

**Cultural Studies in English**

**(ENCS14)**

(15 credits)

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**Teacher:** Adnan Mahmutović

Email: [adnan.mahmutovic@english.su.se](mailto:adnan.mahmutovic@english.su.se)

**Course description**

In this course we study different ways of understanding and interpreting contemporary cultural phenomena, mainly in the form of English-language media and popular culture. The first part of the course gives an overview of the most influential theories within the field of cultural studies, sampling some ways that they have been applied to different types of texts, such as films, TV shows, and graphic novels. In the second part, the students develop a research project and write a research essay focusing on some specific cultural work or practice, independently chosen by the students.

**Intended learning outcomes**

On completion of the seminar part of the course (Theories and Concepts, 10 credits) students are expected to be able to:

- Give an account of the content of the course literature,
- Demonstrate the ability to use central theoretical concepts, models for analysis, and methods within the field of Cultural Studies,
- Apply such concepts and theoretical models to different cultural expressions, especially to works and practices in popular culture;
- Present an independent written analysis of cultural expressions from a contemporary perspective;
- Demonstrate a good understanding of written English,
- Express themselves in academic English.

On completion of the research essay part of the course (Research Project, 5 credits) students are, in addition, expected to be able to:

- Write a coherent research-driven essay in largely correct, academic English that persuasively analyzes an independently chosen contemporary cultural product or practice, motivating that analysis in a way that is relevant to the field, using relevant concepts and documenting all sources in the customary scholarly fashion.

This is what we aim for. The means for this is conscientious preparation for each seminar, active participation in seminar discussion, focused responses to given assignments, and the independent production of written work.

**Course requirements, format, and activities**

The course will take place in the form of seminars, where students will enter a dialogue aimed at understanding and critically judging critical texts in the field of cultural studies (CS), partly by considering their usefulness for the analysis of various cultural practices and products. Students will practice analysis of various forms of popular culture, using critical concepts developed in CS. Seminars are intended to be active, hands-on opportunities for students to practice the skills they will learn throughout the course; for this reason, the students should bring any assigned text(s) with them to every seminar.

The course consists of the following activities:

- Seminars (pre-seminar instructions for each seminar will be posted on Athena);
- Group presentations, to which all students in the group make individual contributions;
- Writing a reflective journal;
- Before each seminar, students are expected to finish the assigned reading, watch any visual material assigned, and carry out any accompanying tasks. It is recommended that students meet

in groups to discuss the reading before the seminar. Students are expected to be well prepared to discuss the reading at the seminar, showing that they have read the assigned texts carefully, with consideration given to instructions and study questions.

### **Grading**

The course adopts the 7-grade SU scale (A–F).

To receive a final grade, students must have completed all the examination assignments (if all examination assignments have not been done, no grade will be given).

To receive a passing grade (A to E), students must complete and pass all the examination assignments, and thus demonstrate that they achieved all the learning outcomes at least at the minimum level (see “Course grading criteria” below).

### **Examination**

Students are required to complete the following for the first part/module of the course (Theories and Concepts, 10 credits):

- Reflective journals for ten seminars of which five will be assessed and graded A-F (each 20% of the module grade), while five will be given just a pass/fail grade (see instructions at the end of the document)

Students are required to complete the following for the second part/module of the course (Research Project, 5 credits):

- One research-driven essay, 3,000-4,000 words (graded A-F).

### **Required reading and viewing**

#### **Course textbook:**

John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. (You should try to get the ninth edition, but the eighth edition will be accepted)

#### **Novels**

Art Spiegelman, *Maus* (complete works, books I and II)

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

#### **Films:**

*The Matrix*, directed by Lilly and Lana Wachowski (1999)

*Pride and Prejudice*, directed by Joe Wright (2005)

*Apocalypse Now*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (1979)

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, dir. Tom Stoppard (1994)

*Adaptation*, directed by Spike Jonze (2002)

*This is England*, directed by Shane Meadows (2007)

*Ex Machina*, directed by Alex Garland (2014)

#### **Other readings**

Eliezer Yudkowsky, “Pausing AI Development isn’t Enough” (link on Athena)

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*. Link:

[https://web.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Baudrillard/Baudrillard\\_Simulacra.html](https://web.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Baudrillard/Baudrillard_Simulacra.html)

One article from: <https://thesociologicalreview.org/magazine/june-2023/>

One article of your own choosing about a popular TV/console/computer game

# Seminar Plan

Dates, times, and places for the meetings are in TimeEdit. Always check TimeEdit for any changes.

