

# ETEC 531

## Key Terms in Cultural and New Media Studies

### Some web sites for Key Terms in Cultural and Media Theory:

<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/> (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

<http://www.sou.edu/English/IDTC/Terms/terms.htm>

<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/asc/IndexASC.html> (Cybernetic Encyclopedia)

<http://www.adamranson.freeserve.co.uk/critical%20concepts.htm> (Filcomedia)

<http://www.yourdictionary.com/diction5.html> (Specialty Dictionaries)

<http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/guide/> (Guide to Literary Theory)

<http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html> (Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

[http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/itc\\_data/postmodern.html](http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/itc_data/postmodern.html) (Postmodern references)

<http://www.theory.org.uk/> (the Media Theory Site)

<http://www.sou.edu/English/IDTC/Terms/terms.htm> (Swirl)

<http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html> (Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page) (Wikipedia)

1. Appropriation- in cultural studies, the process of taking possession of a concept, ritual tradition or technology and putting it to work toward one's own purposes.
2. Articulation- the process of connecting disparate entities together to form a temporary unity; the process of communicating meaning.
3. Circuit of Culture- model of processes through which an analysis of a cultural text or artifact must pass if it is to be adequately studied. These processes include: consumption, production, regulation, identity, representation, and waste.
4. Code- The kind of notation used to transmit any message (e.g., letters, numbers, hieroglyphics); or the master system which generates a potentially infinite number of messages.
5. Cultural intermediaries- People who play an active role in promoting consumption through attaching to products and services particular meanings and 'lifestyles' with which consumers will identify
6. Culture- "Whole way of life," "production and circulation of meaning," and "a 'tool-kit' of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems." Culture should be understood in its widest sense—the production and circulation of meaning.
7. Globalization-
8. Hybrid- "a person who represents the blending of traits from diverse cultures or traditions, or even more broadly it can be a culture, or element of culture, derived from unlike sources; that is, something heterogeneous in origin of composition"
9. Media- A hybrid of meaning-making, communicating modalities (digital, print, etc.), commodity forms, and corporate formations, along with the circumstances occasioned within this convergence.

10. Mediation- In contrast with intermediary, mediation means an event that cannot be exactly defined by its input or its output. If an intermediary is fully defined by what causes it, A mediation always exceeds its condition.
11. Referent- Commonly used in communication theory to designate the thing in the real world to which signs refer. This consists of both available things (the real chair one is sitting on while one produces the sign) and unavailable things (e.g., Napoleon).
12. Representation- The process of constructing meaning through the uses of signs and language
13. Semantic Network- Networks that tie together a range of cultural artifacts, discourses, and institutions as well as people, to lend particular meanings to these things, words, people, etc.
14. Semiotics- "Semiotics can be defined broadly as a domain of investigation that explores the nature and function of signs as well as the systems and processes underlying signification, expression, representation, and communication. As can be demonstrated from numerous cultural traces (verbal, pictorial, plastic, spatial artifacts, etc.), the role of signs in human life has been an ongoing concern over the ages whenever questions have been asked about what constitutes signs and what laws govern them" (Perron, <http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/guide/entries/semiotics.html>).
15. Sign- Information corresponding to the world. In semiotics, a sign is generally defined as "something that stands for something else, to someone in some capacity." Signs include images, gestures, scents, tastes, textures, sounds-- essentially all of the ways in which information can be processed and communicated by any sentient, reasoning mind. Signs are elements that can be related together logically in a variety of different ways (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sign>).
16. Signification- Process of connecting sign, signifier and signified.
17. Signifier- The material substance that makes up one part of a sign (e.g., throat vibrations in a verbal sign, ink on paper in a written sign).
18. Signified- The mental concept which is engendered by the material substance (signifier) of a sign.
19. Signifying Practices- Social practices organized, framed and guided by meaning
20. Symbol- A sign that relates to its object/subject as a result of convention or habit. A conventional sign.
21. Technology- "the systematic, purposeful manipulation of the material world. It has four components: materials, technique, power, and tools or machines. Thus technology is the process of applying *power* by some *technique* through some medium of some *tool* or *machine* to alter some *material* in a useful way. These components are necessary and sufficient to describe any technology at any time, but they are static; they do not address technological change" (Roland, 1992, p. 83). Technology can also be defined as "the means and processes through which we as a society produce the substance of our existence. Specifically, technology consists of five items" (Bernard, 1985, p. 8):
  - tools (hammer, presses, typewriters)
  - energy forms (steam, electricity)
  - materials (plastics, metals, fiber optics)
  - techniques (weaving, annealing metals)

