

British Cultural Studies

Mgr. Jan Miessler

ZUR355 - 4 ECTS / ZUR563 - 6 ECTS; Tuesday 14:00 - 15:40; Room 43

Welcome to the course British Cultural Studies! This syllabus is your guide if you want to plan your reading and seminar work ahead and if you want to know what it all will be about.

The course is built around reading and discussing important classical texts of British Cultural Studies, an approach in social studies that influences thinking about mass media and about modern societies at large. The course starts with an overview of basic concepts and points of view that informed the framework of cultural studies in Britain. In the main part of the course we will focus on important works of the prominent figures of the BCS, on the development of their approaches and on the criticism from other researches of media, culture and society. The discussion will focus on theories as well as on their practical application.

Requirements:

The classes are intended as seminars. This means that students' work consists of reading required texts, active participation in discussions and one individual presentation (10 minutes) by each student during the semester. Students must also write a short final essay (4-6 pages + 1 title page) on a topic relevant to the discussed texts and problems. They will choose the topic from the list of available topics or after consultation with the teacher.

Topics:

- Week 1: Introduction
- Week 2: Position of British Cultural Studies and Some Basic Concepts

- Week 3: The Role of Culture: Base, Superstructure and Ruling Ideas
- Week 4: "Culture and Civilization" and Frankfurt School
- Week 5: Hegemony, Dominance and Ideology (Gramsci, Althusser)

- Week 6: Founding Fathers of BCS (Williams, Hoggart, Thompson)
- Week 7: Stuart Hall and CCCS I.
- Week 8: Stuart Hall and CCCS II.
- Week 9: Audiences of News; Audiences of Soap Operas (Morley, Ang)
- Week 10: Critical Voices, Other Points of View

- Week 11: What Matters? Cultural Studies versus Political Economy (Fiske, McChesney)
- Week 12: Contemporary Authors
- Week 13: Final Seminar

Week 1 Introduction

Reading:

Turner, Graeme (1996): *British Cultural Studies*. (2nd ed.) London: Routledge. (chapter "The idea of cultural studies", pp. 11-37)

Instructions:

It looks obvious that cultural studies deal with culture. But what exactly "culture" is? And why should we focus "British Cultural Studies"? Do you already know some representative figures or some concepts of BCS?

- How would your own definition of *culture* look like? Try to formulate *TWO* different definitions of culture and present some arguments in favor of each one. **You should submit your definitions before our SECOND meeting – otherwise you CANNOT continue with the course!!!** The deadline is 25/02/2008 12:00. Please upload your homework to "Odevzdávárna" in IS.

(This is just a necessary step to discourage hunters of easy credits and to encourage others to start thinking about our topic.)

If you are interested, you may also read the first chapter from Turner for a general overview. This book is a good introduction to the BCS and it can serve you as a basic guide throughout our course. There are quite many copies at Faculty of Art's library – be sure to borrow the *second* (updated) edition of the book.

Organization matters

Do not expect that we will right from the first minute go straight into some theoretical debates. During our first meeting we will probably focus on organizational issues. However, this does not mean that you are not supposed to show up! Your presence is important to prove that you are really interested in the course. You will get general overview of the course and I will also specify what exactly you will have to do in order to finish the course. It will also be the right occasion to ask questions.

Week 2

Position of British Cultural Studies and Some Basic Concepts

Readings:

Storey, John (2006): *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. (3rd ed.) (chapter "What is British Cultural Studies?" pp. xv - xxi)

Alexander, Jeffrey C. – **Smith**, Philip (2003): "The Strong Program in Cultural Sociology: Elements of a Structural Hermeneutics" in: Alexander, Jeffrey C. *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (pp.11-26)

Instructions:

What are the basic concepts of British Cultural Studies? What are their origins and how are they related to the media studies? At the beginning of the course we will have to discuss words like human agency, social structure, ideology, dominance, social class, social group, cultural object, common sense etc.

First read Storey and focus on the concepts he presents. Consider also their relationships. Also try to answer the following questions:

- Do you think that cultural studies are a "science"? If you would be a critic of cultural studies, what would be your arguments? (Do not focus only on what Storey mentions!)
- What are the basic assumptions of British Cultural Studies? What are the implications of these assumptions for our study of culture and society? Do you agree with these assumptions and their implications? Are there any alternatives?
- What do you think about Hall's definition of ideology?
- How could arguments of "cultural populism" look like? Do you think that TV series like Dallas provide viewers with pleasure, or is it just a powerful tool of domination in the hands of ruling classes?

