

Diversity in Cultural Studies and Kulturwissenschaft(en) Summer 2020

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Course description

The course compares different approaches to diversity in Cultural Studies and Kulturwissenschaft(en). On the one hand, there is a long tradition of addressing social heterogeneity by focusing on specific forms of identity (e.g. gender, class, race), the social construction of “the Other,” and the production of inequalities (e.g. the marginalization of minorities, and the appropriation of capital and/or cultural resources). On the other hand, there is the question of whether, in order to avoid perpetuating binary distinctions (e.g. Western-Eastern, feminine-masculine, black-white), analyses focused on “difference” should be replaced by other approaches.

We will spend the semester reading and discussing both theoretical approaches to diversity and critical studies of specific “real world” phenomena where diversity issues are in play. In particular, we will examine different contexts in which “diversity” manifests itself and is deployed (for ends both desirable and undesirable), including language, media, institutions, and technology. These are admittedly artificial distinctions, which we only use here (1) to help organize and thematize our blocks, and (2) to reflect some of the specific lenses through which scholars have focused their research on diversity. Similarly, many different terms have been (and are) used -- both in academic and lay contexts -- to refer to diversity, each of them highlighting particular aspects of it (beside diversity itself, these terms include multiculturalism, hybridity, superculture, and transculturality). While the specific terminology found in our readings may vary, what ties them together is the similarity of the concepts and phenomena references by those terms, rather than the terms themselves.

In addition to the unique challenges posed by the online nature of this course, this course takes place in the context of an international collaboration. As such, the course will include pedagogical strategies that may differ significantly from those that you may be accustomed to. To borrow a metaphor from computer programming, we see this quality of the course as a feature, rather than a bug. These strategies are a unique part of your own diversity training, and we expect you to approach this course with an openness to new/different ways of learning and interacting. We welcome your constructive reflections on the unusual nature of this course, both as it is in process and after it is over.

None of the intellectual or political questions we will examine this semester have easy answers. If they did, there would be no point in offering a university course to examine them. As such, soundbite approaches to these issues will not serve you well, and a crucial part of your task will be to think *critically* and *complexly* about the politics of diversity in contemporary society.

Moodle

You can find our course Moodle site at <https://moodle.uni-heidelberg.de> among the courses offered by the Neuphilologische Fakultät.

We will use Moodle for several things this semester:

- access to the official course documents
- access to all our required readings
- access to our audio/video conversation starters for each course block
- a course blog where you will contribute posts/comments about the course material
- a repository for various media examples relevant to our required readings
- business-related announcements about the course

More information on Moodle is at <https://www.urz.uni-heidelberg.de/de/2020-04-02-moodle>

[N.B.: There are Moodle smartphone apps for both iOS and Android, though these may not be the most efficient way to use the course site on a regular basis.]

Philosophy and expectations

This course requires a different kind of reading and writing than most of the courses you are used to. Partially, this is an unavoidable side effect of it being offered online. Partially, this is because all the readings, written work, and course business will be conducted in English. This is *not* a course where you will be able to read at your own pace for several months and then turn in a Referat or a Hausarbeit at the end of the semester. Instead, this course will require you to interact on a course blog with both us and your classmates on a regular basis. Those interactions, in turn, will depend on you doing the required readings with enough care and thought to make your contributions to our discussions productive ones.

N.B.: Students who are registered for 6 credits will need to make more contributions to the course blog (see below) than students who are registered for 4 credits.

Class “meetings”

Without the opportunity to conduct this course in person, we have organized the course into 7 two-week blocks. For each of these blocks, we will aim to use the following schedule:

- Day 1, 9 am (first Monday): We will share a audio/video dialogue between us about the required readings for that block. That audio/video will also include specific prompts to help frame our online discussions.
- Day 5, 5 pm (first Friday): By this day/time, you should have made at least one contribution (ideally, type #1 or #3, see below) to our online discussions.
- Day 9, 5 pm (second Tuesday): By this day/time, we will have responded to the discussion that has taken place through at least the Day 5 deadline. As circumstances dictate, these responses may happen as comments on specific student-initiated threads and/or as new blog posts of our own.
- Day 13, 5 pm (second Saturday): By this day/time, you should have completed all your required contributions to our discussions for the block in question.

Discussions

The blog is a forum where you and your classmates will stake out clear positions on the *major* issues raised by our required readings and biweekly prompts, and offer persuasive arguments to support those positions. Posts/comments that (1) are primarily summaries of the readings, (2) focus mostly on minor facets of the readings and/or topics outside of the course content, or (3) offer simple statements of (dis)agreement without any substantive commentary of your own will *not* meet this requirement.

Discussion contributions will be evaluated for each two-week course block. For any given block, there are four types of contributions you can make:

1. A post of *at least 250 words* of thoughtful commentary about the readings.
2. A thoughtful response of *at least 250 words* to a classmate's posts or comments.
3. A thoughtful response of *at least 250 words* to that block's audio/video prompt.
4. A thoughtful response of *at least 250 words* to our followup contributions for that block.

If you are registered for 6 credits, you *must* make *four* contributions (one of each type) during *every* block. If you are registered for less than 6 credits, you *must* make *three* contributions (one each of #1 and #2, plus one of either #3 or #4) during *every* block.

