



**Boston University Study Abroad
London**

**Boston University Study Abroad London
Arts and Media in Britain
CAS AH 319 (*Core course*)
Summer 2012**

Instructor Information

A. Name

Dr. Aleks Sierz

Course Objectives

To give an overall picture of contemporary British arts and media (including commercial media); to provide a broad study of the major developments in state funding of the arts and media over the past sixty years; to relate the arts and media to broad changes in British society and put them into a social context; to examine the work of specific arts and media institutions in detail; to stimulate critical analysis of artworks and media products through written work and discussion. The ultimate aim is to increase awareness of British arts and media, and to give an insight into how they are organised and why they have developed into their present form.

Course Overview

The course will introduce the student to the wide range of arts and media in London, from national institutions such as the BBC and National Theatre to the main newspapers and galleries. It will provide an overview of post-1945 arts and media, and offer a sound introduction to arts administration and the funding of this sector. The course will focus especially on the theme of Britishness, and on how national identity is expressed in the institutions, practices and products of the arts and media. What does it mean to be British today, and how is this identity projected by broadcast media, newspapers and the live arts? Such questions will be covered through lectures and visits to institutions which exemplify the broad spectrum of the subject. This course will prepare students for the wide breadth of opportunities that are open to them in the fields of Broadcasting, Film, Theatre, Journalism and Arts Administration in London. It will cover issues such as government funding for culture, censorship and freedom, as well as the relationship between media and citizenship. The course will look at examples of the arts and media with the aim of stimulating critical analysis through written work and discussion.

Methodology

This course will be taught over nine four-hour sessions. Lectures by Aleks Sierz will be supplemented with in-class video screenings, field trips, visiting speakers, and will involve readings from relevant texts as well as other class exercises.

Assessment

40% Final Paper (2,000 words), submitted in the final week of core phase.

40% Four short reviews (500 words each) of British cultural artworks.

20% Class presentation in week five.

Grading

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria, attendance requirements and policies on plagiarism: <http://www.bu.edu/london/current-semester>

Course Chronology

Session One: Wednesday 30 May

What are the arts and media in Britain?

Introduction

1) Course introduction. Overview of the arts and media in London and Britain, plus the question of how these activities and institutions express national identity. Discuss: what is Britishness, and how does it differ from Englishness?

2) Video of BBC discussion of Britishness today.

3) Introduction to the basic cultural institutions: the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Arts Council and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

4) The main running themes of the course expressed as cultural tensions (high/low; old/new; fiction/reality; insiders/outside; subsidy/commerce; censorship/freedom). Postwar British cultural history: orientation by means of word clouds and timelines. What are the characteristics of each decade of postwar British culture?

5) What is a cultural icon, and how do you read its meaning? Historical overview from the 1950s until the present, situating iconic cultural artefacts in a broad perspective, including the major developments of the 1960s and moment of Cool Britannia in the 1990s.

[Preparatory reading: Jeremy Paxman, *The English*, pp 1-23 and Michael Higgins, Clarissa Smith and John Storey (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*, pp 12-25]

Session Two: Thursday 31 May

Auntie knows best

Mass media: the BBC

1) The rise and rise of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC): when was it set up, how is it funded and what does it do? Questions of bias, neutrality and the broadcasting of events of national importance. The role of BBC radio and television in nation-building. Discuss: what is public-service broadcasting, and is there such a thing as a classic BBC programme?

2) How does the BBC exemplify traditional British values and how does it contribute to improving the relationship between the citizen and the state?

3) Video of Rude Britannia, a BBC 4 documentary. Discuss: how is the desire for artistic freedom compromised by the need to set limits on expression?

4) How to write a critical review of an arts subject: practical advice.

[Preparatory reading: Michael Higgins, Clarissa Smith and John Storey (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*, pp 171-88]

Session Three: Wednesday 6 June

Goggle box and the flicks

Mass media: television and film

- 1) Overview of the creative and institutional role of commercial television: when was ITV set up, how was it funded and how did it differ from the BBC? The role of American television programmes in entertaining the nation. The importance of adverts in creating national identity. The case of Channel 4 and the challenge of Rupert Murdoch's Sky. Discuss: is the desire to make profit compatible with the requirement to create good citizens?
- 2) The British film industry: how do you define a national industry in a globalised world? What is a British film and how could it be said to construct a national identity?
- 3) Video of classic British films, a BFI documentary.
- 4) Class discussion of first review.

[Preparatory reading: Michael Higgins, Clarissa Smith and John Storey (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*, pp 96-114]

Session Four: Thursday 7 June

Playing to the gallery

Mass culture: Brit art

- 1) The rise and rise of art galleries in Britain: when were places such as the National Gallery, Tate Britain and Tate Modern set up, how are they funded and what do they deliver? Questions of education and entertainment: how important is interactivity in the museum and gallery? The role of museums and galleries in creating community pride and popularising values. Discuss: can art galleries deliver education as well as entertainment?
- 2) Britart, the Young British Artists and the revival of contemporary art in Britain.
- 3) Video of BBC documentary of Tate Modern.
- 4) Class discussion of the Tate Britain visit.

