Gonzaga University in Florence
Sociology of the Arts
(SOCI 295)
Spring Semester 2015
Pierluca Birindelli, Ph.D.

Credits: 3; Contact hrs/wk: 3
Prerequisite: None; Site Visit fee: None
Email: pierluca.birindelli@gmail.com
Office Hours: by appointment and/or after class
Meeting times: Wednesday 3:35 pm - 6:30 pm

Course Description
The aim of the course is to introduce the relationship between art, culture and society. The leading topics of discussion will be: the meaning of art from a sociological viewpoint; the possibility to define art; the tension between universally recognizable qualities of art and its institutionalization; the foundation, production and consumption of art; the relationship between art forms and social structures; the relation of art to myth, religion and ideology; the differentiation/homogenization of artistic tastes.

Course Objectives
Having clarified the shifting boundary between fine and popular arts, and pointed out the main conceptions and approaches to the study of art – also by making reference to classical sociologists (Carl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel) – the first part of the course is dedicate to the development of three main concepts: cultural objects, art objects and art worlds.
In the second part of the course we will address the relation between social structure, production and consumption of art, with the constant attempt to construct synthetic conceptual bridges between pre-modern (with particular attention to Renaissance), modern, and post-modern life-worlds.
Part of the course is dedicated to the theme of genius, creativity and socio-cultural milieu, with special reference to the Renaissance artist. The course will end pointing out some emerging features of the globalization of art and, through the phenomenon of élite/mass tourism, its relation with economy, politics and aesthetics.

Course Requirements and Learning Outcomes
Throughout this course students are expected to engage in active participation by contributing their thoughts, ideas and questions. Thus, it is crucial to study the required readings, be ready to share opinions on the topics discussed in class and hand in short papers following the guidelines.
Course requirements include a midterm exam and a final research paper.
The midterm exam consist in answering (essay form) to one mandatory question and then pick another among a list. Each question is worth 100 point, the final grade is given by the average. Usually each answer should be approximately 1 to 2 handwritten pages.
The final research paper (around 15 pages) is about one of the topics discussed during the course (or linked to them). Students should start thinking about a possible theme from the beginning of the course; the third week after the midterm a research proposal – title, short description, one source – has to be formulated. In the final work, students are expected to make reference to the interpretative concepts and methods of analysis acquired during the course and to their autobiographical experience, as well as finding (at least) one newspaper article and one scholar article about the chosen theme — for further information see the appendix at the end of the syllabus. At the end of this course, the successful student is expected to be able to: 1) actively engage him/herself with the topics brought to his/her attention (assessed in the participation); 2) understand the main theoretical perspectives and empirical findings discussed in class (assessed in the midterm exam); 3) interpret how the experience of art has affected his/her self-identity both home and abroad (assessed in the first part of the final research paper); 4) critically understand and apply concepts and methods learned during the course in the research project (assessed in the final paper).
Teaching Method
The course has a seminar format. Lectures will introduce the main topic, with the support of slides synthesizing concepts, paradigms, theories and examples extracted from the readings. Film screening and consequent discussion will take place in order to help students to familiarize with certain artistic features of Italian and European culture and society. Sometimes students will have to carry out in-class exercises (individually or in groups) and report on them. Then social and cultural experiences will be used to elaborate concepts raised throughout the course. A teaching method is efficient if the students prepare the right way. Students are also partially responsible for the success of the teaching method, as the pedagogical value of a method has to be enacted by each participant in the process.

Teaching Commitment
My primary goal is to foster students’ critical thinking and imagination. I believe that the best way to obtain this objective lies in the capacity to construct a dialogic environment, where is crystal clear that learning together, the best we can, is our mission (nothing more, nothing less). Students shall never censor themselves, but always express their opinions upon any theme — discussion about sensitive themes shall never be avoided in a social science class — keeping in mind that reading, studying and being curious is the only way to construct thoughtful interpretations. Students should also try to take the challenge of exploring unknown cultural territory, not expecting to receive the “perfect map” — you go from A to B and then to C and so on — in advance. I believe knowledge has little to do with the practice of reassuring ourselves each step we take; I prefer to wander a bit in the forest of cultural symbols and only afterwards find our way out. In our learning itinerary, students shall never be scared of making mistakes; mistakes, in the narrow sense of it, do not exist. These are the meta-objective of the course. On my behalf, the only thing I can guarantee 100% is intellectual honesty.

Grading
Attendance and participation: 30%; Mid-term exam: 30%; Final research project: 40%.