For evaluation purposes, only your own words count: e.g., 75 words from you plus 200 words quoted from elsewhere counts as 75 words, rather than 275. Similarly, if your contributions include large amounts of filler prose, only the substantive words will count toward the requirements above. Any given contribution must be substantially different from your other contributions: i.e., you don't get credit simply for rephrasing an argument you've already made in previous posts/comments. Posts/comments shorter than 250 words will *not* count toward the requirements above.

Tips, advice, and other rules

- While there is no formal upper limit on your contributions to the blog, we *strongly* recommend that you keep your posts and comments to less than 500 words.
- Your contributions to our discussions should be respectful and constructive -- *especially* (though not exclusively) if you are disagreeing with something one of your classmates has written.
- Good blog contributions involve an approach to writing that is simultaneously more formal than the average in-class discussion but less formal than a standard research paper. You should craft your words with enough care for them to serve as productive contributions to the discussion, but you do not need to approach them as if you are producing a publishable essay.
- 35 students each writing 750-1000 words during any given block generates a *lot* of additional prose to read. The requirement for everyone to make type #2 contributions means that you will need to read at least some of your classmates' contributions with the same care and thought that you would give to us and to the required readings. Realistically speaking, we recognize that you may not be able to do that for each and every one of those contributions.
- The biweekly rhythm of the course is likely to vary from student to student, and potentially even from block to block. The general goal, however, is for there to be a structured conversation that flows and unfolds over the entire two-week span of the block. You should aim to complete the reading as early in the block as you can, and to spread your required contributions to the discussion out across the two weeks.

- Individual posts/comments are *not* required to address all the readings for any given block, or all the major issues raised by any individual reading (this would, in most cases, be difficult to do well in only 250-500 words). That said, we still expect that the totality of your contributions to our discussions will reflect the depth and breadth with which you have done all the readings for any given block, and our formal evaluation of your work for the course will be shaped by this.

Technical instructions

The Moodle site is structured in sections. In each section you will find the readings, our audio/video with the prompts, and the blog. To create a post, click on the forum icon and then on “add a new discussion topic.” To create a comment, click on the title of the post you want to comment on, and then on “Reply” (at the bottom right side). When you are done with your comment, click on “submit” to publish it.

Academic dishonesty

We expect you to understand and use proper citation techniques when you refer to and/or quote work originated by others (including your classmates). The following is a *partial* list of examples of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism in any of its forms
- copying assignments (in whole or in part) produced by other students
- “double-dipping” (i.e., using the same work to earn more than one grade -- including attempts to reuse work that you have submitted for a grade in some other course)
- having someone else research and/or write substantial portions of any graded assignment for you
- deleting and/or re-editing discussion posts/comments after they’ve been placed on the course Moodle site
- knowingly assisting someone else in their efforts to engage in any of the above practices

Put bluntly, the risks are high (plagiarism is usually easy to identify), the penalties are higher (e.g., you could fail to earn credit for the course), and the potential benefits are usually trivial (e.g., you have saved yourself the “trouble” of writing a 250-word blog post on your own).

Miscellaneous

- Our discussions will cover topics that are likely to evoke strong differences of opinion. We don’t expect those discussions to produce unanimous agreement about those topics, but we do expect our discussions to be characterized by mutual respect and collegiality. Strong opinions are acceptable; verbal bullying and personal attacks, on the other hand, will *not* be tolerated under any circumstances.
- “What happens on Moodle stays on Moodle”: i.e., the contents of this course -- whether provided by us or you -- are not intended for public circulation or distribution. You are permitted to download and make personal backup copies of such materials for purposes of completing the course successfully, but not otherwise.

Reading schedule

1. Introduction (20 Apr - 2 May)

- Steven Vertovec, "Introduction: Formulating Diversity Studies"
- Sara Ahmed, "The Language of Diversity"
- Beverly Daniels Tatum, "Defining Racism: Can We Talk?"
- Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"
- Gilbert B. Rodman, "Cultural Studies: What It Is"

2. Race, ethnicity, nation (4-16 May)

- Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*

3. Gender and sexuality (18-30 May)

- bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody* [chapters 1 and 2]
- Jo Littler, "#Damsplaining and the Unbearable Whiteness of Merit"
- Marek Sancho-Hoehne, "Negotiating Gender in Germany: Normalising Trans* Imaginations"
- Tommaso M. Milani & Erez Levon, "Sexing Diversity: Linguistic Landscapes of Homonationalism"

4. Diversity and language (1-13 Jun)

- Ien Ang, "On Not Speaking Chinese"
- Rey Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker* [introduction and chapter 2]
- Gloria Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue"
- Jan Blommaert & Ben Rampton, "Language and Superdiversity"

5. Diversity and media (15-27 Jun)

- Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media"
- Tricia Rose, "Fear of a Black Planet: Rap Music and Black Cultural Politics in the 1990s"
- Heather Ashley Hayes & Gilbert B. Rodman, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Film"
- Giulia Pelillo-Hestermeyer, "Transculturally Speaking: Linguistic Diversity, Otherness and the Transformation of Public Spheres"

6. Diversity and institutions (29 Jun - 11 Jul)

- Sara Ahmed, "Commitment as a Non-Performative"
- Jan Bloemnaert & Jef Verschueren, *Debating Diversity: Analysing the Discourse of Tolerance* [chapters 1, 5, and 6]
- Herman Gray, "Jazz Tradition, Institutional Formation, and Cultural Practice"

7. Diversity and technology (13-25 Jul)

- Richard Dyer, "The Light of the World"
- Safiya Umoja Noble, "A Society, Searching"

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