PLUS: CLASS VISIT TO TATE BRITAIN

[Preparatory reading: Michael Higgins, Clarissa Smith and John Storey (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*, pp 189-207)]

Session Five: Wednesday 13 June

Broadsheets and redtops

Mass media: newspapers and magazines

- 1) Overview of the history and structure of the national newspapers in Britain. What is the difference between broadsheets and tabloids? The Fourth Estate: how is the news created and what is its political agenda? Discuss: do British newspapers wield power without responsibility?
- 2) Demonstration of the variety of ways in which different newspapers report the same story. Closer look at language use. From Fleet Street hacks to citizen bloggers: how the new digital age affects traditional media organisations.
- 3) Case study: how magazines can become opinion formers, and how they are sometimes also cultural provocateurs.
- 4) Class discussion of second review.

[Preparatory reading: Michael Higgins, Clarissa Smith and John Storey (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*, pp 279-95]

Session Six: Thursday 14 June

Changing stages

High culture: Theatre, dance and opera

- 1) Overview of the British system of arts funding by the state. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Arts Council: nanny state or patron. What the "arm's length policy" is and by what means was the British system of arts funding developed in the postwar period. Discuss: how and why does the state fund the arts?

- 2) Overview of the live performance sector, including the performing arts of opera, theatre, dance and classical music. When were the Royal Opera House, English National Opera, National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company, Festival Hall and Sadlers Wells set up, how are they funded and what do they do? Questions of high art versus mass entertainment. The role of the performing arts in creating cultural identity. Discuss: are the arts in Britain caught between the risk of being too elitist and the urge to dumb down?
- 3) Musicals and the West End. Video of BBC documentary of musicals in London.
- 4) Video of contemporary British dance.
- 5) Class discussion of the National Theatre visit.

PLUS: CLASS VISIT TO NATIONAL THEATRE

[Preparatory reading: Michael Higgins, Clarissa Smith and John Storey (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*, pp 154-70]

Session Seven: Wednesday 20 June

The great tradition

High culture: novels and poems

- 1) English Literature: the great British novel and publishing in Britain. How tradition and innovation combine to make the novel an important contribution to contemporary culture. The Man-Booker Prize and its critics. The centrality of the literary in culture. Discuss: what images of national identity are conveyed through contemporary novels?
- 2) English poetry from slim collections to slam performance.
- 3) Case study: the Penguin paperback as a British cultural icon.

[Preparatory reading: Michael Higgins, Clarissa Smith and John Storey (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*, pp 115-36]

Session Eight: Thursday 21 June

Nostalgia or innovation?

Mass pop: Brit pop and architecture

- 1) Britpop and its discontents. Pop music, lyric traditions and the role of pop culture in national identity. Video of BBC documentary of Glastonbury pop music festival. Discuss: Is popular music an industry in crisis?
- 2) London architecture. Video of BBC news report about 1980s London architecture. When does recent architecture become historic and suitable for listing? Case study: the Heritage Industry.
- 3) Case study: the challenges of the digital age. Video of BBC documentary of youthquake and digital culture.
- 4) Class discussion of third review.

[Preparatory reading: Michael Higgins, Clarissa Smith and John Storey (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*, pp 262-78]

***Please note: students on the Internship Programme will have their first Internship Tutorial meeting with Mo Dodson on Wednesday 27th June, from 4.30-6.00pm in the George & Peto Room (1st Floor), 43 Harrington Gardens.**

****All Internship students must attend a mandatory information session with the Programme Director regarding Internships and Travel at 1.30pm on Wednesday 27th June in the Boston Room, 43 Harrington Gardens.**

Session Nine: Thursday 28 June

Cruel Britannia

Mass culture and high media

- 1) Britain today is a country in which high culture has never been more popular, with record numbers of people buying classical music, attending concerts and going to galleries. At the same

time, creatives in both the media and the arts are obsessed with populism, with ‘giving people what they want’ and dumbing down. What is the role of high culture in a mass society?

2) Case study: fashion as a cultural form. Video of BBC documentary about “chavs”, media, fashion and mass culture.

3) Quiz on what you have learnt this semester: how have your ideas about Britishness changed over the semester?

4) Class discussion of fourth review.

[Preparatory reading: Michael Higgins, Clarissa Smith and John Storey (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*, pp 208-24)]

29 June

Final Exam: See exam timetable for time (posted 2 weeks before exams)

Class presentations

Two copies of all assessed work are required.

