

The Sociology of Art and Creativity

Understanding Visual, Expressive and Performative Cultures

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4 Credits

Introduction to the Course

All cultural production takes place in a social context, and this is as true of the visual, performative and literary arts as it is of other expressive manifestations of culture (film, comics, fashion, food or architecture for example). This course will examine the social basis of artistic production and consumption by looking at the means through which the arts are produced, circulated, displayed, preserved and consumed, the social location of artists, the relationships between the arts and processes of social change, the nature of artistic movements, the ways in which the arts are displayed in galleries, museums and public spaces and in performance spaces, shifting standards of taste and style, and theoretical approaches to the sociology of the arts. These latter are connected in turn to wider sociological debates relating to such issues as gender, class, the media, visual anthropology, and semiotics (the analysis of symbols and symbol systems).

The course is designed to give students a systematic introduction to the sociology of the arts, to equip them with a good grasp of methodologies for examining cultural production and reproduction, with a detailed awareness the links between the arts and wider sociological issues including social structures and social stratification, globalization, secularization and religion, and technological change. It will examine emerging issues in visual and performative studies, including questions of audiences and reception theory, arts activism, the arts and politics, public art, and the relationships between the arts and the digital world, cinema, the environment and conflict. The course is comparative in nature and will encompass Asian, European, Latin American and African examples.

Course Organization and Assessment

The course will consist of weekly lecture/discussion classes, substantial investigative, research and participatory work by class members, and a required gallery visit. Assessment will be in the form of two written reports (25% each), a written report on your gallery visit (10%), an open book end-of-term examination (30%), and in class presentations and attendance (10%).

Reading

Much of the course will involve looking (at pictures, films, videos etc.), but basic texts will be referred to throughout the course and include Victoria D. Alexander *The*

Sociology of the Arts: Exploring Fine and Popular Forms, Jeremy Tanner (editor) *The Sociology of Art: A Reader*, Nicholas Mirzoeff *The Visual Culture Reader*, and John Clammer *Vision and Society: Towards a Sociology and Anthropology from Art*. Further recommended readings and sources of visual material will be suggested as the course progresses.

Syllabus

1. The nature of the arts: what exactly are we studying and who defines what is art?
Reading: Alexander, chap.1, Clammer, Chap.1.
2. The arts and society: What is the “sociology of art” and how are the arts connected to society: mapping the relationships between the arts, politics and economy. Reading: Alexander chaps 2-3, Tanner “Introduction” (pp.1-26), Mirzoeff chaps. 2,3 and 5.
3. The Production of Culture: Art worlds, networks, prizes and competitions, art education, the migration of arts and artists. Reading: Alexander chaps. 5,6 and 7, Tanner, chaps. 5,6 and 7.
4. The Consumption and Circulation of Culture: audiences, consumers, buyers and viewers. Who goes to an art gallery or museum and what happens in those places? Cultural tourism. Reading: Alexander chaps. 10 and 11. Tanner chaps.12-15.
5. Artists in their Social Contexts: Visual arts, performers, film. How do they survive? What are their careers like. Fame, reputation and recognition. “Stars” and “Celebrities”. Reading: Alexander chap. 8, Tanner chaps. 8-11.
6. Art Movements as Social Movements: What is a “revolution” in art and how are such revolutions connected to social movements in the larger political and social world? What is “arts activism” and can the arts be effective vehicles for social change? Reading: Clammer Chap.7.
7. The Arts and Cultural Contact and Communication: Historical influences between the arts and their contemporary expression. Collaboration and collectives in art. Reading: Clammer chaps.8-10.
8. Public Art and New Media Arts: What happens when art escapes the gallery? Public sculpture, the mural and poster art. Video art, digital arts, popular culture, the comic, propaganda, architecture and design. Reading: Mirzoeff chaps. 25, 28, 29 and 33.
9. Symbolism and Representation: The Power of the Image. Colonialism, anti-colonialism, Orientalism. Reading: Mirzoeff chaps. 10, 13, 43 and 45. Clammer Chap. 10.
10. Gender, Class, Race and Art. Art production and social inequalities. Biases and stereotypes in art. The concept of “primitivism”. Art history and its biases. Female arts and minority artists and their systematic under-representation. Reading: Alexander chap. 12.

11. Ways of Seeing and Performing: changing tastes and styles in art. The impact of photography and mass reproduction. Reading: Alexander chap. 13.
12. Globalization and the arts: Hybridity and cultural appropriation and cross-cultural communication and influence. New networks of diffusion, art education and migration. "World Music". Reading: Alexander chap. 7, Clammer chap. 8.
13. The Arts and Development: Cultural industries, the preservation of cultural diversity. The arts and environment and sustainability. Reading: John Clammer *Art, Culture and International Development*.
14. Art and Social Theory: Connecting the arts to sociology, larger social theory and contemporary discourses of power, agency, change and alternatives.

In addition to the formal course requirements you are encouraged to look at works of art and attend whenever possible performances of film, theatre, dance, puppets, concerts etc. and to visit galleries and heritage sites, to read widely in creative literature and literature about the arts, and to practice a form of art that is congenial to you. One of the intentions of the course is to help you refine and deepen your own visual and expressive literacy, and it is a good idea to keep a notebook/diary/scrapbook of visual images, music notes, programs of performances etc. that you discover as we move through the course.

The usual rules pertaining to plagiarism or any unfair means, attendance and classroom decorum apply. Registration with the DSC is recommended if you have any special needs.