Art Rules. Sociological approaches to the visual arts
- Syllabus -

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NB: if you are interested in a text but can’t find it online/at the library, tell me, I’ll send it to you.

SESSION 1 (Jan 22) : Introduction

Presentation of how this class will work, what I expect from you (assessment), etc.

What are the “visual arts”? How does sociology of art differ from the approach adopted by art history, aesthetics, critical theory, etc.?

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Part 1 : METHODS AND BASIC CONCEPTS

SESSION 2 (Jan 29) : Overview of the field

How have the social sciences approached the concepts of art and artist? What are the methods, concepts and tools available for art sociologists?
Required readings:


Questions:

1. What is the “Van Gogh effect”? What does this “effect” have an impact on? When and why has it appeared?
2. Name and describe the shifts caused by the revolution mentioned by Heinich in the text.


Questions:

1. What is “classified art”? What is “contemporary art”? What are the main differences between the market for classified art and the market for contemporary art?
2. According to Moulin, who is the key figure in the contemporary art market, and why? Do you agree with this statement?


Questions:

1. What is a guild? In your opinion, what are the differences between an art market controlled by a guild (as described in the text) and the art market today?
2. Seventeenth-century Netherlandish art market conditions dramatically changed, both on the “supply” side and on the “demand” side: describe those changes and their consequences.

Optional readings:


SESSION 3 (Feb 5) : Observing the arts

***Election of the Class Representative***

How is an ethnography of the arts possible? Symbolic interactionism and the art worlds. Art as a collective process.

**Required readings :**


Questions :

1. What is an “art world”? Give some examples (beside those given by Becker).
2. What are the “conventions” mentioned in the text? Give some examples (beside those given by Becker). Why are they necessary to the existence of any social world (the “art world” being one kind of social world)?
3. According to Becker, what should sociologists observe when they want to study art?


Questions :

1. How does this text illustrate the idea that artistic production is a collaborative process *per se*?
2. Judging from the experience described in the text, why are there any tensions between artists and technicians?

**Optional readings :**

Robert CLULEY, « *Art Words* and *Art Worlds*: The Methodological Importance of Language Use in
Howard S. Becker's Sociology of Art and Cultural Production », *Cultural Sociology*, 6, 2012, pp. 201-216


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**SESSION 4 (Feb 12) : Mapping the arts**

Methods and theories to contextualize the artistic production in time and in social space.

**Required readings :**


Questions:

1. In this text, “cultural need” is a manifestation of social prestige : can you explain that?

2. Why is the link between culture (or love of art) and education (or School) both “obvious and hidden”?  

3. Describe the social process through which, for Bourdieu, Art and Museums eventually justify social inequalities.


Questions :

1. Explain, in your own words, what a “field of art” is. Taking contemporary cinema as an example, give the name of a movie director who would be in the “large-scale production” area of today's field of cinema (and justify your choice) ; then, give the name of a movie director who would be in the “restricted production” area of the same field (and – again –
2. When, according to you, is a field of art “autonomous”? Can you give an example of one “heteronomous” (= not autonomous) field of artistic production, and explain your choice?


Questions : 

1. What is a disposition according to Bourdieu’s theory?
2. Why, when we look at the way he reached consecration in the art world, is it not surprising that Duchamp was born in a cultivated family of artists?
3. How can you explain Pollock’s rapid consecration?

Optional readings : 


Mike SAVAGE & Elizabeth B. SILVA, « Field Analysis in Cultural Sociology », *Cultural Sociology*, 7 2013, pp. 111-126

Elizabeth SILVA, « Cultural capital and visual art in the contemporary UK », *Cultural Trends*, 17:4, 2008, pp. 267-287

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**SESSION 5 (Feb 19) : Work session on the field research**

**Quiz #1 (written test)**

This session is dedicated to a collective discussion of the field research projects. Consequently, for this session, each student is expected to think about the subject s/he would like to study for
his/her fieldwork and the most suitable methods to use for that.

PART 2 : OBJECTS OF INQUIRY

SESSION 6 (March 5) : The artists – 1 : Art as a profession

What exactly is an artist for sociologists? Professionalization in the arts: learning how to deal with the risks and uncertainties. How can we count the artists and other creative workers?

Required readings:


Questions:

1. Describe precisely the methodological aspects of this study (method(s) used, type of sample, etc.)
2. What are the main results of this cross-cultural survey?
3. How can you relate these results, and the “Van Gogh Effect” that we have seen earlier?


Questions:

1. In a socio-economic point of view, according to Menger, artists can’t be considered as “rational actors”: explain why.
2. What are the main characteristics of the artistic labor market?
3. Why do artistic careers and jobs in creative industries tend to attract high-educated young people from privileged social areas?

Optional readings:

Elisabeth CAILLET, “Profession et organisation: le cas paradoxal des arts plastiques”, *Culture et Musées*, 2, 2003, pp. 53-76.

Tyler COWEN, “Why Women Succeed, and Fail, in the Arts”, *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 20, 1996, pp. 93-113


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**SESSION 7 (March 12) : The artists – 2 : Building an artistic reputation**

How do recognition and posterity work? Why are some artists inscribed in collective memory and others are not? Who is responsible for artistic reputation building?

