



**Boston University Study Abroad  
London**

**Boston University Study Abroad London  
Arts and Media in Britain  
CAS AH 319 (*Elective A*)  
Fall 2014**

**Instructor Information**

A. Name

Dr. Aleks Sierz

**Course Objectives**

To give an overall picture of contemporary British arts (visual arts, performing arts, literature and architecture) 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, why they have developed into their present form, and what they say about us.

**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 in the fields of Broadcasting, Film, Theatre, Journalism and Arts Administration. 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 British 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, and will involve readings from relevant texts as well as other class exercises.

### **Assessment**

**10%** Class participation.

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

**30%** Final Paper (2,000 words), submitted in the final week of core phase.

**20%** Class presentation in the final week of core phase.

### **Grading**

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria and policies on plagiarism:

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

*\* Final Grades are subject to deductions by the Academic Affairs Office due to unauthorised absences.*

### **Attendance Policy**

#### **Classes**

All Boston University Study Abroad London Programme students are expected to attend each and every class session, tutorial, and field trip in order to fulfill the required course contact hours and receive course credit. Any student that has been absent from two class sessions (whether authorised or unauthorised) will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their continued participation on the programme.

#### *Authorised Absence:*

Students who expect to be absent from any class should notify a member of Academic Affairs and complete an Authorized Absence Approval Form 10 working days in advance of the class date (except in the case of absence due to illness, for which students should submit the Authorised Absence Approval Form with the required doctor's note as soon as possible). **Please note:**

**Submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Form does not guarantee an authorised absence**

Students may apply for an authorised absence only under the following circumstances:

- Illness, supported by a local London doctor's note (submitted with Authorised Absence Approval Form).
- Important placement event that clashes with a class (verified by internship supervisor)
- Special circumstances which have been approved by the Directors (see note below).

**The Directors will only in the most extreme cases allow students to leave the programme early or for a significant break.**

#### *Unauthorised Absence:*

Any student to miss a class due to an unauthorised absence will receive a **4% grade penalty** to their final grade for the course whose class was missed. This grade penalty will be applied by the Academic Affairs office to the final grade at the end of the course. As stated above, any student that has missed two classes will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their participation on the programme as excessive absences may result in a 'Fail' in the class and therefore expulsion from the programme.

#### *Lateness*

Students arriving more than 15 minutes after the posted class start time will be marked as late. Any student with irregular class attendance (more than two late arrivals to class) will be required to meet with the Assistant Director of Academic Affairs and if the lateness continues, may have his/her final grade penalised.

## **Course Chronology**

### **Session One: Monday 8 September**

#### **What are the arts and media in Britain?**

##### **Introduction**

- 1) Course introduction. Overview of the arts (visual arts, performing arts, literature and architecture) and media in London and Britain, plus the question of how these activities and institutions express national identity.
- 2) Video of novelist Martin Amis discussing Englishness 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 themes of the course expressed as cultural tensions under the headings of nation, history, Empire, class, race, religion, sex, character and stereotypes. Why national identity is a question, a discussion, rather than fixed in stone. Discuss: what is Britishness, and how does it differ from Englishness? How is national identity expressed in symbols, stories and other cultural artefacts?
- 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 Swinging 1960s and 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: Tuesday 9 September**

#### **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) British comedy and satire: national character expressed through laughter.
- 5) 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: Monday 15 September**

#### **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: Tuesday 16 September**

##### **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: Monday 22 September**

##### **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. How magazines are opinion formers, and sometimes cultural provocateurs. From Fleet Street hacks to citizen bloggers: how the new digital age affects traditional media.
- 3) Case study: the great phone hacking scandal and the fall of the News of the World.
- 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]

##### **PLUS: CLASS VISIT TO WEST END THEATRE**

#### **Session Six: Tuesday 23 September**

##### **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 National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company 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) Video of Sky documentary about the National Theatre.
- 4) 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: Monday 29 September**

#### **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 arts in culture. Discuss: what images of national identity are conveyed through contemporary novels?
- 2) Literary phenomena: Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, JK Rowling's Harry Potter books.
- 3) Case study: how is London seen by writers?
- 4) Class discussion of third review.

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

### **Session Eight: Tuesday 30 September**

#### **Nostalgia or innovation?**

#### **Mass pop: Brit pop, book publishing 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) Cultural icons: poet Philip Larkin and the Lady Chatterley trial.
- 3) Case study: the Hay-on-Wye Festival.
- 4) London architecture. Video of BBC documentary about 1980s London architecture. When does recent architecture become historic and suitable for listing? Case study: the Heritage Industry.

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

\* **Contingency Class Date: Friday 26 September.** Students are obligated to keep this date free to attend class should any class dates need to be rescheduled.

### **Session Nine: Friday 3 October (NOTE DAY)**

#### **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]

### **Tuesday 7 October**

**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:**

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

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

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

#### **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)

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)

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)

RIBA, *The Brits Who Built the Modern World* (RIBA, 2014)

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)

Norman Rosenthal, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* (Thames & Hudson, 1998)

Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre Since the War* (Yale University Press, 1999)

Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art* (Verso, 2006)

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](http://www.culture.gov.uk)

The Arts Council: [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

The BBC: [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)

The Guardian: [www.guardian.co.uk/culture](http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture)

The Arts Desk: [www.theartsdesk.com](http://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 Blackboard: <https://lms.bu.edu>  
(you must be logged in to view materials).

### **Terms and Conditions**

I will make some time available in each session for students to raise questions etc. Should students wish to discuss matters with me in person I will also be available during the break mid-lecture and at the end of class. Alternatively, please feel free to e-mail me with questions. If you have problems with the availability of reading materials (all of which should be in the library) please contact me either through the Student 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, Fall 2014**

**Monday 15 September, 11am: TATE BRITAIN VISIT.** Nearest tube: Pimlico (Victoria Line).

**Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> September, EVENING THEATRE VISIT: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time at the Gielgud Theatre.** Nearest tube: Piccadilly/Leicester Square (Northern, Piccadilly Lines).

**Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 10.30am: NATIONAL THEATRE BACKSTAGE TOUR.** Nearest tube: Waterloo (Northern, Bakerloo, Jubilee Lines).

**I really do hope you enjoy the course, Aleks Sierz, Fall 2014**