



## CEU SUMMER UNIVERSITY

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*Cultural Studies/Cultural Theory*

## **CULTURE AS RESOURCE: CULTURE AND DEMOCRACY IN THE GLOBAL SYSTEM**

**July 16- 27, 2007**

**Course Director:** Imre Szeman, *McMaster University, Institute on Globalization, Canada*

**Faculty:** Nicholas Brown, *University of Illinois-Chicago*  
Eric Cazdyn, *University of Toronto*  
Maria Elisa Cevalco, *University of São Paulo*  
Gunter Lenz, *Humboldt University, Germany*  
Helen Petrovsky, *Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia*  
Will Straw, *McGill University, Canada*

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### **BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

Viewed through the lens of cultural studies, globalization (as both rhetoric and reality) has had two broad effects on how researchers, policy makers, and those engaged in the production of culture view culture today. *First*, as with all of the other phenomena associated with globalization, the collapse of space and time as a result of (among other things) new technologies of cultural diffusion, has meant that cultural critics have to contend with a world in which culture and cultures bump up against one another with more frequency and intensity than ever before. From this perspective, the interesting questions to pose about culture today seem to have to do primarily with the results—whether positive or negative, emancipating or threatening—of the modes and forms of hybridization, standardization, and bricolage that are the results of the globalization of culture.

Such a perspective tends to conserve *older* ideas of culture even as they attempt to embrace the new realities of globalization—ideas concerning the function and meaning of culture that extend back to the modern origins of the concept, where it was imagined to be (relatively) autonomous vis-à-vis the market or other spheres of society, linked to the national soil or ‘context’ in which it is produced, and defined mainly by its function as “the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (Raymond Williams). However, if there is any content at all to the idea of globalization, it is that the levels into which we have long separated the study of the social (always artificial to begin with) have been now shown to be definitively unworkable. In describing globalization as “complex connectivity,” the sociologist John Tomlinson suggests that “the complexity of linkages established by globalization extends to phenomena which social scientists have laboured to separate out into the categories into which we now, familiarly, break down human life: the economic, the political, the social, the interpersonal, the technological, the environmental, the cultural, and so forth. Globalization arguably confounds such taxonomy” (13). The *second* analytic perspective on culture in the era of globalization thus asks what it means for cultural production and cultural analysis if culture is now (for complex reasons extending well beyond the epistemic ones identified by Tomlinson here) no longer relatively autonomous, but truly collapsed into other phenomena. The cultural critic Fredric Jameson has suggested that today the “sphere of culture itself has expanded, becoming coterminous with market society in such a way that the cultural is no longer limited to its earlier, traditional or experimental forms, but is consumed throughout daily life itself, in shopping, in professional activities, in the various often televisual forms of leisure, in production for the market and in the consumption of those market products,

indeed in the most secret folds and corners of the quotidian.” What does it mean for contemporary cultural analysis if we are to take such an insight seriously?

The first half of this course will pursue this question—taking up the second analytic perspective on culture in globalization—by considering the problems and possibilities of culture and cultural politics today. During the first week, we will also consider carefully existing theories of globalization from across the disciplines and subject them to study, critique and analysis.

During the second week, the class will consider what the transformations of the concept of culture mean for how we understand the links between culture and *democracy*. Though democracy is most commonly discussed in relationship to narrowly political structures and phenomena, the importance of culture to democratic life (as well as the cultural determinants of democracy itself) has long been recognized. Indeed, the relative autonomy of the cultural sphere has been seen as a crucial element of democratic polities, whether democracy is understood to refer to a specific kind of state formation or to more radical political possibilities (democracy as the ‘rule of all over all’). One of the contemporary transformations of culture has been from a sense of “art as the process through which the individual gains freedom by externalizing himself” (Adorno) to the evocation of culture as a primary mode by which cities and countries might “spur economic growth through urban cultural development projects and the concomitant proliferation of museums for cultural tourism” (Yúdice). Art, architecture and film (for instance) have become primary ways for cities to develop their economies and to achieve the status of ‘creative cities,’ which the writer Richard Florida has argued is essential for economic growth today. The imagined autonomy of culture has been essential to envisioning it as a potential space for critique or as a defining component of the public sphere or civil society required for democracy. If culture has become merely a resource for the development of urban (and national) economies, does culture have a role to place in actualizing democratic futures? Can a strictly market culture breed democratic life?

## COURSE SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

### Week One

#### Culture After Globalization

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##### **1. Introduction: Culture Now**

*Dr. Imre Szeman, McMaster University*

Overview of expectations and course requirements; Review of major theories of culture and their change over history; from colonialism to post-colonialism; the persistence of cultural imperialism; the politics of culture and the idea of culture as the exercise of political/ideological control by other means.

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##### **2. Globalization: Discourses and Debates**

*Dr. Eric Caedyn, University of Toronto*

Does the discourse of globalization offer the best way to conceptualize culture today? In addition to considering the specific contribution of globalization discourses to our understanding of contemporary culture, this lecture will probe the central assumptions and claims of the leading theories of globalization.

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##### **3. Cultural Transnationalism**

*Dr. Nicholas Brown, University of Illinois-Chicago*

How do cultural forms operate across economic and geopolitical fault lines? What are the prospects of a ‘critical’ cultural transnationalism that might allow for the possibility of imagining difference globally?

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##### **4. The Politics of Culture and/in the Periphery**

*Dr. Maria Elisa Cevalco, University of São Paulo*

Does culture function the same way in the periphery and in the center? How has globalization altered the classical scheme of imported ideas? What is the cognitive potential of cultural critique as viewed from the periphery?