SEMINAR 1. Course introduction  
Introductory seminar. No preparation needed.

## SEMINAR 2. Culturalism

**Key Concepts:** CULTURE, IDEOLOGY, POPULAR

**Read:** Ch 1-3 in Storey

**View:** *The Matrix*

**Prepare:** What is culture? Storey offers a number of definitions. Which do you prefer? Can you argue against some of the definitions he lists?

**Journal:** Submit a copy of your reflective journal on Athena, 24 hours before the seminar. Regarding the journal, see more below, under “Written Assignments.”

## SEMINAR 3. Marxism

**Key Concepts:** POWER, CLASS, HEGEMONY, NEGOTIATION

**Read:** Ch 4 in Storey

**View:** *Pride and Prejudice*.

**Prepare:** How might the film (not the novel) be analyzed from a Marxist perspective? Why was it (and other film adaptation of Austen novels) so popular? What would be the critique? Also think about yourself in the terms supplied by Marxism. What is your position in the class structure? Have you changed position?

**Journal:** Submit a copy of your reflective journal on Athena, 24 hours before the seminar.

## SEMINAR 4. Race, Racism and Representation

**Key Concepts:** RACE, RACISM, ETHNICITY, ORIENTALISM

**Read:** Storey Ch 9 and *Maus*

**View:** *Apocalypse Now*

**Prepare:** How does the comic deal with racism? What is meant by “representation”? Can you think of any examples of Orientalism now? Do you find Storey’s analysis of orientalism in Vietnam movies relevant for *Apocalypse Now*?

**Group one:** Introduce the notions of racism and Orientalism and suggest some problems and questions for our discussion. It is good if you can refer to *Maus* and *Apocalypse Now*, and also connect to current cultural phenomena.

**Journal:** Submit a copy of your reflective journal on Athena, 24 hours before the seminar.

## SEMINAR 5. Gender and Sexuality

**Key Concepts:** GENDER, FEMININITY, MASCULINITY, INTERSECTIONALITY

**Read:** Storey Ch 8

**Prepare:** Look up the notion of “intersectionality” specifically and find examples. For instance, you can search for the problems with Western feminism in relation to women from non-Western countries. For example, most recent cases would include Palestinian (women in war zones) and Iranian (Mahsa Amini case and the riots).

**Group two:** Give a brief presentation of different feminist theories and suggest some problems and questions for our discussion. Connect the theoretical issues to other current cultural phenomena. You can give references to any popular culture.

**Journal:** Submit a copy of your reflective journal on Athena, 24 hours before the seminar.

## SEMINAR 6. Artificial Intelligence

**Read:** Gibson, *Neuromancer*, “Pausing AI Development isn’t Enough” by Eliezer Yudkowsky (link on Athena).

**View:** *Ex Machina*

**Journal:** Submit a copy of your reflective journal on Athena, 24 hours before the seminar. In your journal respond to any of the articles from:  
<https://thesociologicalreview.org/magazine/june-2023/>

## SEMINAR 7. Being a FAN

**Key Concepts:** FAN CULTURE, SUBCULTURES

**Read:** Storey Ch 12.

**View:** *This is England*

Think about the film’s presentation of the skinhead subculture and its meaning in 1980s Britain. What does the film say about the way that political movements can coopt subcultures? What are the contemporary subcultures that might be vulnerable to political cooptation? Storey presents two poles in Cultural Studies: where would you place yourself? Why?

**Group three:** Introduce the notion of fan culture and subcultures and suggest some problems and questions for our discussion. It is good if you can refer to *This is England* and if you can connect the theoretical issues to other current cultural phenomena.

