

Arts in Modern Society

Hunter College Spring 2015

Monday & Thursday 9:45-11

Hunter West 405

Professor Benjamin Haber

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office hours by appointment

Course Description

What is the value of art? Sociologists have primarily analyzed art as a cultural practice that can offer insights about the larger society. In this view art becomes a reflection of the material and/or symbolic conditions of our world, an artifact that gives clues to the functioning of a social structure. Many artists however, would bristle at the suggestion that their work is simply a reflection of society, and would question if sociologists have taken art objects, texts and performances seriously.

This course is broken into two sections. In the first we will consider the sociology of art in modern society. Looking at a broad variety of popular and fine art we will consider the engagement of the social sciences with creative production. This will be a largely theoretical discussion of various frameworks for understanding the power and function of art and culture in 20th and 21st centuries. The second half of the class will analyze the techniques and technologies of the arts to think critically about sociological production. How might we rethink authorship, interpretation and critique, especially in the context of emergent media technologies and disciplinary restructuring?

Learning Objectives

Successful completion of this course will give you:

- A critical understanding of various sociological theories of modern art and culture
- New tools for thinking creatively about sociological production

Grades

Class Attendance: 10% of grade

Participation/Discussion: 20%

Writing Assignments: 40%

Final Project and Presentation: 30%

Attendance: Will be taken everyday. You do not need to let me know if you are going to be absent, however more than 2 absences will affect your grade, excused or not. If you do miss class please ask another student, not me, for any notes, materials or assignments you have missed. *In addition to class outside visits to museums and performances are required for this class.* If you don't have time for these trips please reconsider taking this course.

Participation: This is a discussion heavy course so participation is crucial. Please come to class having read all the materials, prepared with notes and some comments and or questions for discussion. Once a semester you will be required to take a particularly active role by doing supplementary research on the topics/readings and helping me lead class discussion

Writing Assignments: You will be given a total of 5 writing assignments throughout the semester, each will be worth 8 points. You will write two reviews, two responses to the readings and an extended proposal for a final project.

Assignments turned in late will be given (at best) half credit. *Anything turned in more than one week late will not be accepted.*

Final Project and Presentation: You will have a variety of options for your final project—you may write a final paper, but you also have the option of incorporating a variety of textual, visual and performance media into this project. You will also be required to give a short creative, engaged presentation of your project at the end of this course. More details will be announced in class.

Course Policies

Plagiarism: Is a serious offense and *will cause you to fail the class*- don't do it. I will find out and it is embarrassing for both of us. All work from sources other than your brain must be properly cited. From the Hunter College Policy on Academic Integrity: "Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures."

Written work: Please properly cite all sources. I'm not a stickler for a specific type of citation style but it is absolutely essentially that I know when you are using other people's words or ideas and who wrote them, where they came from and when. This includes non-textual media as well—art works, pictures and film.

Accessibility and Disability: All students have different learning styles and classroom abilities and I strive to be accommodating to diverse needs and abilities. Please let me know as soon as possible if you have specific requirements or suggestions for me that will help you succeed in my class.

Email: Please always identify yourself in your emails. Before you write an email make sure that your question has not already been answered in this syllabus. If I have not responded to your email you can *not* assume that I have received it—give me a couple of days and then follow-up with another email or talk to me after class or during office hours.

Course Schedule

(Please note that this schedule may change and texts may be added throughout the semester)

Sociology of Art

Thursday 1/29: Introduction to and discussion of syllabus

Art in Modern Society

Monday 2/2: H. Becker "Art as Collective Action"

Th 2/5: P. Bourdieu "But Who Created the 'Creators'?" and selections from *Distinction*

M 2/9: R. Barthes *Mythologies*, selections

Th 2/12: NO CLASS

M 2/16: NO CLASS

Art, Capital and the Market

Wednesday 2/18: W. Benjamin "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," W. Alden [Art for Money's Sake](#)

Th 2/19: T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"

M 2/23: F. Jameson "Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"

Th 2/26: C. Harold "On Target"

Identity and Fashion

M 3/2: G. Simmel "Fashion" Watch: [Interpreting the Scrunchie](#)

Th 3/5: D. Hebdige *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, selections

Film, Television and Popular Culture

M 3/9: Film TBA

Th 3/12: M. McLuhan "The Medium is the Message"

M 3/16: L. Spigel "Installing the Television Set" & L. Ouellette "'Take Responsibility for Yourself' Judge Judy and the Neoliberal Citizen"

Th 3/19: J. Rodriguez "Color-Blind Ideology and the Cultural Appropriation of Hip-Hop" & this [Azealia Banks interview](#)

Art of Sociology

Authorship and Interpretation

M 3/23: J. Baldwin "Autobiographical Notes" and R. Barthes "Death of an Author"

Th 3/26: S. Sontag "On Photography"

Critique and the Academy

M 3/30: R. Ferguson “Administering Sexuality; or, The Will to Institutionality”

Th 4/2: B. Latour “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern”

4/3-4/11 SPRING BREAK

See: [New Museum Triennial](#), 235 Bowery, Opening February 25-Closing May 24

Read: M. H Miller “[The Kids Are All Right](#)” and R. Kennedy “[Where Virtual Equals Real](#)”

Explore: [Dis Magazine The Data Issue](#)

New Media and the Digital

M 4/13: D. Espenschied “[Big Data, Little Narration](#)” and L. Manovich “The Database”

Th 4/16: I. Bogost *How to Do Things with Videogames*, selections

M 4/20: B. Bratton and NJeremijenko “[Suspicious Images, Latent Interfaces](#)”

Performance Studies

Th 4/23: D. Conquergood “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research”

M 4/27: J. Munoz “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts”

Th 4/30: A. Levine “Being a thing: the work of performing in the museum” Explore:

[W.A.G.E](#)

Art and Social Change

M 5/4: Gallery Visit: [Left Coast: California Political Art](#) @ James Gallery 365 5th Ave.

N. Smith “Contours of a Spatialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the Production of Geographical Scale”

Th 5/7: D. Crimp “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism” and “Portraits of People with AIDS”

M 5/11: Presentations

Th 5/14: Presentations

Th 5/21: Presentations