Required Reading

Set textbooks:

Jeremy Paxman, *The English* (Penguin, 1999)

Michael Higgins, Clarissa Smith and John Storey (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Suggested additional readings:

Overviews:

Bryan Appleyard, *The Pleasures of Peace: Art and Imagination in Post-War Britain* (Faber 1990)

James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power without Responsibility: Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain* (Routledge, 2009)

Nick Davies, *Flat Earth News* (Vintage, 2009)

Tim Footman, *The Noughties: A Decade That Changed the World 2000-2009* (Crimson, 2009)

Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (Methuen, 1997)

Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (Pan, 2007)

Arthur Marwick, *Culture in Britain Since 1945* (Blackwell, 1991)

Britishness:

Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Kate Fox, *Watching the English* (Hodder, 2004)

AA Gill, *The Angry Island: Hunting the English* (Phoenix, 2006)

Mark Perryman, *Imagined Nation: England after Britain* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2008)

Chris Rojek, *Brit-myth: Who Do the British Think They Are?* (Reaktion Books, 2007)

Art forms and issues:

Lisa Appignanesi, *Free Expression Is No Offence* (Penguin, 2005)

Stephen Bayley, *Labour Camp: The Failure of Style Over Substance* (Pan, 1998)

Michael Billington, *State of the Nation* (Faber, 2007)

Steve Blandford, *Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain* (Intellect, 2007)

Christopher Breward, *Fashion* (Oxford History of Art, 2003)

John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* (Faber, 2006)

Frank Furedi, *Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone?* (Continuum, 2004)

John Harris, *Britpop: Cool Britannia and the Spectacular Demise of English Rock* (Da Capo, 2004)

David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries* (Sage, 2007)

Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (Methuen, 1987)

Steve Knopper, *Appetite for Self-Destruction: The Spectacular Crash of the Record Industry in the Digital Age* (Simon & Schuster, 2009)
Raymond Kuhn, *Politics and the Media in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)
Caroline Lang, John Reeve and Vicky Woollard, *The Responsive Museum: Working with Audiences in the Twenty-First Century* (Ashgate, 2006)
Norman Lebrecht, *Covent Garden: The Untold Story* (Pocket Books, 2001)
John Lloyd, *What the Media Are Doing to Our Politics* (Constable, 2004)
Ronan McDonald, *The Death of the Critic* (Continuum, 2007)
Judith Mackrell, *Out of Line: Story of British New Dance* (Dance Books, 2008)
Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre Since the War* (Yale University Press, 1999)
Richard Witts, *Artist Unknown: An Alternative History of the Arts Council* (Warner, 1998)

Autobiographies:

John Drummond, *Tainted by Experience: A Life in the Arts* (Faber, 2000)
Andrew Marr, *My Trade: A Short History of British Journalism* (Pan, 2004)
John Tusa, *Engaged with the Arts: Writings from the Frontline* (IB Taurus, 2007)
Toby Young, *How To Lose Friends and Alienate People* (Abacus, 2002)

Useful websites:

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport: www.culture.gov.uk
The Arts Council: www.artscouncil.org.uk
The BBC: www.bbc.co.uk
The Guardian: www.guardian.co.uk/culture
The Arts Desk: www.theartsdesk.com

The library also has DVDs and videos of British films, television programmes as well as movie versions of significant theatre plays.

Additional readings may be posted on the course webpage:

<http://www.bu.edu/london/virtual-library/ah319> (you must be logged in to view materials).

Terms and Conditions

**** Attendance at all classes and visits is mandatory. Students missing lectures without a doctor's letter or authorisation from the Director will automatically be docked a – or a + from their final grade. Persistent lateness will also be penalised in the final grade.** Please see the Academic Handbook on the BU London website for the attendance policy:

<http://www.bu.edu/london/current-semester>

A register of attendance will be taken at the beginning of each session. Absence can be conveyed either by advising a senior member of staff in the Academic Affairs Office with a request that the information be passed on to the lecturers; or by emailing faculty teaching the course (see the contact details at the top of this syllabus) prior to class. Leaving it to another class member to convey messages will not be acceptable. Appointments for interviews for internships should not conflict with attendance at classes. **

Aleks will make some time available in each session for students to raise questions etc. Should students wish to discuss matters with faculty in person he will also be available during the break mid-lecture and at the end of class. Alternatively, please feel free to e-mail him with questions. If you have problems with the availability of reading materials (all of which should be in the library) please contact him either through the Academic Affairs Office or via e-mail.

Students must check their email and the weekly Student Newsletter for field trip updates and reminders, if any are to be included.

Note: Please turn off all mobile phones in class; laptops can only be used for note-taking in exceptional circumstances and only after permission has been given by faculty.

SCHEDULE OF CLASS VISITS, Summer 2012

Thurs 7 June, 11am: TATE BRITAIN VISIT. Nearest tube: Pimlico (Victoria Line).

Weds 13 June, EVENING THEATRE VISIT: POSH AT THE DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE. Nearest tube; Leicester Square/ Charing Cross (Northern, Piccadilly and District Lines).

Thurs 14 June, 10.45am: NATIONAL THEATRE BACKSTAGE TOUR. Nearest tube: Waterloo (Northern, Bakerloo, Jubilee Lines).

I really do hope you enjoy the course, Aleks Sierz, Summer 2012