**Journal:** Submit a copy of your reflective journal on Athena, 24 hours before the seminar.

## SEMINAR 8. Structuralism & Post-structuralism

**Key Concepts:** THE ARBITRARINESS OF THE SIGN, SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE, LANGUE AND PAROLE, BINARY OPPOSITIONS

**Read:** Storey Ch 6.

**View:** *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (check out the story of *Hamlet* before seeing this film). How does the film problematize the relation between words and world? Does it give us any hope of finding some basis for really engaging with the world? Can we take its presentation of the human conditions seriously or is it mainly a form of playing with words and with the original play?

**Journal:** Submit a copy of your reflective journal on Athena, 24 hours before the seminar.

**Deadline: November xx.** Project proposal with a preliminary bibliography. Submit on Athena.

## SEMINAR 9. Postmodernism

**Key Concepts:** METANARRATIVE, ADAPTATION, FORM vs. CONTENT

**Read:** Storey Ch 10 and Jean Baudrillard’s essay on the simulacrum (link on Athena)

**View:** *Adaptation*. Think about how this film incorporates postmodern ideas and devices. We have now watched three films that might be classified as postmodern: *The Matrix*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, and *Adaptation*. Think about similarities and differences. Taken together, what do they say about (North Atlantic) culture in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**Group four:** Present cultural phenomena that fit the notion of the hyperreal

**Journal:** Submit a copy of your reflective journal on Athena, 24 hours before the seminar.

## SEMINAR 10. Graphic novel

**Read:** Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*

**All groups:** I will send a separate assignment for each group.

**Journal:** Submit a copy of your reflective journal on Athena, 24 hours before the seminar.

**SEMINAR 11. Conspiracy theories**

**All groups:** Choose at least one popular conspiracy. Find and read an article about it and prepare to present the theory. Use the article (or more) in your discussion.

**Deadline for your research project: January 19, 2025. Submit on Athena.**

**Re-take deadline for both parts of the course: February 23, 2025. Submit on Athena.**

## GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

In the seminar plan, there are several group assignments. This course is designed with active participation by students in mind, very much in the spirit of Cultural Studies. If you do not participate in these seminar activities, you will lose out on an important dimension of the course. However, since attendance is not compulsory, you need to make that decision yourself, and you need to be open about it, so that we can work with groups of students who do want to participate.

Think of these presentations as laying the groundwork for seminar discussion of the topics and concepts for that seminar. The main aim is not to present a lot of information, but to make the other members of the seminar think about some of the key ideas and terms. Make sure to give everyone in the group a chance to contribute to the presentation.

Each presentation should be some 15-20 minutes, and it should be followed directly by seminar discussion based on what the group has presented and what everyone has read. Be concise and analytical. Try not to retell a lot of what we all have read, but rather present your thoughts about what you take to be the key issues.

When you plan the presentations, be sure to plan the work in a spirit of collaboration and finding the forms that work best for the group.

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

### 1. JOURNALS (10 credits)

Every student will write reflections on the issues that we deal with for each seminar. Read the required chapter(s) from Storey and use theoretical concepts in your analyses. Try and **analyze major ideas and be critical**. If you disagree with the theory, be clear about what you find problematic. **Always use examples**. For instance, for the second seminar, you can analyse *The Matrix* in relation to at least one major idea presented in Storey, chapters 1-3. Give references to the sources you are discussing and to any other source you have used. Each journal entry should demonstrate that you have read/viewed the material for each seminar, and that you have understood critical concepts.

There will be **two different types of journal entries**. One is shorter, around 300 words, and will only be given a pass/fail grade, and no further feedback. The other type should be between 500 and 750 words long (excluding references) and will be graded according to the 7-scale grade (A-F), with some feedback given by your instructor. There should be **at least five entries of this second type**. You will choose yourself which seminars you wish to write a longer, more substantial journal for. When you post these entries, you should type “(Journal for full assessment)” after the title you have given the journal entry.

The journal will be submitted on Athena, no later than **24 hours before** each seminar. If you plan not to participate in group work, this will be your only contribution to the seminar, so please think of your audience. Please note that this means there is a **deadline** for each instalment of your journal. If you miss a deadline, you will have to submit your journal instalments at a later date. Please check Athena for the resubmission date.