**Required readings:**


[A few elements to understand this text : In *Etched in Memory*, K. and G. Lang make a very accurate study of the “posthumous career” (that is : the “building and survival of the reputation”) of a sample of nearly 300 American and British etchers (ca. 150 men and 150 women), who were active at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. The two sociologists try to answer the question : why are most of these artists forgotten today? How does artistic reputation “work”? In this chapter, K. and G. Lang try to answer these questions by focusing on the female etchers of their sample, who – more frequently than their male counterparts – seem to have “disappeared” from collective memory.]

**Questions :**

1. Following the hypotheses given in the text, name the possible causes to the important gender disparity in male and female etchers’ lifetime and posthumous reputation (see Table p.285) Which ones, according to the authors, are the most plausible?

2. Imagine you are a sociologist in charge of a research on artistic reputation. Describe the
method(s) you will choose to elaborate a sample of artists and measure their reputation. (Of course, there are many possible answers to this question...)


Questions:
1. Which method(s) did Zafirau use for this research?
2. Describe the job of talent representatives in the movie industry, using Becker’s theory of “art as a collective activity”. What interest is there for sociologists to study this category of agents in the art world?

Optional readings:

SESSION 8 (March 19) : Work session #2

**Quiz #2 (written test)**
Collective discussion of the advancement of students’ field researches.
SESSION 9 (March 26) : Tastemakers, gatekeepers and “support personnel”

The importance of intermediaries in the arts, with a special focus on the role of contemporary art galleries and Hollywood talent agencies.

Required readings :

Questions :
1. What are the impacts of organizational brokerage in Hollywood for the screenwriters studied by D. & W. Bielby?
2. Explain why the system of “Packaging” described in the text tends to create conflicts of interest between agents and their clients.
3. Why can we say that talent agents are both “gatekeepers” and “tastemakers”?


Questions :
1. Beside the fact that they don’t work in the same art worlds, is there any difference between the job of a talent representative (as described by Zafirau or D. & W. Bielby), and the job of an art dealer (as studied in this text)?
2. According to Velthuis, what are the two major anomalies in price setting on the contemporary art market? How can you explain them?

Optional readings:


SESSION 10 (Apr 2) : The public – 1. Measuring cultural consumption

The sociology of reception. What is the impact of class, gender or race in cultural socialization in contemporary western societies? Political aspects of taste and its social/historical evolutions. Cultural consumption as inscribed in global history.

Required readings:


Questions:

1. How did the deregulation of TV systems in the world directly benefit to The Cosby Show, according to Havens?

2. Audience measurement is the main indicator of success for TV shows, making of high audience ratings for a program, a sign of its quality. Can you figure out some of the consequences of this system on the production/creation of TV shows? (This question is not directly related to the text.)

Questions:

1. What are the 3 sociological lines of argument originating from the generally admitted statement “taste is socially determined”?

2. Describe the data used by the authors for their research. What other elements could they have used to complete their study?

3. Why aren’t there any “univores” for the visual arts? Similarly, what is the specificity of the visual arts (compared to music, cinema or literature)?

4. Why are the “omnivores” in visual arts a cultural elite, but not a social one?

Optional readings:

Gitte BALLING & Nanna KANN-CHRISTENSEN, « What is a non-user? An analysis of Danish surveys on cultural habits and participation », Cultural Trends, 22:2, 2013, pp. 67-76


Hervé GLEVAREC & Michel PINET « De la distinction à la diversité culturelle. Éclectismes qualitatifs, reconnaissance culturelle et jugement d'amateur », L'Année sociologique 3, 2013 (Prépublication), DOI : 10.3917/anso.pr1.0001.


SESSION 11 (Apr 9) : The public – 2. Museums, marketing and politics

How do people react to art? Is it possible to measure and analyze the perception of artistic productions? The question of cultural politics from the perspective of audience studies.

Required readings:


Questions :

1. Why is the study by Heath & Vom Lehn particularly original regarding traditional sociology of reception?
2. How could the results of this study be used by a museum for instance?
3. Describe the data and method used in the text by Caldwell.
4. Recent gradual withdrawals of government support have caused a major shift in the history of museal institutions : what is this shift and what is its main consequence?


Questions :

1. According to the text, what is the first incentive for State involvement in artistic matters?
2. Describe the main differences between France and the United States regarding national/federal support for art and culture.
3. Why did US administration choose to invest in the arts after World War II ? (some reasons are given in the text, but not all of them...)
Optional readings:


Laurie HANQUINET, « Mondrian as kitchen tiles? Artistic and cultural conceptions of art museum visitors in Belgium », Cultural Trends, 2013, DOI:10.1080/09548963.2013.757892


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Saturday April 12, 5:00 PM => Deadline for the fieldwork report !

The field research report must be sent to me by email ONLY.

Note that there will be no alternative date to submit the report : a penalty of – 2 points per day of delay will apply.

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No class on April 16
SESSION 12 (****Apr 23 ****) : What about the artworks?

Is it possible to study artworks sociologically?

Theme of the session to be chosen among 3 :

- Art, ideology and society in nineteenth-century France
- Visual politics : feminism in art in Europe & US
- TV series & production studies

During this session, I’ll give you back your reports + your grades for the semester.