- organization of work (assembly line, craft production, batch processing)
- 22. Text- Any artifact of culture, widely interpreted to include discourse, image, sound, technology, textual form or terrain. We read the world as we might read a book.
- 23. Transculturation- (hybridization) How subordinated groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture

**Critical Theory**— "Often erroneously used to refer to contemporary theoretically informed criticism in general, critical theory was a specific and hugely influential school of thought also known loosely as the 'Frankfurt School.' Much preoccupied by 'mass' society in the 1930s and early 1940s, when fascism so successfully mobilised mass opinion and action, critical theory's most influential work was Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which argued that the Western intellectual tradition of instrumental rationality— using reason as a tool to manipulate the world— was complicit with capitalism's managerial approach to organising human life in the interests of production and ultimately with the totalitarian impulse to use people as mere disposable raw material. The ferocity of this Marxist-influenced critique was especially directed at the mass media and the 'culture industry' that they sustained, the latter viewed as manipulative, deleterious and distracting people from any political consciousness" (Fleming, 2000, p. 68).

**Culture**— "Whole way of life," "production and circulation of meaning," and "a 'tool-kit' of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems." Culture should be understood in its widest sense—the production and circulation of meaning.

A repertoire or "toolkit of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct strategies of action." Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273

**Hermeneutics**— Hermeneutics is the study of interpretive understanding or meaning. It is the theory and practice of interpretation. Hermeneutics is necessary where there is possibility of misunderstanding and to recover the particularity, or the animating muse or notions of an author's thoughts. The aim is to understand the author as well or even better than he or she understands himself or herself. The emphasis is on the "lived experience" expressed in the author's text. Lived experience is the focus and starting point for hermeneutics and all human science. Expression is the text or artifact as objectification of lived experience. Understanding is the moment when "life understands itself" (not a cognitive act or psychologized understanding). "To interpret a text is to understand the possibilities of being revealed by the text. Hermeneutic science requires that the authors be given space to speak truthfully—the researcher must not construct an interpretation out of context. The text must be given space to speak for itself, literally, without editorial license" (van Manen, 1989).

**Narrative**— "Narrative inquiry refers to a subset of research in which stories are used to describe human action. Narrative refers to a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity by means of a plot. It is a discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-

directed processes. Narrative configuration is the process by which happenings are drawn together and integrated into a temporally organized whole. The configurative process employs a thematic thread to lay out happenings as parts of an unfolding movement that culminates in an outcome. The thematic thread is called the plot. Narrative inquiry gathers events and happenings as its data and uses analytic procedures to produce explanatory stories” (Amos & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 5). Life history and autobiography are forms of narrative inquiry.

**Phenomenology**— "Phenomenology is a philosophy of experience. For phenomenology the ultimate source of all meaning and value is the lived experience of human beings. All philosophical systems, scientific theories, or aesthetic judgments have the status of abstractions from the ebb and flow of the lived world. The task of the philosopher, according to phenomenology, is to describe the structures of experience, in particular consciousness, the imagination, relations with other persons, and the situatedness of the human subject in society and history. Phenomenological theories of literature regard works of art as mediators between the consciousnesses of the author and the reader or as attempts to disclose aspects of the being of humans and their worlds" (Armstrong, <http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/guide/entries/phenomenology.html>).

“The study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it. Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. Phenomenology asks: “What is this or that kind of experience like?” It differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

Features:

- “Study of lived experience (as we experience it and not as we conceptualize it)
- Study of essences (awakening of deeper meaning behind experience)
- Attentive practice of thoughtfulness (a minding, a heeding, a caring attunement)
- Search for what it means to be human (to become more fully what we are)
- Poetizing activity (a thinking on original experience, calling forth a speaking in a more primal sense)

**Postcolonialism**— "The designation "postcolonial" has been used to describe writing and reading practices grounded in colonial experience occurring outside of Europe but as a consequence of European expansion and exploitation of "other" worlds. Postcolonial literature is constituted in counterdiscursive practices. Postcolonial writing is also related to other concepts that have resulted from internal colonialization, such as the repression of minority groups: Chicanos in the United States, Gastarbeiter in Germany, Beurs in France, and so on. It is similarly related to women voicing concern and frustration over colonialization by men, or a "double" colonialization when women of color are concerned. Among the large nomenclature, which includes so-called Third World literature, minority discourse, resistance literature, response literature (writing back or rewriting the Western "classics"), subaltern studies, othering discourse, colonialist discourse, and so on, the term "postcolonial" (sometimes hyphenated, sometimes not) has gained notoriety in recent years and clearly has replaced "Commonwealth literature" or "Commonwealth studies."

