

Post-War British Popular Culture

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: LNDN 3343

Number of Credits: 3

Language of Instruction: English

Course Description

This course will look at some key theories of popular culture, and include case studies of selected examples from the British Isles since 1945. The main aim will be to enable students to think independently about this topic. The course will include study visits to galleries, museums and other sites as an important learning experience.

Course Objectives

- Display a knowledge of some of the key debates in popular cultural studies
- Do independent research in this area, using a variety of primary and secondary sources
- Write a paper using this research

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course students should be able to: identify, define, and solve problems; locate and critically evaluate information; master a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry; communicate effectively; gain a deeper understanding of the host culture where they are studying.

Students should demonstrate: responsibility & accountability, independence & interdependence, goal orientation, self confidence, resilience, appreciation of differences.

Methodology

A combination of Lectures, discussions, presentations by students, screenings and field trips.

Required Reading / Materials

There will be a formal Reading Pack handed out in class – this will consist of journal articles and chapters of academic studies from the reading list below. The professor will also prepare a substantive reading pack tailored to your chosen research topic for the final paper.

Students will also be expected to acquaint themselves with the main outlines of British and world history from the Second World War onwards, and to search for texts on popular culture outside the ones I have handed out in class.

STUDENTS WILL NEED TO READ THE EQUIVALENT OF ABOUT 40 PAGES OF RESEARCH PER WEEK ON AVERAGE TO ACHIEVE THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE GRADES. SEE BELOW FOR FURTHER READING.

INDICATIVE FURTHER READING The literature on this subject is enormous. The following is only a very small indicative selection. I encourage you to use your home university's academic digital databases when possible. Remember, to achieve the highest possible grades, you will need to do independent research in addition to reading the set notes and texts handed out in class.

Examples of History:

A Marwick, *British Society since 1945*

K Morgan, *The People's Peace*

D Childs, *Britain since 1945: A Political History*

A Sked, *Post-War Britain*

D Coates, *The Context of British Politics*

A Scott, *Who Rules Britain*

A Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain*

Cannadine, D. *Class in Britain*

Day, G. *Class* Smith, A. *Nationalism* (Oxford Reader)

Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities*

Examples of Cultural History and Art History:

M Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* J Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

R Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*

R Blythe, *The Age of Illusion: England in the Twenties and Thirties 1919-1940*

C Booker, *The Neophiliacs...English life in the fifties and sixties*

R Hewison, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War 1945-1960 Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960-1975*

R Williams, *Key Words*

Cultural Studies and Popular Cultural Studies

Anderson, P. *Arguments within English Marxism* (see below for comments)

Bennett, T et al. *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*

This contains the 'classic' essay by S Hall, 'Cultural studies: two paradigms'. The argument of this essay (originally signalled in 1978 in an article by R Johnson in *History Workshop Journal*) was heavily criticised by one of the subjects of the essay, E.P. Thompson in his lectures and his book, *Poverty of Theory*, (which was responded to by Perry Anderson in *Arguments within English Marxism*) which led to a major rift in cultural studies in this country. A deep divide opened between those who followed Thompson's ideas of what used to be called 'free-will' and self-determination of the individual and community (what Hall called a 'culturalist' approach), and those who followed Hall's and some of the younger academics' theories that there was no 'free-will' (what they called 'agency') in human affairs, but rather a determination by forces that were largely outside our conscious control (e.g. the grammar of a language; the conventional ideas, or 'ideologies' of a culture). The latter approach Hall called 'structuralist'. This rift resulted in major losses to cultural studies, as Thompson retreated from any deep interaction with the cultural studies' community, and Williams, perhaps the most important figure in cultural studies in the 20th Century, lost his energetic and original direction trying to forge theoretical bridges between the opposing camps, though he never abandoned his belief that individuals in community had free-will. (see below for further).

The so-called 'culturalist' stream tended, after this division, to engage in what was called 'ethnographic' and 'oral' and life history' studies, while the so-called structuralists occupied the high theoretical ground in British cultural studies, looking down their noses at the supposedly intellectually limited endeavours of the oral historians and ethnographers (except when these used the high theory of the high theorists).

Altogether, this debate was characterised by a parochialism that ignored the majority of opinions outside their own sectarian groups, as well as many of the core debates of the major intellectual traditions of the world, giving it a kind of anti-historical *Déjà vu* atmosphere that was never resolved.

Bennett, T. et al. *Popular Culture and Social Relations* A 'classic' text. It was produced, as was the previous anthology, for the Open University (Britain's 'open access' university of the air).