## Example of an extended journal entry:

### Being a Fan

Storey has throughout the book shown many different ways of looking at popular culture and in the end he prescribes balance and vigilance in the future study, not to neglect all the possible variables. I agree with the idea that culture is not simply imposed on us from above. The masses are not passive consumers: “To deny the passivity of consumption is not to deny that sometimes consumption is passive; to deny that the consumers of popular culture are cultural dupes is not to deny that the culture industries seek to manipulate.”

De Certeau introduces the concept of “cultural poaching,” which indeed sounds like a sub-culture, where the word “poaching” is an anarchistic catchphrase. It might be his intention to encourage the breaking of the domination of teachers and intellectuals who advocate “authorized meanings”. It seems that the Arnoldian views on culture cannot be omitted, even though what is bad and good is up for discussion. There will still be people who think they have the “right” (high culture) answers. I believe they are very important and valuable as well, but they must be a part in a more complex process that is taking place in our contemporary culture.

Like Storey, I agree with McGuigen that power and politics must be taken into account in the study of popular culture. Even sport, as Bourdieu has shown, has fallen from being a pastime to a highly politicized spectacle and economic enterprise. Hall has pointed out that in many cases economics have been taken out of the study of popular culture and I agree with him that as long as we live in a capitalist world, driven by capitalist needs and demands, economy must always be taken into account. In *This is England* we see one capitalist way of embracing a subculture with “economic enthusiasm and is prepared to supply it with all the commodities it is able to desire”. We find young Sean getting dressed up in the attires of the anarchist skinhead culture. In a shoe store, the sales lady pushes him to buy another brand, claiming it is the London version of Doc Martens. But the boy cannot accept this. It is not the matter of the quality of the product, but its social meaning. The producer of the shoes, in this case, had no control over the meaning that the footwear would acquire and even if, eventually, the shoes came to be connected to racist ideologies, the meaning was not imposed top-down. This may be an example of poaching as well. Furthermore, this shows that “Almost everything we buy helps reproduce the capitalist system economically. But everything we buy does not necessarily help secure us as ‘subjects’ of capitalist ideology” (Willis). The Skinheads were not such subjects. I grew up with the racist skinheads and believed everyone to be so, but had to look into the Skinhead origin after I watched the movie. Formed in the sixties as a subculture alongside Mods, they were influenced by the Jamaican “rude boys”, and favoured music from the West Indies and later ska music. To go back to capitalism, it is interesting how political and economically strong groups took advantage of the bad economy in England in the late seventies and the early eighties. We see the men in suits bringing the anti-social and anti-government skinheads to a barn and feed them with racist propaganda. It is similar to what the Germans did before WW2, blaming the state of the economy, unemployment and poverty on Jews. In *This is England* it is the immigrants that get the blame, the “Pakis” etc. Ironically really, when in reality it is the English right wing and capitalist government they should be targeting.

[And then a list of references added here]

## 2. THE RESEARCH PROJECT (5 credits)

In this second part of the course, the research essay, you will have the opportunity to develop your own ideas with regard to a topic of your choice: it should be a topic that fits within the field of Cultural Studies, and you should carefully motivate your choice of topic.

The essay should be ca 3-4,000 words long.

You need to use secondary literature (peer-reviewed articles and/or books) to support your ideas.

The essay format and the references should follow the English Department Style Sheet (in Athena, under Resources for the essay).

- A. Research Proposal (Deadline November xx). Submit on Athena. Name the document CS\_ResProp\_yourfullname  
The research proposal should be 2 pages long and should include a **preliminary title** and a **description** of what you intend to do in your project. Include a list of the literature you intend to use. Your final bibliography should include at least six secondary sources. Submit on Athena.
- B. Final Draft. (Deadline January xx, 2024). Submit on Athena. Name the document CS\_ResEss\_yourfullname.