Next read Alexander and focus on:

- What is the difference between traditional and cultural sociology?
- Do you agree with the cultural sociology perspective?
- What is the relationship between British Cultural Studies ("Birmingham School") and Alexander's cultural sociology? Are these two just different labels for the same thing, or is there some difference?
- What do you think: do you find alternatives to BCS better or not?

Week 3

The Role of Culture: Base, Superstructure and Ruling Ideas

Readings:

Marx, Karl – Engels, Friedrich (1845): "The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas" in: *German Ideology*. (Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 5)

(<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm>)

Marx, Karl (1859): "Base and Superstructure" in: *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

(<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>)

Engels, Friedrich (1890): *Letter to Joseph Bloch*.

(http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_09_21.htm)

Williams, Raymond (1980): "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory." in: *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. London: Verso.

(<http://homepage.newschool.edu/~quigley/vcs/base&super.pdf>)

Instructions:

What about ruling and subordinate classes? What about base and superstructure? And what about ideology? It is often said that the origins of BCS are Marxist. In this seminar we will read the classics. Were they wrong or were they – after all – right? Are their ideas of some use today? Or do they belong to the ash heap of history? First read Marx and Engels and find out:

- According to Marx and Engels, whose ideas are the ruling ideas of every epoch and why? Is there any space for other ideas?

- What is the relationship between material base and ideological superstructure?

- Who are the actors who produce the ruling ideas?

- Do you agree? Or disagree? Why?

- If you compare Marx and Engels (1845) and Engels (1890), do you see any contradictions?

Then read Williams. How does he reflect Marx and Engels's basic terms after more than a century of their existence?

- For what does Williams criticize "mainstream Marxism"?

- What are the three different cultural formations? Could you offer some current examples?

- Do you think this is consistent with Marx – Engels (1845) or not? And why?

Week 4

"Culture and Civilization" and Frankfurt School

Readings:

Arnold, Matthew (1869): *Culture and anarchy*. London: Smith, Elder and comp. (selected paragraphs reprinted in Storey's reader, pp. 6-11)

Leavis, F. R. (1933): *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*. Cambridge: Minority Press. (selected paragraphs reprinted in Storey's reader, pp. 12-19)

Adorno, Theodor W. (1941): "On Popular Music", *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, no. 9. (reprinted in Storey's reader, pp. 73-84)

Instructions:

Is there a special breed of people which we might call "cultured people"? And what about the rest? In this seminar we will be dealing with UK "Culture and Civilization" stream that dominated literary theory in Britain for almost a century. First read Arnold and think about these questions:

- How does Arnold define *culture*? Do you agree with his definition? What are your main points in favor or against?
- And what about Arnold's concept of *anarchy*? How would you label Arnold's position?
- What would Marx say about Arnold?
- Does Arnold say anything about who are the producers of culture?

Then read Lewis, whose text was written more than sixty years later, and compare.

- What would you say on Leavis' "collapse of authority"?
- Do you also see the "danger" of mass civilisation? Or do you have some arguments in its favor? And do you agree that there once was a cultural "Golden Age" ?
- Have you found some development between Arnold and Lewis?

Finally read Adorno, *the* representative of Frankfurt School, and notice similarities and differences between UK literary criticism and Germany's Frankfurt School.

- Compare the points of view of Arnold and Lewis – and of Adorno.
- How does Adorno see the relationship between profit and culture?
- Is Adorno an elitist? Or a Marxist? Or a typical exponent of incomprehensible German philosophy?
- Are you a consumer of mass culture? And are you unhappy about it? What would you say to Adorno if he would catch you watching MTV?

Week 5

Hegemony, Dominance and Ideology

Readings:

Gramsci, Antonio (1971): *The Selections from Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers. (selected parts)

(http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/prison_notebooks/index.htm)

Althusser, Louis (1971): "The Ideological State Apparatuses." in: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Monthly Review Press.

(<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>)

Instructions:

How come that the communist Revolution in the early 20th century proved so successful and that striking workers were rolled back in the whole Europe except for Russia? Where all the support for Mussolini came from? How the ruling classes achieve the dominance of their ruling ideas? And is there some way out of this maze? First read Gramsci and think about:

- What is "hegemony"? Could you explain it and give some examples?
- What is the role of intellectuals? And who are they? Do they form a specific class, or are they part of an existing class?
- Do you see any development from classical "base – superstructure" model?

Then read Althusser.