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##### **5. The Politics of Culture in the Center: U.S. Culture and the World**

*Dr. Günter Lenz, Humboldt University*

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The globalization of culture is often conflated with the ‘Americanization’ of culture. In what ways and to what degree is this conflation analytically productive? This class will analyze and assess the degree of U.S. influence on global culture and explore its significance for the cultural and social analysis of globalization.

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### ***6. Politics of the Popular I: Music and Globalization***

*Dr. William Straw, McGill University*

The rise of popular music in the twentieth century; importance of technological innovations; world music; file sharing and copyright issues; fan communities; from the Walkman to the I-Pod.

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### ***7. Politics of the Popular II: Visual Culture and Globalization***

*Dr. Helen Petronsky, Russian Academy of Sciences*

This session will examine the predominance and significance of all forms of visual culture—from contemporary arts to video games, from television to new media arts—in the context of globalization. How is visibility linked to social control? What new social imaginings are opened up in a global society dominated by the visual?

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### ***8. Politics of the Popular III: Commodity Cultures***

*Dr. Nicholas Brown*

Is popular culture complicit with commodity culture and the spread of what has been characterized as ‘consumer culture’? Do forms of popular culture—once imagined as potentially democratizing social experience—now offer any critical relation to the market? Or is popular culture and market culture one and the same?

## **Week Two Culture and the Promise of Democracy**

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### ***1. ‘Relative Autonomy’ and the Cultural Criticism***

*Dr. Imre Szeman*

The idea that culture or the aesthetic offers a space outside of the social that allows for a critique of it has been a key component of aesthetic philosophies and avant-garde movements since the late eighteenth-century. One of the key insights that have emerged from globalization discourses is that the idea of the autonomy of culture is unsustainable. Can we imagine a politics of culture without assuming that (some forms of culture) are relatively autonomous from the social order more generally? What are the critical powers of culture in the era of globalization?

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### ***2. From Modernism to Postmodernism to Globalization***

*Dr. Nicholas Brown*

What was cultural modernism? Is there a unifying thread that can tie together apparently diverse modernisms? What does it mean for modernism to have ended? And what is the relation of various modernisms to the movements and periods that are thought to have superseded it?

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### ***3. Culture and the Practice of Cultural Studies***

*Dr. Maria Elisa Cevalco*

The function of culture at the moment of cultural studies, the politics of “culture is ordinary”, culture and democracy at the age of culture as commodity.

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### ***4. Contesting the Commodification of Culture***

*Dr. William Straw*

What are the ways in which the commodification of culture is contested today? This lecture looks at a range of cultural contestations of the growing economic logics and language being used with both cultural practice and cultural policy in the world today.

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### ***5. Cultural Politics***

*Dr. Eric Cazdyn*

In what ways are cultural artefacts or practices the bearers of political messages, forces, ideas and discourses? What does it mean to imagine and to practice forms of ‘cultural politics’ as a way of animating democratic public life?

One of the most common forms of ‘cultural politics’ is one that begins with a criticism of all things American. Anxieties over the globalization of culture are often synonymous with worries about American global cultural dominance. This session will ask two questions: What is anti-Americanism today such an easy position to adopt—a ready-made answer to the question of what ails us today? Might an angry yet progressive anti-Americanism actually be more effective at producing global democratic change than so many utopian calls for a new democratic future?

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**7. Cultural Democracy***Dr. William Straw*

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“Cultural democracy” takes different forms in different national and local contexts. The politics of the popular may turn to the state as an agent of intervention in some contexts, and uniformly resist any such intervention in others. This class will look treat the politics of popular culture as phenomena whose terms and stakes are posed differently across the globe.

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**8. Review and Student Presentations**

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Students will offer presentations of the group work that they have embarked on during the course.

### INSTRUCTORS

**Imre Szeman**, McMaster University (*Course Director*); **Nicholas Brown**, University of Illinois-Chicago; **Eric Cazdyn**, University of Toronto; **Maria Elisa Cevalco**, University of São Paulo; **Günter Lenz**, Humboldt University; **Helen Petrovsky**, Russian Academy of Sciences; **William Straw**, McGill University

The instructors for this course are drawn from around the world and represent a range of theoretical perspectives and research expertise, including specific expertise in Japan and South-East Asia (Cazdyn), Africa (Brown), South America (Cevalco), Canada and the Caribbean (Szeman), Western Europe (Lenz), and Eastern Europe (Petrovsky). Collectively, the team also represents a range of disciplinary backgrounds. Team members hold degrees and/or academic positions in art history, communication studies, comparative studies, cultural studies, East Asian Studies, film, literary studies, philosophy, politics and sociology.

### STUDENT BACKGROUND

This course is designed for faculty and students with research and teaching interests in the effects of globalization on cultures around the world. Participants should have some previous background in cultural studies, critical theory, political theory, globalization studies and/or cultural policy studies.

### STUDENT ASSESSMENT

We will assess the in-class work of each participant and will ask for a theoretically-informed position paper on one or more of the assigned readings. We will also assess the participants on the group-presentations that they will be responsible for developing over the course and presenting on the final day. In addition, we want to encourage participants to use this intensive two-week period of reading, analysis and discussion to set out the beginning of a publishable research essay. The resource personnel will make themselves available after hours throughout the two week period in order to give participants feedback and to help mould their research papers.

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*Non-discrimination policy statement*

*Central European University does not discriminate on the basis of – including, but not limited to – race, color, national and ethnic origin, religion, gender or sexual orientation in administering its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.*