Wed. 9/14 Marx, The German Ideology & Smith “Ideology”

Wed. 9/21 Williams, Marxism and Literature; Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” Mouffe and Laclau from Hegemony and Socialist Strategy 93-148


Wed. 10/5 Coole New Materialisms

Wed. 10/12 Coole New Materialisms

Wed. 10/19 Deluze from Thousand Plateaus and sections of Reidar Due, Deluze

Wed. 10/26 Haraway “ Manifesto for Cyborgs,” “The Promises of Monsters,” selections from Modest Witness


Wed. 11/9 Rickert Acts of Enjoyment 1- 138

Wed. 11/16 Zizek Sublime Object of Ideology

Wed. 11/23 Zizek Sublime Object of Ideology

Wed. 11/30 Rickert Acts of Enjoyment (139-215); Santos, “Something Smart on Rhetoric and Cynicism”