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JMU Würzburg (Germany)  
Winter term 2024/25

Course announcement:

## Smartphone Cultures

Online research seminar, THU 17/10/24 – 31/10/24  
+ symposium on 30-31/01/25. [See below for exact meeting times.]



*Photo: Victoria Prymark (licensed through Unsplash).*

As a transnationally open installment of our CULTURAL STUDIES COLLOQUIA series, this online research seminar brings the perspective of cultural studies to bear on **the smartphone as a key node in the cultural circuitry of our contemporary moment.**

We will investigate the virtual world/s created, the online practices facilitated, and the 'artificial intelligences' articulated by the phone and by the digital networks to which it links its users. However, our primary accent will be on the **real uses made of the phone** in *on-site* social, economic or political contexts – and on the **direct or indirect effects** of such uses. How, for example, do the phone and the technologies it mediates impact individual as well as collective lives, agencies, intelligences or imaginaries? How does the smartphone – in analogue life as well as through online operations – transform social, economic, and natural environments? How is the phone produced and marketed, and what are the material or immaterial consequences? Hardly least, how do the smartphone and its affordances impact the political – either as a conduit for misinformation or as a low-threshold tool and portal of democratic participation?

To explore these questions, the seminar will determinedly **move beyond Western European and North American contexts**, putting a particular emphasis also on **Eastern Europe** and the countries of the

former Soviet Union as well as on India and other regions of the so-called **Global South**. The objective is to consider both the local dimensions and the global intersections of smartphone culture/s.

### ***From the story of the Sony Walkman to the cultural implications of the smartphone***

The seminar takes inspiration from a classic cultural studies project undertaken by Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall and collaborators in the 1990s. Their Open University course on "Cultures of the Walkman" examined the key mobile entertainment device of that time: the portable cassette player. Telling *The Story of the Sony Walkman*, as they did in the textbook documentation of the project *Doing Cultural Studies*,<sup>1</sup> allowed for an investigation not only of the Walkman but of the entire culture that sustained the device, its production, and the forms of its practical use. At the same time, the project honed the conceptual tools of cultural analysis, especially in terms of media and articulation studies. We hope that our turning to the smartphone may work along similar lines and engender similar benefits.



Adapted from: <https://medienkompetenz.katholisch.de> (based on Michelangelo's Creation of Adam, Wikimedia Commons).

### ***Form and organization of the research seminar***

To facilitate substantive transnational dialogue, the seminar will take place via 'ZOOM' in weekly two-hour sessions from **mid-October to mid-December 2024**. It will conclude on 30 and 31 January 2025 with a two-partite online symposium in which seminar participants will have the opportunity to present their projects to an expanded audience.

"Smartphone Cultures" is part of the **JMU Cultural Studies Colloquia (CSC)** series. For an overview of CSC seminars and Study Days to date as well as the associated JMU Cultural Studies publication series with Würzburg University Press, please visit our website: [LINK](#). By the beginning of September, a prospective **syllabus** (with reading list, bibliography and additional information) will also be available on this website.

To create a committed and cohesive thinking community, we ask prospective participants to compose a brief (productive or even provocative) **statement of purpose** (of 1 to 1,5 pages) in which

<sup>1</sup> Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, et al., *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (1997; 2nd ed., Los Angeles: Sage, 2013).

they **(1)** introduce themselves and **(2)** outline their interest/s in this semester's topic. Please mail your statement of purpose to [culturalstudies@uni-wuerzburg.de](mailto:culturalstudies@uni-wuerzburg.de) by **15 September**.

The Cultural Studies Colloquia are designed for **advanced and graduate students**. In this semester's course, particular emphasis will be placed on transnational participation. As needed, the participation of non-JMU students can be documented via JMU Cultural Studies certificate. We will respond to statements of purpose by 22 September.

**Meeting times:**

17/10 & 24/10: Germany: 4.00-5.30 p.m. / Ukraine: 5.00-6.30 p.m. / India (IST): 7.30-9.00 p.m.

31/10 to 19/12: Germany: 4.00-5.30 p.m. / Ukraine: 5.00-6.30 p.m. / India (IST): 8.30-10.00 p.m.

[Shift due to European time change on 27/10.]

Symposium on 30/01 & 31/01: Germany: 3-6 p.m. / Ukraine: 4-7 p.m. / India (IST): 7.30-10.30 p.m.

**First reading (and viewing) suggestions:**

ASSA: *Anthropology of Smart Phones and Smart Ageing*. Project located at University College London.

Project website: [LINK](#). // YouTube channel: [LINK](#).

Doron, Assa, and Robin Jeffrey. *The Great Indian Phone Book: How the Cheap Cell Phone Changes Business, Politics, and Daily Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Du Gay, Paul, et al. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*. 1997. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Sage, 2013.

Miller, Daniel [1954-] et al. *The Global Smartphone: Beyond a Youth Technology*. London: UCL Press, 2021. [LINK](#).

"The Only Thing That's Changed Is ..." iPhone 6s Commercial. 2015. [LINK](#).

Vincent, Jane, and Leslie Haddon, eds. *Smartphone Cultures*. London: Routledge, 2019.



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