In the Introduction, Bennett claims that the rift between culturalists and structuralists has been mended by a collective turn, in the early 1980s, to an Italian Communist writer of the early 20th Century (up to 1937 when he died), Gramsci. This is a blatantly selective, not to say parochial, view of the history of cultural studies. Ironically, these texts about ordinary people are written in a style that is unintelligible to all but a few highly specialised academics in this field, limiting the democratic debate of the ideas they expound.

Berger, J. *Ways of Seeing* A 'classic' text, still much used by students. One of the best ever written. Accompanied by/to a tv series. One of the most important attempts to relate high art to popular culture and ideology. Berger argues that European oil painting was often if not always, politically incorrect: sexist, and classist. He demonstrates important similarities between much of the 'Artistic' paintings of Europe and the moral sleaze of advertising and pornography.

Brantlinger, P. *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America* A very useful summary of the history of cultural studies.

Burke, P. *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* One of the most successful and rare attempts to describe popular culture as the way of life of ordinary people in Europe. A groundbreaking study, and one which very few if any historians, including Burke, have managed to follow up on successfully (though some may cite the French 'Annales' school as one that preceded Burke, their take on culture is radically different).

Chambers, I. *Border Dialogues Urban Rhythms* Chambers' texts are an attempt to 'poeticise' a theoretical approach to popular culture. A genuine heart behind the long-winded prose, but it is very difficult to read!

Frith, S. and Horne, H. *Art into Pop* This deals with a fascinating and important topic: the ways in which art schools in Britain provided the seed-bed for many popular music movements. More, it looks at the relationship of high art to popular culture, and the way all of this is situated in a world of commerce and commodification. A particularly interesting chapter on the influence of 'Situationist' theory on Punk.

Dodson, M. 'Taste and virtue; or the virtue of taste' in J.Palmer and M. Dodson *Design and Aesthetics* Dodson, M. 'Introduction to part II' in *Design and Aesthetics* (as above...). These two essays exemplify a 'deep anthropological' approach to the study of popular and high culture, which is little understood outside a group of specialist 'hunter/gatherer' anthropologists, and a group of specialist activists often labelled, pejoratively, 'primitivists' (one of its leading lights being the sometimes waywardly eccentric, but always intelligent and open-hearted, John Zerzan).

Eagleton, T. *The Idea of Culture* An important Marxist update to the work of R Williams by one of his former students.

Gerder, K. and Thornton, S. *The Subcultures Reader* This is a very wide ranging anthology on highly noticeable sub-cultural groups in modern societies, from music and fashion groups such as Punks, Goths, Metallies, Hip Hoppers; to tv fan-groupies such as 'Trekkies'; to sexually-orientated sub-cultures; to sports' fan sub-cultures; and to religious sub-cultures. The book demonstrates how academics have focused on the more sensational, and media-

dominated, aspects of 'lived' popular culture rather than the kind of popular culture that most of us live out, which is typically not within a sub-culture strictly defined as such. In general, it demonstrates the inadequacy of most academic work when it attempts to engage with the lives of ordinary people.

Gray, A. and McGuigan, J. *Studying Culture* A useful anthology of some key essays on culture, including a reprint of R Williams' early essay 'Culture is Ordinary'.

MacCabe, C. *High Theory/Low Culture: analysing popular television and film* A collection of essays by some of the most fashionable theorists on popular culture in the 1980s, generally following Hall's 'structuralist' approach, or perhaps now, a post-structuralist approach? A little more readable than much of the writing in this genre, it still contains howlers such as an early misuse of the literary term 'diegesis' (a misuse which has now become entrenched in 'cultural theory' and 'film theory'), as well as an aberrant spelling of same! (see pp.67ff., 1986 imprint)

Hebdige, D. *Subculture: the meaning of style* A 'classic' text from one of the leading lights of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (the most important school of cultural studies until it was recently abolished by its parent university). Hebdige broaches the now familiar argument that much of popular cultural fashion was invented by young people, especially working class youths, as a 'symbolic' revolt against an oppressive social system.

Hewison, R. *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945-60 Too Much: Art and Society in the sixties. 1960-75*

O'Sullivan, T. and Jewkes, Y. *The Media Studies Reader* A very useful anthology, containing 'key' essays. An important chapter on 'stereotypes', as well as other chapters that are written in a readable style.

Szczelkun, S. *The Conspiracy of Good Taste: William Morris, Cecil Sharp, Clough Williams-Ellis and the repression of working class culture in the twentieth century* An important exploration of the ways in which taste and class interact by one of Britain's most interesting avant-garde artists. It criticises two important writers who were supposed to have been supporters of the culture of peasant and working class cultures, William Morris (founder of the Arts and Crafts movement) and Cecil Sharp (founder of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, which still exists and has headquarters in Camden Town).

