

# Sociology 346: Sociology of Art

Grand Valley State University

Winter 2010, 2130 ASH, MWF 12:00-12:50

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**Course Description.** Building upon Max Weber's insight that "modern man tends to transform judgments of moral intent into judgments of taste ('in poor taste' rather than 'reprehensible')", this course explores the ways that public debates over art, aesthetics, and especially taste often mask more fundamental conflicts of culture, class, race, ethnicity, and gender. We will examine the creation and appreciation of art from a sociological perspective, examine controversies over the public funding of cultural projects in the 19th and 20th century United States, and explore the often fluid boundaries between the taste for "high" and "popular" culture. Part of the "Creativity" theme.

## Required Readings

The Guerilla Girls. 1998. *The Guerilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*. New York: Penguin.

Articles and Book Chapters on Reserve at Zumberge Library

**Objectives.** Describe the historical differentiation of aesthetic, magical, and religious social practices in modern western societies. Apply the sociological imagination to describe both the liberatory and repressive potential of aesthetic practice in modern societies. Apply sociological theories to explain links between significant artistic movements, social structures, and power relations. Describe and explain the role played by commemoration in modern and postmodern societies. Apply sociological concepts to the analysis of contemporary art and/or aesthetic practice.

**Expectations.** Expect to spend at least two hours working outside of class for every hour spent in class. For this course that means a minimum of six hours every week. Whether or not you actually do that is your choice; I will, however, grade your work as if you have.

**Reading Responses:** Short reaction papers on assigned reading due Monday of W2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15. Credit/ No Credit. 10% of your grade.

**If you miss class on a Monday** I will not accept your reaction paper for credit. Can you email it to me? **NO**. Can you have a classmate bring it for you? **NO**. Drop it at my office later? **NO**. **You may miss two submissions without penalty.**

**Paper:** 8-10 pages in length. Details TBA. 30% of your grade.

**In-class Essays:** There will be five. Details TBA. 20% of your grade.

**Midterm Exam:** Essay format. 15% of your grade. **Final Exam:** Comprehensive. Essay format. 25% of your grade.

**Attendance. Whatever.** Take responsibility for your own actions. **I'll take attendance** – maybe everyday, maybe not. **Miss two classes and your course grade drops 1/3. If you miss class** you are responsible for the material you missed. **If you miss class** do not, **under any circumstances**, ask me if we did anything important that day.

**Late assignments** are not accepted for credit. Ever. (If you have a legitimate reason for non-submission it's not late.)

**Exams and in-class essays** can be made up in the case of **VERIFIED** serious medical or family emergency only. Those in need of a make-up must **notify me in writing by the end of week fourteen**. Documentation verifying legitimate reason for missing must be attached (i.e. a doctor's note, towing receipt, police report, etc.). **Make-ups will take place immediately following the final exam.**

**A Missed Final Exam** cannot be made up. A situation grave enough to make you miss the final should qualify you for an incomplete according to University regulations. **I do not reschedule exams** or assignments for personal reasons. (This includes work, vacation, mission trips, etc.)

**No assignments for credit beyond** those listed above will be given.

**Disability Statement.** If you have a disability that will require special accommodation(s) in this course, please contact the Office of Disability Services. If you have already done so, you should have a letter that describes your specific needs and the necessary accommodations. Please bring that letter to my attention as soon as possible.

## Schedule

### Autonomous Art and the Critique of Society

What does it mean to say art is "autonomous?" How have social theorists answered this question? Is art autonomous?

W1 Emergent Distinctions Between Magic, Art, and Religion

Weber, Max. "The Tensions Between Ethical and Religious Art." from Chapter VI "Religious Groups", xiv "Religious Ethics and the World: Sexuality and Art" in *Economy and Society Vol. 1* Pp. 607-610. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (Reserve)

Weber, Max. "The Esthetic Sphere" from "Religious Rejections of the World" in *From Max Weber*. Ed. By H. Gerth and C.W. Mills. (Reserve)

W2 Art versus Social Structure

Witkin, Robert W. 1998. *Adorno on Music*. London: Routledge. (Chaps 1 and 2) (Reserve).