"The word "postcolonial" shows up in a variety of journal titles since the mid-1980s but is used as a full title in a collection of interviews with a leading Indo-American critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1990), as a subtitle to the book by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), and again in a subtitle by the Canadian and Australian critics Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism* (1990), thus showing clearly the preoccupation with the term in discourse from British Commonwealth countries. Benita Parry, one of the leading critics of the various attempts to come to terms with the colonialist formation, still speaks of colonial discourse. The term was probably used for the first time by Australian Simon During in his 1985 *Landfall* essay. Max Dorsinville had used "post-European" already in 1974, while Helen Tiffin used "commonwealth literature" still in 1984 but switched to the new term by 1987. By now, and largely due to Australian efforts, the terms "postcolonial literature" and "postcolonial culture" are well established" (Gugelberger, [http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/guide/entries/postcolonial\\_cultural\\_studies.html](http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/guide/entries/postcolonial_cultural_studies.html)).

**Postmodernism**— Theory particularly inspired by "Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault, brought postmodernism from the streets and from the novel into the academy. At first, these French theorists were not associated with postmodernism, but the publication of Jean-François Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition* (1979) made the two nearly synonymous. (The accuracy of this labeling is still a matter of dispute.) Lyotard emphasized the antifoundational and antiholistic aspects of French theory, as well as its hostility to eternal, metaphysical truths or realities and to grand narratives (theories that provide totalizing explanations). "I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives," Lyotard wrote (xxiv). He proposed a postmodern world in which decisions are made on the basis of local conditions and are applicable only in that limited context. Individuals participate in a multitude of such localities and the lessons, beliefs, and practices of one site are not transferable to any other. Lyotard celebrated this multiplicity of "language games" (xxiv) and offers ceaseless experimentation in all these games as the highest good." "In sum, postmodernism is best understood as marking the site of several related, but not identical, debates among intellectuals in the last four decades of the twentieth century. These debates revolve around the relation of artworks to social context, the relation of art and of theory to political action and to the dominant social order, the relation of cultural practices to the transformation or maintenance of society in all its aspects, the relation of the collapse of traditional philosophical foundations to the possibility of critical distance from and effective critique of the status quo, the relation of an image-dominated consumer society to artistic practice, and the future of a Western tradition that now appears more heterogeneous than previously thought even while it appears insufficiently tolerant of (open to) multiplicity. At the very least, postmodernism highlights the multiplication of voices, questions, and conflicts that has shattered what once seemed to be (although it never really was) the placid unanimity of the great tradition and of the West that gloried in it" (McGowan, <http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/guide/entries/postmodernism.html>).

**Queer Theory**— Queerness, in the work of theorists like Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, is as much a semiotic as it is a social phenomenon. To say that someone is "queer" indicates an indeterminacy or indecipherability about their sexuality and gender, a sense that they cannot be categorized without a careful contextual examination and, perhaps, a whole new rubric. For gender to be, in Judith Butler's words, "intelligible," ancillary traits and behaviors must divide

and align themselves beneath a master division between male and female anatomy. From people's anatomy, we can supposedly infer other things about them: the gender of the people they desire, the sartorial and sexual practices they engage in, the general elements of culture that they are attracted to or repulsed by, and the gender of their "primary identification." While in practice each of these categories is rather elastic, it is usually when they do not line up in expected ways (say, when a man wears a dress and desires men) that one crosses from normative spaces into "queer" ones. In Butler's view, queer activities like drag and unexpected identifications and sexual practices reveal the arbitrariness of conventional gender distinctions by parodying them to the point where they become ridiculous or ineffective.

**Semiotics**— "Semiotics can be defined broadly as a domain of investigation that explores the nature and function of signs as well as the systems and processes underlying signification, expression, representation, and communication. As can be demonstrated from numerous cultural traces (verbal, pictorial, plastic, spatial artifacts, etc.), the role of signs in human life has been an ongoing concern over the ages whenever questions have been asked about what constitutes signs and what laws govern them" Perron,

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