Mulhern, F. *Culture/Metaculture* A recentish exploration of the problems of cultural theory. Not very readable, and narrow in its interests, but a good example of its kind.

Storey, J. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* A very useful reader. Worth dipping into for key texts from Marx and Matthew Arnold to the present.

Strinati, D. *An Introduction to theories of popular culture* A very useful summary, but not particularly readable. The first edition is in some ways better.

Thompson, E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class* With Christopher Hill, Raphael Samuel and Peter Burke, Thompson completes a quartet of historians who have made it their lifework to understand how creative and important ordinary people were. Thompson also

wrote on the poet William Blake (see his *Witness against the Beast*, perhaps the most important study of Blake's religion and politics), and on nuclear war during the later Cold War.

Turner, G. *British Cultural Studies: an introduction* A very useful history of cultural studies as a 'project' in Britain.

Walker, J.A. *Art in the Age of Mass Media* An important topic treated in a very readable style by one of our most conscientious and thorough art historians. It looks at popular culture, and also its relation to Modernism and Postmodernism. Walker was one of the first writers in English to deal readably with Postmodernism. A classic text still much used by students.

Williams, R. *Culture and Society* *The Long Revolution* *The Country and the City* By the founder of cultural studies, these books are classics, and though feminists and postmodernists have chipped away at the edges, these books remain the ground upon which all subsequent British cultural studies (and media studies, film studies, etc) of any substance stand. One of his first essays indicates an important, democratic stance on culture: 'Culture is ordinary'. He is often clumped together with Thompson et al. above as one who celebrated the life of ordinary people with true scholarship.

Walker, J.A. *Art into Pop, Pop into Art* A very useful and interesting and well written examination of the cross influences of Pop Music and High Art.

Grading

CAPA Program and Instructor Policy

The faculty expects from its students a high level of responsibility and academic honesty. Because the value of an academic course depends upon the absolute integrity of the work done by the student, it is imperative that a student demonstrate a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work and class behavior. This means to gain full attendance you must attend all classes, you must not be late (unless with a valid reason) and you must be respectful of the professor and of other students by not talking/whispering in class when others are talking or presenting. Persistent lateness or lack of attention in class, i.e., reading materials other than the work assigned, may result in a low or zero grade for participation, and possible referral to the CAO. **No electronic equipment will be used in class**, including laptops, phones, ipods, cell phones, etc, unless you have written permission from the Chief Academic Officer prior to the course. If you are caught using any electronic equipment, you may receive a zero grade for participation.

Plagiarism will be dealt with very seriously, and will be referred to the Chief Academic Officer in London. You may receive an F for the course. If all work is not submitted by the end of the program, you will receive an F for the course.

Class Participation and Attendance

Attendance at all classes is mandated by CAPA; students who miss a class without permission from CAPA's Chief Academic Officer will have their grade for the course lowered. Informed participation is expected in every class, so students must have read the full assignment carefully before coming and be ready to discuss it if called upon. At any meeting there may be a brief, pass-fail two-minute quiz on some utterly obvious fact in the assigned reading. Students will also be asked to complete informal in-class writing assignments on a regular basis, which will require them to demonstrate their familiarity with the assigned materials. Students who repeatedly demonstrate unsatisfactory performance on these quizzes and exercises will be penalized in the participation grade.

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Assessment 1	20%
Assessment 2	20%
Assessment 3	50%
Group Presentations	10%
Overall grade	100%

Course Content

Unit 1

Intro Lecture at CAPA

Unit 2

Study Visit to North West End

- Meet at Tottenham Court Road Tube Station, in front of “Dominion Theatre” (“We will Rock You”)

Unit 3

Study Visit to National Gallery

- Meet at Front Entrance (Trafalgar Square side)
- Nearest Tube Charing Cross or Leicester Square

Unit 4

Study Visit to British Museum

- Great Russell Street.
- Meet in the Front Entrance of the British Museum (nearest tube:Tottenham Ct Rd.)

Unit 5

To be confirmed: Study Visit to Iskcon/Radha Krishna Temple

- Meet outside, Radha Krishna Temple, 9-10 Soho Street (Nearest Tube: Tottenham Ct Rd)

Unit 6

Study Visit to Wallace Collection

- Meet Front Entrance of Wallace Collection, Manchester Square (Manchester Square is North of Wigmore Street: nearest Tube: Bond Street)

Unit 7

Break Week- No Classes

Unit 8

Time and Date to be Confirmed: Study Visit to Notting Hill

- Meet Andy Charlton at WH Smith's outside Notting Hill Gate Tube
- ANDY'S MOBILE TEL: 07768655597

Unit 9

Lecture at Cromwell Road: Screening of "Notting Hill"

- Hand in Midterms

Unit 10

Study Visit to Regents Park and Camden Town

- Meet outside Marylebone Road Entrance to BAKER STREET TUBE STATION

Unit 11

Possible Field Trip to be announced

Unit 12

Lecture at CAPA

Unit 13

Lecture at CAPA

Unit 14

Last Class: Hand in Papers and Group Presentations

Students need to hand in printed out work on the dates scheduled. Emailed work cannot be accepted on this course.