### Instructions and Tips for the Research Project

- For your project you should choose a primary material to study. This can consist of any work of popular culture that interests you: a film, a TV series, popular music, fiction, a journal or magazine, a Facebook group, etc. If you choose a magazine you need to work with several copies, and similarly for a TV series, you need several instalments.
- Decide on an aspect of your chosen material that you would like to research. This can be linked to any of the concepts and theories we have studied and discussed. For instance, you can analyse the representation of “masculinity” in *Sex and the City*.
- It is assumed that students who apply for this course already have basic training in writing essays. However, you may still feel a bit insecure about how to proceed with your research project. There is support to be had from *Studie- och språkverkstaden* (<https://www.su.se/utbildning/studera-vid-universitetet/studie-och-spr%C3%A5kverkstaden>)
- You must formulate a **thesis statement** or **claim**, which briefly answers your research question. A claim tells your reader something specific. For instance: “The Matrix films create a hodgepodge of critical and philosophical thought from Plato to modern philosophy of the mind. I argue that this is a case of cultural poaching that bothers the line between high and low culture.” The thesis statement is usually found at the end of your introduction, and it is often a good idea to place it at the end of the first or second paragraph.



## Secondary sources

When writing research papers, you are free to support your ideas by using articles and books written on the subject you have chosen. You are now part of an academic community, which continually debates and discusses matters through writing and speaking about them.

You must be sure, however, that the articles and books you use can be trusted—that they are of a certain quality and not someone’s personal ravings on some website or blog. Therefore, we look for sources that are **peer-reviewed**, that is, they have been read by experts in the field and judged to be of a certain standard. If you do not use peer-reviewed material to develop your idea, you will not be trusted or taken seriously. Often you can use other kinds of sources—song lyrics, magazine articles etc.—to add flair to your writing.

### Where do I find such materials?

The most convenient way to find articles and books is to use databases. The Stockholm University Library (SUB) has many useful databases and a collection of e-books and e-journals. All of these can be accessed through the SUB home page. The databases list articles and books, and you can search by, for instance, subject, title, or author. When you find the title of an article in a journal, you can usually click on the journal title to get information about the journal itself.

### How do I find the materials?

To find articles or books via databases, go to the university library homepage: <https://www.su.se/stockholms-universitetsbibliotek/> and

- Click on **databaser** and go directly to the particular database you want
- JSTOR (full-text, journals)
- MLA (not full-text, but comprehensive and very useful)
- Project MUSE
- EBSCO
- Film and Television Literature Index
- Communication and Mass Media Complete

If you only find a reference, you may need to go to the SUB catalogue or to the LIBRIS catalogue, to locate the book or journal you want. LIBRIS covers all Swedish research libraries (link on the SUB website). This will allow you to see if books can be ordered from other university libraries. Inter-library loan orders (*fjärrlån*) can be made via the SUB site. Keep in mind that books will take a few days or even several weeks to arrive.

Sometimes MLA has a direct link to a full-text version in another database (for example the E-journals databases MUSE and JSTORE).

I hope that you’ll enjoy working on your projects, and I look forward to reading them!

## Formal Requirements for Essay Writing

Length: ca. 3-4,000 words.

Font: Times New Roman, 12 points.

Spacing: 1.5 lines.

Format, documentation style: See the “Chicago\_Style\_Sheet\_Literature” on Athena.

## Last minute check

- Is there a clear statement/explanation of intent?
- Does the essay deal with what it promises to deal with?
- Are the choices of material, concepts, and theory well motivated?
- Is the argumentation convincing?
- Are there enough primary materials and do these really support the argument?
- Is the essay well-structured or are there logical jumps that need to be further explained?
- Are there proper introductory and concluding paragraphs?
- Are there ideas that need to be worked out further?
- Does the essay follow the formal guidelines for writing?
- Are there spelling and grammar mistakes?
- Are all the sources that have been used for the essay properly documented? Make sure you are not committing plagiarism?