- If you compare Althusser and Gramsci, which one emphasizes more the possibility for social change?
- Would you describe Althusser's "ideological state apparatuses" as structure-based or actor-based? And what does it imply?
- Do you see any problems in Althusser and his apparatuses? Explain!

Week 6

Founding Fathers of BCS

Readings:

Hoggart, Richard (1957): *The Uses of Literacy*. London: Chatto and Windus. (pp. 144-9, 246-500)

Thompson, E.P. (1963): *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Victor Gollancz. (pp. 8-13).

Williams, Raymond (1961): *The Long Revolution*. London: Chatto and Windus. (pp. 57-70)

You may also read:

Turner, Graeme (1996): *British Cultural Studies*. (2nd ed.) London: Routledge. (the first part of the chapter "The British tradition: a short history", pp. 38-66)

Introduction:

In this seminar, we will discuss writings of "founding fathers" of BCS. First, read Hoggart and find out:

- If you compare Hoggart to Arnold and Leavis, do you see something they have in common? Focus on their evaluations of past and present and on working classes and their cultures.
- And what are the differences?
- What is according to him the problem of mass culture? Compared to Adorno, is it similar or different point of view?

Then read Williams:

- What are the three "general categories" in the definition of culture? Which one is fundamental for further development of cultural studies?
- What is, according to Williams, the purpose of cultural analysis?

Finally, read Thompson:

- Does Thompson emphasize structure or agency? Is he consistent with classical Marxism?
- If you compare Thompson's culture and Gramsci's hegemony, what are the differences? Focus on the working class and its ideas/culture.
- According to Thompson, is there one culture or many cultures? And why is it so?

Week 7

Stuart Hall and CCCS I.

Readings:

Shannon, C.E. (1948): "A Mathematical Theory of Communication." *Bell System Technical Journal*, vol. 27. (pp. 379-423, 623-656)

Hall, Stuart ([1973] 1980): 'Encoding/decoding'. in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Ed.): *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*. London: Hutchinson. (pp. 128-138)

Hebdige, Dick (1979): *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London and New York: Routledge. (pp. 5-19)

You may also read:

Davis, Helen (2004): *Understanding Stuart Hall*. London: Sage.

Instructions:

First refresh your knowledge about the so called "Shannon-Weaver model of communication" (you don't need to read the whole article, just think about the logic of the model presented in the first few pages). Then read Hall's Encoding/Decoding:

- Do you feel the difference between Shannon and Hall? How would you describe it?
- After reading Hall, do you see any problems with applying Shannon – Weaver model on media research?
- What can Shannon's and Hall's audience do with the encoded message? What is the difference between both approaches?

Finally, read Hebdige and find out:

- Could he build his account on Shannon – Weaver model? Why (not)?
- What, according to Hebdige, allows individuals and groups to produce their oppositional identities? How would you link this to Hall's encoding/decoding?
- Can be subcultures incorporated back into mainstream culture? If yes, how? If not, why?
- How do *you* see the audiences? How strong their potential for resistance might be? What about your own experiences?

Week 8

Stuart Hall and CCCS II.

Readings:

Hall, Stuart (1992): "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies." in: Grossberg, Lawrence, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds.): *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge.

Willis, Paul (1977): *Learning to Labour*. Aldershot: Gover.

McRobbie, Angela (1991): *Feminism and Youth Culture*. London: Macmillan.

Gilroy, Paul (1987): *There Ain't No Black In the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Hutchinson

Gilroy, Paul (1993): *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso

hooks, bell (1981): *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press.

Instructions:

After spending some time in relative obscurity in Birmingham, cultural studies started to become mainstream in UK and also abroad. Also the scope of topics and approaches became broader. Some previously taken-for-granted starting points were challenged and (by some researchers, most notably in the USA) the critical appeal of cultural studies was put into background. Thus, first read Stuart Hall's account on the developments in the field.

- According to Hall, what are the important characteristics of cultural studies?
- Does he see some problems in current (early 1990s) writings in the field?
- What is your opinion? Is Hall right, or is it legitimate to accept broader criteria?

Next we will have to deal with authors, who still belong to the original tradition of BCS, but who contributed by something new. Basically, they usually challenged the special position of class that was previously the basic analytical concept of BCS. Thus, read one of the remaining texts and find out:

- What is probably the important contribution of this text to the BCS tradition?
- Does the author claim that the class is more important than other distinctions (race, gender, age etc.) or not? And what is the relationship between class and race, gender etc. from the cultural studies' point of view?
- What do *you* think? Is class the most important, or is it just one thing among the many? Why?