Assessment 1

20% Class participation and Exercises, including weekly research notes on the field trips and the set readings for each week. All of the above constitutes 10% of overall grade

Assessment 2

Mid-Term Course Work: Min 850 words overall: 20%: Due Session 9

Please hand in, in Session 9, an academic analysis of the field trips you have attended so far, using as a starting point the theoretical perspectives of the set texts handed out in class

- Some research on and engagement with the study visit in terms of the histories of the places visited, their historical significance for different people and at different periods, and their function in society.
- Some analysis of the way each site connects to popular culture in the widest sense of the word, and specifically to popular culture in the UK. To do this you will need to refer to my notes and to other sources, including factual and critical sources. You may include some creative visual imagery and creative writing, but the emphasis will be on academic rigour.
- Reflective analysis, including personal responses – the meaning the field trip has for you and its significance for others. Your analysis in this respect could use the methods of anthropological participant observation and/or objective observation.

Methods of observation for your reflective analysis If you approach your experience of the field trip as an anthropological participant observer, you can write an account of the experience from the perspective of one engaged in the same process as others, but approached with a greater than usual degree of observation.

If you use a more detached approach – a more objective observation – you can also observe others seen at the study visit sites, how they interact with each other and the environment. There is no hard and fast distinction between these two approaches and they can be combined. The terms allow you to reflect further on your own positioning in your experience and your relationship with the experience and others engaged in it. You can even, if you wish, engage in some short interviews with other students or with others at the sites visited, and write up your findings into your short reviews.

Assessment 3

Final project: min 1750 words: 50%: Due Last Session

You are asked to decide on a theme of your own that emerges from your own interests, from the field trips and from your reading and research, and to write up an essay on this theme. Your discussion will engage with your own experiences and with rigorous academic research. Providing your essay respects academic rigour, you can engage in some creative elements, including creative writing and visual or aural imagery.

Remember that I define Popular Culture very broadly for the purposes of this course. For example, Fine Art, Literature, Concert Music, 'Polite' Architecture, Serious Theatre are all 'Popular Culture' for the 'Cultured Classes'. But so also are the living participant cultures of all classes (e.g. Dinner Parties for the Refined Classes, and Working Men's Clubs for the old working class). This seems to fly in the face of conventional definitions of popular culture, but a short analysis will demonstrate that most of the examples of popular culture used for conventional 'academic' analysis often apply to only tiny fractions of the population, and often groups who consider themselves to be 'elites' of some kind, e.g. 'Goths'. Please see my Notes on Study Visits and on Popular Culture for an initial introduction to this perspective on popular culture.

Group Presentation: Each group to aim for about 10 minutes maximum of your learning experiences in London. 10%: DUE: Last Session

This is an informal exercise, and you can be as creative as you wish, but if you prefer an academic approach, that is fine too. I will require copies of any research notes and prompt notes you use, and may record the presentations.

The faculty expects from its students a high level of responsibility and academic honesty. Because the value of an academic course depends upon the absolute integrity of the work done by the student, it is imperative that a student demonstrate a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work and class behaviour. This means to gain full attendance you must attend all classes, you must not be late (unless with a valid reason) and you must be respectful of the professor and of other students by not talking/whispering in class when others are talking or presenting. Persistent lateness or lack of attention in class, i.e. reading materials other than the work set, may result in a low or zero grade for participation, and possible referral to the CAO. **No electronic equipment will be used in class**, including laptops, phones, ipods, cell phones, etc, unless you have written permission from the Chief Academic Officer prior to the course. If you are caught using any electronic equipment, you may receive a zero grade for participation.

Plagiarism will be dealt with very seriously, and will be referred to the Chief Academic Officer in London. You may receive an F for the course. If all work is not submitted by the end of the program, you will receive an F for the course.

Policies

Attendance Policy

Regular attendance and punctuality are mandatory in order to earn full marks. The final grade will take into consideration preparation required for class (i.e. readings) and participation in class discussions. If you miss any meetings without an excused absence from the on-site director, your final grade will be dropped accordingly. In the case of absences, it is the student's responsibility to find out what information was given in class including any announcements made.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).