## **POINTERS REGARDING ASSESSMENT OF THE ESSAY**

(These are not grading criteria, but they give you a sense of what makes up a strong essay, and what kinds of problems you should try to avoid)

### **A**

The grade “A” will typically be given to essays that have innovative ideas about the investigated materials, that have a clear thesis statement, a clear structure and a persuasive argument. Furthermore, they should display a reader-friendly coherence, linking paragraphs in a logical way that strengthens the line of argument. Claims are well supported. Theoretical concepts are used in a correct way and there is a critical dialogue with a particular theory. The student’s voice is prominent and it is clear that the student has positioned themselves in relation to the theory. The text is free from formal mistakes. The vocabulary is advanced and varied and there are no or very few grammar mistakes.

### **B**

The grade “B” will typically be given to essays that are creative and have a clear thesis statement, a clear structure, and a solid argument. It is coherent and the paragraphs are logically linked. Claims are supported and theoretical concepts are used correctly. There is a dialogue with a particular theory and the student has delineated his/her position vis-à-vis theory. The text has no formal mistakes. There are perhaps some, but very few language problems.

### **C**

The grade “C” will typically be given to essays that has instances of creativity, while being for the most part conventional in its approach. They have a thesis statement, a discernable structure and a central argument. Claims are supported. Theoretical concepts are used correctly. There is some dialogue with a particular theory. The text has some formal mistakes and there are some language errors.

### **D**

The grade “D” will typically be given to essays that are predictable in their approach, while having claims that are supported. Few theoretical concepts are used. There is an attempt at the use of theory but it is used inconsistently or superficially. The text has obvious formal mistakes and there are language errors.

### **E**

The grade “E” will be given to the essay that for the most part summarises primary materials, that has a weak thesis statement and displays a muddled structure, which goes hand in hand with an unclear argument. There are definite claims being made, and they have some support. Few theoretical concepts are used and the chosen theory is not fully employed, but there is some dialogue with it. The text has obvious formal mistakes. The vocabulary is conventional and the text is marred by grammar and spelling mistakes.

### **F**

The grades “F” and “Fx” will typically be given to essays that lack claims about the investigated materials and that hav an incoherent structure. The arguments are not supported. No theory is used, or used in an incorrect way. The text has a large number of formal errors. The vocabulary is poor. The quality of the text is so low that comprehension becomes a problem. The grade “Fx” rather than “F” implies that the essay is in some respects closer to an “E” grade, but not enough to merit a passing grade.

## Course grading criteria

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>Fx</b>	<b>F</b>
	<b>excellent skills in</b>	<b>very good skills in</b>	<b>good skills in</b>	<b>satisfactory skills in</b>	<b>adequate skills in</b>	<b>Fail</b>	<b>Fail</b>
<b>Knowledge of CS concepts and debates</b> (ILO 1)	Giving an account of the material covered by the course reading	Giving an account of the material covered by the course reading	Giving an account of the material covered by the course reading	Giving an account of the material covered by the course reading	Giving an account of the material covered by the course reading	The student has displayed some, but not all, of the skills of the level of the criteria for E	The student's work does not achieve the course outcomes
<b>Ability to use concepts, models and methods</b> (ILO 2)	Using central theoretical concepts, models and methods within Cultural studies	Using central theoretical concepts, models and methods within Cultural studies	Using central theoretical concepts, models and methods within Cultural studies	Using central theoretical concepts, models and methods within Cultural studies	Using central theoretical concepts, models and methods within Cultural studies		
<b>Applying concepts</b> (ILO 3)	Applying central concepts and theoretical models to different cultural expressions.	Applying central concepts and theoretical models to different cultural expressions.	Applying central concepts and theoretical models to different cultural expressions.	Applying central concepts and theoretical models to different cultural expressions.	Applying central concepts and theoretical models to different cultural expressions.		
<b>Academic English</b> (ILO 4)	Demonstrating a good understanding of written English and expressing themselves in academic English.	Demonstrating a good understanding of written English and expressing themselves in academic English.	Demonstrating a good understanding of written English and expressing themselves in academic English.	Demonstrating a good understanding of written English and expressing themselves in academic English.	Demonstrating a good understanding of written English and expressing themselves in academic English.		
<b>Research-driven essay</b> (ILO 5, second part of the course only)	Writing a research-driven essay	Writing a research-driven essay	Writing a research-driven essay	Writing a research-driven essay	Writing a research-driven essay		