Eugene Lang College, The New School
Culture and Media Studies

LCST 3789: Cultural Toolkit (Spring 2012)

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Dates: Jan. 24 to May 10
Time: 10:00
Location : W. 12th St. (619)
Office Hours: Tues. 4:00 to 5:00
or by appointment

Course Description

This course provides students with the methodological competencies required to carry out advanced research in the field of Cultural Studies. Combining theory with case studies, students are introduced to some of the investigative approaches commonly adopted by Cultural Studies scholars, including ethnography, discourse analysis and archival research. Further attention is paid to research ethics and research controversies. In addition to reading articles on the question of method by key theorists, such as James Clifford, Angela McRobbie and Michael Taussig, throughout the course students will be asked to complete short research assignments designed to advance their own research skills. The final assignment will take the form of a proposal for a senior year project.

Required Materials

All readings will be posted on the class website at: http://lcst3789.wordpress.com

Description of Assignments and Evaluation

Attendance/Participation (20%): The participation grade will be based on class attendance and demonstrated preparation for each class meeting, as well as the completion of in-class assignments. Students who miss more than eight classes with or without legitimate cause will be given an F or where appropriate, a retroactive medical withdrawal.

Assignment 1 (0%): Topic & question

Assignment 2 (20%): Interview

Assignment 3 (20%): Research dossier

Assignment 4 (40%): Research proposal (n.b., the final grade will be based on process and product; students who fail to complete each step on time and/or fail to participate in the class presentations and critiques will only receive a partial grade for the final proposal)
Policy on Late Assignments: Unless you make arrangements with the instructor prior to the deadline, late assignments will be penalized at 1%/day (e.g., a student who submits an essay one week past the deadline will lose 7% of their final grade in the course).

Electronic Devices: Electronic devices may only be used on specific occasions with the permission of the instructor.

Schedule

January 24: Introduction
Objective: To introduce and discuss the goals of the course and to develop a research question.

Assignment 1 (0%): Identify one to three potential research subjects you would like to investigate for your senior project. For each potential topic, respond to the following questions: 1. What led you to this research subject (e.g., a personal connection, expertise etc.)? 2. If x is your topic, what is your question? 3. Have other researchers explored this topic and/or question? If so, who? 4. What methodology will you use to explore this investigation? Why?

January 26: Introduction (continued)
Objective: To explore the role of methodology in cultural studies versus allied disciplines (e.g., Sociology, Anthropology, History and Literary Studies); to explore Cultural Studies’ discomfort with defining itself in relation to a single methodology; to explore how Cultural Studies theorizing and research has impacted other disciplines with methodological traditions.

Module 1—Researching People and Communities

January 31: Ethnographic Research
Objective: To explore the role of ethnographic research in Cultural Studies and allied disciplines.
1. Paula Saukko, Doing Research in Cultural Studies (pp. 37-73)

February 2: Observations and Cognitive Mapping
Objective: To analyze the role of participant observation and cognitive mapping in Cultural Studies research.
February 7: The Qualitative Interview
Objective: To explore the practice and ethics of interviewing human subjects.

Assignment 2 (20%): Conduct an interview (approximately 20-minutes) with the aim of exploring the following research question: To what extent do toys play a role in how we remember and make sense of our childhoods? In other words, your objective is to explore the role toys play in the construction of narratives about childhood. Notably, this is your research question/topic but NOT the question you’ll ask your research participant! Before sitting down with your participant, you’ll need to develop a set of questions and/or prompts for your participants that will enable you to explore the research question/topic. Once you have completed your interview, transcribe the entire interview (n.b., it will take at least 2 hours to transcribe 20 to 25 minutes). Bring four copies of your transcript to class on February 14.

February 9: From “Fieldwork” to “Deskwork”—On Ethnographic Writing
Objective: To explore strategies for “writing up” fieldwork observations and various genres of ethnographic writing; to further explore the “fictions” of ethnography.

February 14: Assignment 2—Workshop

Group Work: Working in groups of three to four, read and compare your interview transcripts. Did you ask similar questions? Which questions or discussion prompts were most helpful? How might you improve your questions? What decisions did you make while transcribing your interview (e.g., did you mark the interjections and pauses)? Could these interviews be used to respond to the research question? Read together, what insights do your interviews yield?