Week 9

Audiences of News; Audiences of Soap Operas

Readings:

Hall, Stuart – Whannel, Paddy (1964): *The Popular Arts*. New York: Pantheon. (chapter "The Young Audience.")

Morley, David (1980): *The 'Nationwide' Audience: Structure and Decoding*. London: British Film Institute.

(Chandler's resume at: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Modules/TF33120/morleynw.html>)

Ang, Ien (1985): *Watching Dallas. Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Routledge.

You may also read:

Turner, Graeme (1996): *British Cultural Studies*. (2nd ed.) London: Routledge. (chapter "Audiences", pp. 122-155)

Ang, Ien (1991): "On the Politics of Empirical Audience Research" in: *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World*. New York and London: Routledge. (pp. 35-52)

Instructions:

We will focus on the important samples of audience research, based on the BCS tradition. First read Hall and Whannel (an early account, later debunked by Hall himself) and focus on:

- How they see the audience? Compare their point of view with that of Arnold + Leavis and with that of Hoggart and Williams. What are the similarities and differences? Focus on whether they are normative or not – and guess why.

Then read Chandler's resume of Morley.

- Compare Morley and Hall–Whannel: what is the main difference?

- Do you agree with the author about particular groups' "reading positions"? Why? And do you agree with Morley's conclusions that these reading positions are determined by readers' positions in the society? Or do you see here any problems?

Finally, read through Ang's book about Dallas.

- In what aspect Ang's perspective differs from that of Morley (p. 10)?

- In which aspect is Dallas "realistic" (p. 47)?

- What are tragic structure of feeling, mass culture ideology and populist ideology?

- Can you apply these terms on the debates about soap operas, reality shows, evening news etc. in our cultural context?

Week 10

Critical Voices

Readings:

Bourdieu, Pierre (1984): *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (chapter 2, "The Social Space and Its Transformations", pp. 97-168).

Sokal, Alan D. (1996): "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity." *Social Text* 46/47, pp. 217-252 (spring/summer 1996). (http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/transgress_v2/transgress_v2_singlefile.html)

You may also read:

Mander, Mary (1987): "Bourdieu, the Sociology of Culture and Cultural Studies: A Critique" *European Journal of Communication*, vol. 2 (1987), pp. 427-453.

Instructions:

As we have already seen in Alexander's account, there was also a criticism of cultural studies. Various authors evaluated it from different positions. In this seminar, we will focus on one of the most distinguished critic, Pierre Bourdieu, who not only criticized BCS, but also provided an alternative to it. The comparative view on Bourdieu and BCS should allow us to see both strong and weak points of these two approaches. First read Bourdieu...

- Compare Bourdieu with authors we already know (Marx, Arnold + Leavis, Adorno, people from CCCS and especially Morley and Ang). What are the similarities and differences? In what Bourdieu differs from BCS?
- What are the three capitals we all have (according to Bourdieu)? And how do they affect our fields of possibilities? Does Bourdieu claims that the capital strictly predetermines our life trajectories – or is there some room for human agency?
- Do you find Bourdieu's model static or dynamic? Do you think it is an improvement of older models, and if so, in which aspects? Do you see any problems with Bourdieu? (You can compare your critical conclusions with those of Mander.)

A completely different critique of postmodern tendencies in cultural studies was made by Alan Sokal. This time you really do not need to read his article, just check up the debate about the so called "Sokal affair" (<http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/>).

- What do you think about Sokal's article? What was the significance of its publishing in a distinguished journal?
- Do you have a similar view on postmodernism and cultural studies? Why? Or why not?

You can also check:

<http://www.elsewhere.org/pomo/>

Week 11

What Matters? Cultural Studies versus Political Economy

Readings A - USA:

Fiske, John (1989): *Reading the Popular*. London: Routledge. (selected chapter)

Fiske, John (1996): *Media Matters. Race and Gender in U.S. Politics*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press. (selected chapter)

McChesney, Robert (1996): "Communication for the Hell of It: The Triviality of U.S. Broadcasting History." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 40/4, pp. 540-552.

Readings B - UK:

McGuigan, Jim (1992): *Cultural Populism*. London: Routledge. (chapter 2, Trajectories of Cultural Populism")

Garnham, Nicholas (1995): "Political Economy and Cultural Studies: Reconciliation or Divorce?" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12/1, pp. 62-71.

Grossberg, Lawrence (1995): "Cultural Studies vs. Political Economy: Is Anybody Else Bored with This Debate?" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12/1, pp. 62-71.