**FRIDAY In-Class Essay #1**

W3 The Sacred and The Profane

Durkheim, Emile, "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life." Reading Seven in *Readings From Emile Durkheim*. Ed. Kenneth Thompson. (Reserve)

Dubin, Stephen C. 1992. "Rally 'Round the Flag." Pp. 102-124 in *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions*. London: Routledge. (Reserve)

W4 Autonomous in Practice?

Marx, Karl. 1972 [1857-58]. Excerpt from "The Grundrisse" Pp. 244-246 in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. (Reserve)

Promey, Sally M. 2001. "Pictorial Ambivalence and American Protestantism." Pp. 189- 231 in *Crossroads: Art and Religion in American Life*.

Ed. by Alberta Arthers and Glenn Wallach. New York: New Press. (Reserve)

Harris, Neil. 2001. "Reluctant Alliance: American Art, American Religion." Pp. 1-30 in *Crossroads: Art and Religion in American Life*.

Ed. by Alberta Arthers and Glenn Wallach. New York: New Press. (Reserve)

**FRIDAY In-Class Essay #2**

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### Imagined Autonomy: Art and the Reproduction of Society

What are the consequences of art's real or imagined autonomy?

W5 Cultural Capital and Class Stratifications

DiMaggio, Paul. "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth Century Boston: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America." Chap 13 in Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies. Ed. By Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Reserve)

Halle, David. 1993. *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Intro. and Chaps 4 and 5 (Reserve).

FRIDAY In-Class Essay #3

W6 Confrontations and Negotiations of Meaning Around Public Art

Blake, Nelson Casey. 1993. "An Atmosphere of Effrontery." Chap. 9 in *The Power of Culture*. Ed. By Richard W. Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Reserve).

"Public Art on Campus: How to Interact With an Egghead" (Reserve).

W7 Capital, Convention, Melancholy, and Critical Realism

Battani, Marshall. 1999. "Organizational Fields, Cultural Fields, and Art Worlds: The Early Effort to Make Photographs and Make Photographers in the Nineteenth-Century United States." *Media, Culture, and Society Vol. 20 #5*. (Reserve).

Battani, Marshall. 2005. "In Praise of Bad Photographs: Photography's Decline Into Modernism." Pp. 150-164 in *Visual Worlds*. Ed. By John R. Hall, Blake Stimson and Lisa Tamiris Becker. London: Routledge. (Reserve).

FRIDAY MIDTERM EXAM

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### Communists, Fascists, Protesters, and Interventionists

What are the various ways that *people actively use art* to maintain the current social order or to create social change?

W8 Control Art, Control Society

Film: "Entartete Kunst"

Halle, David. 2001. "The Controversy Over the Show *Sensation* at the Brooklyn Museum, 1999-2000." Pp. 139 – 187 in *Crossroads: Art and Religion in American Life*. Ed. by Alberta Arthers and Glenn Wallach. New York: New Press. (Reserve)

FRIDAY In-Class Essay #4

W9 SPRING BREAK

W10 Critiquing the Art World

The Guerilla Girls. 1998. *The Guerilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*. New York: Penguin.

W11 Art and Social Movements

Adams, Jacqueline. 2001. "The Makings of Political Art." *Qualitative Sociology*. Vol. 24, #3: 311-348.

Adams, Jacqueline. 2002. "Art in Social Movements: Shantytown Women's Protest in Pinochet's Chile." *Qualitative Sociology*. Vol. 17, #1: 21-56.

W12 Interventionism

Film: "The Yes Men"

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### After Autonomy: Commemoration -- Social Change and Stability

What is the purpose of commemoration in a heterogeneous society or under conditions of meaningful uncertainty?

W13 Film: "Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision"

W14 Commemoration and Consensus

Wagner-Pacifi, Robin and Barry Schwartz. 1991. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past." *American Journal of Sociology* 97: 2. 376-420. (Reserve).

Friday In-Class Essay #5

W15 Collective Memory and Tragedy

Schwartz, Barry and Todd Bayma. 1999. "Commemoration and the Politics of Recognition." *ABS* 42 #6: 946-967. (Reserve).

Vinitzky-Seroussi, Vered. 2002. Commemorating a Difficult Past: Yitzhak Rabin's Memorials." *ASR* 67 #1: 30-51. (Reserve).

Friday Papers Due

FINAL EXAM Wednesday April 28<sup>th</sup> 2:00-3:50