February 16: Ethics
1. New School Institutional Review Board Guidelines

Module 2—Researching Texts & Things

February 21: Everyday Life
Objective: To explore how to study everyday life, including aspects of the everyday that are frequently taken for granted and not considered research worthy.
2. Michel de Certeau, General Introduction to The Practice of Everyday Life, The Everyday Life Reader (see previous link).
3. Luce Giard, “Doing Cooking,” The Everyday Life Reader (see previous link).
February 23: Texts and Textual Communities
Objective: To explore how cultural studies scholars approach the study of texts and textual communities, paying specific attention to the ways in which the investigation of texts in cultural studies overlaps and differs from approaches found in allied disciplines, such as literary studies.
2. Kate Eichhorn, “DIY Collectors…” *Women’s Studies: An Inter-disciplinary Journal*.

February 28: Assignment 3

Assignment 3 (20%): In this stage of the course, you will continue to exploration of toys initiated in the first module. Focusing on one popular toy (e.g., Hot Wheels, Barbie, Twister, G.I. Joe, Transformers, Etch-a-Sketch etc.), collect the following research materials on your subject: 1. An annotated bibliography with at least ten relevant academic sources (book chapters, refereed journal articles, or books) on your subject; 2. A file folder with copies of relevant primary source materials (e.g., newspaper or magazine advertisements of your toy from different historical periods or related ephemera, such as toy boxes, assembly instructions and/or television commercials, films etc. that represent, reference or parody your subject—you may include a CD, data key or list of online links for audiovisual materials); and if possible, 3. An artifact (e.g., your toy or game from any era).

March 1: Visual Culture
Objective: To explore how cultural studies scholar approach the study of images (moving and still) and their audiences.
Guest lecture: Pooja Rangan

March 6: Working in Archives
Objective: To explore how to carry out research in archives while simultaneously researching the archive(s) itself, or to explore how archives are not only repositories of knowledge but places where knowledge is produced.

March 8: Things and their Users
Objective: To explore approaches to investigating objects and their uses/users.
Module 3—Researching Concepts and Phenomena

March 20: Introduction to Researching Concepts and Phenomena
Objective: To explore how three Cultural Studies scholars explore elusive concepts and cultural phenomena.

March 22: Affects
Objective: To explore how affects (feelings), which can neither be seen nor even easily defined, are approached might be researched and theorized.
2. Eve Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” Touching Feeling.

*The final three classes before the scheduled proposal writing workshop are TBA; in consultation with the class and in response to identified interests and needs, we will choose three additional concepts or topics to explore before moving on to the final module.

March 22: TBA
TBA

March 27: TBA
TBA

April 3: TBA
TBA

Module 4—Proposal Writing

Objective: Over the course of the next month, you will put theory into practice and use the knowledge and research experience you have gained throughout the course to produce a proposal for a senior work in Cultural Studies, Media Studies or Screen Studies. Even if you do not attend to carry out a senior work, you must complete this assignment. Proposals will be thoroughly critiqued during the seminar. By the end of the class, every student should have completed a viable, original, ethically thoughtful and methodological coherent proposal.

Required reading: Guidelines for senior works (see the Handbook).

April 5: Step 1
* Propose a working title and write a 2-page description of the key idea being explored. Bring 18 copies of your proposal and working title to class.
April 7: Step 2
* Write a 2-page description of the methods of investigation to be employed.
Bring 4 copies of your description of methods to class.

April 10: Step 3
* Write a 1-page description of the relevance of the project to the field of Cultural Studies, Media Studies or Screen Studies.
Independent study—send to instructor by 5:00 pm.

April 12: Step 4
* Write a 1-page description of work already accomplished, 1-page on likely results or conclusions that are desired from this work, and compile a 1-page bibliography of relevant sources.
Independent study—send to instructor by 5:00 pm.

April 17: Presentations and Critiques

April 19: Presentations and Critiques

April 24: Presentations and Critiques

April 26: Presentations and Critiques

May 1: Revise Proposal
Independent study.

May 3: Revise Proposal
Independent study.

May 8: Individual Meetings with Instructor
Arrange a time to meet with the instructor to discuss your final proposal.

May 10: Submit Final Proposal
Send an digital copy of your final proposal to the instructor and the department chair by 5:00 pm.