Instructions:

As we have seen, audiences are important. Focusing on them, however, may lead to another problem: not seeing other things. The debate between political economists and cultural studies scholars started in early 1990s and still continues. In this seminar we will discuss two leading advocates of these two approaches in USA and also the debate on the same issue that took place in UK at the same time. This time you have two options:

Option A – an American option

First read one chapter from Fiske's *Reading the Popular* and then another one from *Media Matters*. Then read McChesney's critique that is focusing on something Fiske represents. What are the main points in favor of McChesney? And do you agree with him? What is your own position?

Option B – a British option

Read the chapter from McGuigan's book and then the following discussion in March 1995 number of *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* (there are also other articles about the topic and you can also read them, if you are interested). What are the main points of the authors? Do you agree with them? What is your own position and your points – and why?

Week 12

Contemporary Authors

Readings:

Hesmondhalgh, David (2001): *The Cultural Industries*. London: Sage. (chapter 6, "Internationalisation, Globalisation and Cultural Imperialism", pp. 173-191)

Negus, Keith (1998): "Cultural production and the corporation: musical genres and the strategic management of creativity in the US recording industry" *Media, Culture and Society* 20, pp. 359-379.

You can also read:

Hesmondhalgh, David (2001): "Ownership is only a part of media picture" online at: [OpenDemocracy.org](http://www.opendemocracy.net/media-globalmediaownership/article_46.jsp)
(http://www.opendemocracy.net/media-globalmediaownership/article_46.jsp)

Instructions:

If political economy is the thesis and cultural studies the antithesis, then, what is the synthesis? Cultural economy? Political economy of culture? Theories of cultural production? Or something completely different? And actually, why bother with some synthesis? Read Hesmondhalgh and Negus and find out.

- Compare Hesmondhalgh with Marx, Adorno, Hall, Fiske and McChesney. What does he take from them and in what aspects does he differ? How would you describe his position? And do you agree with this position?
- What do you think about the concept of cultural imperialism? Do you see any examples? And do you find them significant?
- Read Negus and find out his criticism of other approaches. What does he find problematic and why? Do you agree with his evaluations?
- Now, when the course is at its end, what do you think: in which way is the culture related to the economy and the society? Do you agree with some of the authors we have been discussing during our seminars or do you hold some different position. Or you still don't have any opinion at all?

Finally, familiarize yourself with what is going on in some leading journals in the field:

Media, Culture and Society
International Journal of Cultural Studies
Cultural Studies
European Journal of Cultural Studies

Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies
Journal of Media and Cultural Politics
Journal of Cultural Economics
Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies

!!! DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING FINAL PAPERS !!!

Week 13

Final Seminar

Instructions:

Read the assigned papers – we will discuss them and give feedback to authors. Also prepare your comments about the contents and the structure of the course. We will discuss them also.

Basic Course Literature

Davis, Helen (2004): *Understanding Stuart Hall*. London: Sage.

McRobbie, Angela (2005): *The Uses of Cultural Studies*. London: Sage.

Strinati, Dominic (1995): *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.

Turner, Graeme (1996): *British Cultural Studies*. (2nd ed.) London: Routledge.

Presentations:

BA students can pick MA topic, but it does not work the other way round.

Week 3

BA

- Marx and Engels (short bio)

MA

- Base and Superstructure in Marx and the Difference between Marx and Hegel
- Marxist View on Religion
- Marxist View on Marxism

Week 4

BA

- Life of Arnold
- Leavis and his Followers
- Adorno and Horkheimer

MA

- Adorno's Basic Concepts
- Benjamin's Perspective

Week 5

BA

- Life of Gramsci and the Story of Prison Notebooks
- Life of Althusser

MA

- Historical Developments of the Term "Ideology"

Week 6

BA

- Williams
- Hoggart
- Thompson

MA

- "The Invention of Tradition" – Reflection of the Text

Week 7

BA

- Early History of CCCS
- Closure of CCCS
- Life of Stuart Hall

MA

- Lazarsfeld's Communication Research

Week 9

MA

- Ang's feminist perspective on watching soap operas
- Ang's assessment of Morley

Week 10

BA

- Life of Pierre Bourdieu

MA

- Bourdieu's Central Concepts
- Tony Eagleton's Critique of CS

Week 11

BA

- Who is Robert McChesney?
- Who is John Fiske?
- Who are McGuigan, Garnham and Grossberg?

MA

- Political Economy of Media

Week 12

BA + MA

- Presentation (and a critical assessment, if possible) of a recent article in the field of cultural studies (or of some recent book)