Attendance, academic honesty, decorum and other policies
It is required to observe Gonzaga University’s policy regarding absences and academic honesty. Students are expected to behave properly and to show self-respect as well as respect for others. Please be advised that laptops are allowed only to take notes during lectures. You may not use your computer to surf the Web or for any other personal purpose. Regarding the use of laptops, smartphones etc. in class, my opinion is expressed in the following post: Laptop in Class.
Documented learning disabilities or other medically certified problems that need special accommodation for any of the student’s expected academic performances will be treated with due attention.

Required Readings (changes and/or additions will be given as class handouts)
Recommended additional resources

Data and conceptual tools for the overall course and the research paper are available on my blog: Pierluca Birindelli. Examples of research paper are available here: Interpreting Cultural Experiences: Travel and Knowledge

Movies
Amadeus (Forman 1984)
Basquiat (Schnabel, 1996)
Bright Star (Campion 2009)
Modigliani (Davis 2004)
Nightwatching (Greenaway 2007)
Pollock (Harris 2000)
The Belly of an Architect (Greenaway 1987)
Wittgenstein (Jarman 1993)

Documentaries and videos
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: Flow, the secret to happiness
Turning the Art World Inside Out (Jack Cocker 2013)
Ways of Seeing (John Berger 1972)
Why Beauty Matters (Roger Scruton 2009)

Art exhibitions
Palazzo Strozzi and Strozzina
Course outline & schedule *(The order and content can be changed if necessary-useful)*

**Week 1: Jan. 14**

**Art and social theory: conceptions and approaches**
  - Metaphysical conceptions: Beauty, Imitation of Nature, Aesthetic experience
  - Sociological conceptions: Humanistic art history, Marxist social history of art
  - Cultural studies, Anthropological studies, Analytical Philosophy; Modernism and Postmodernism

**Exercise:** *My experience of art*

**Week 2: Jan. 21**

**Classic sociologists and art (Marx, Weber, Simmel, Durkheim)**

**Carl Marx: art and ideology**

**Max Weber: art and cultural rationalization**

**Georg Simmel: symmetry and social organization**

**Exercise:** *Pyramid*

**Emile Durkheim: symbolic objects, communicative interaction and social creativity**

**Week 3: Jan. 28**

**Cultural objects and the cultural diamond**

**Week 4: Feb. 4**

**The production of art: art worlds and type of artists**

**Week 5: Feb. 11**

**The creative personality and the socio-cultural context**
**Week 6: Feb. 18**

**The genius: canon, innovation and the social-historical context**


Movie: *Amadeus* (Miloš Forman 1984)

**Review**

**Week 7: Feb. 25**

**Mid-term exam**

**Week 8: Mar 4**

**The experience of art: ethnography and autoethnography**

*Site visit: Art Exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi*

**Spring Break Mar. 9-13**

**Week 9: Mar. 18**

**The consumption of art: symbolic and social boundaries**


*Deadline for the choice of the research paper topic*

**Week 10: Mar. 25**

**Aesthetic autonomy, taste and distinction**


**Week 11: Mar. 31 - Apr. 2**

**Evolution in the highbrow taste**


*Hand in of the index, introduction and first development of the research paper*

**Week 12: Apr. 1**

**Globalization of Art**


**Week 13: April 8**

**The experience of art: ethnography and autoethnography**

*Site visit: Art Exhibition at Strozzina*

**Week 14: April 15**

*Presentation of the draft of the research paper*

*Group work*

*Discussion*

**Week 15: April 22**

*Final paper presentation and paper hand in*
Appendix: Final research paper guidelines and format

Sociology of the Arts

Prof. Pierluca Birindelli

Your Picture

Your name and last name

A title for the overall work

Submission date

Name of the peer-reviewer
**Index**
- Premise
- Introduction
  1. Title of the first chapter
  2. Title of the second chapter
  …
- Conclusions (with a title)
- Bibliography

***

**Autobiographical Premise**
Report the and review — adding a brief comment about the confirmation/change of your point of view — the autobiographical account about your relationship with arts. The premise might seem detached from the rest of the papers. This is done on purpose, in order to recognize your personal conceptual framework.

**Introduction**
- Use the summary you already wrote and expand on it.
- Point out possible changes in the topic/subtopic and method — a very short story of the refinement of your theme and how you investigated it.
- Indicate why you think this is in general an interesting theme to explore. Also, explain how it is linked (directly or indirectly) to one of the topics of the course\(^1\) as well as the possible connections to your experience abroad (and/or past biography\(^2\)).
- Your thesis (claim, argument, interpretation, viewpoint) upon the topic.
- Concisely anticipate what you found and your interpretations.

**Body: theme(s), method, theories, concepts, findings**
In the body (development) of the paper, you shall use at least one concept (theory, point of view, etc.) that is present in our readings, slides or that we have discussed in class (or in our individual meetings/emails). You shall also use at least (minimum) one scholar article (or chapter in a scholarly book) and one newspaper article. A simple example (I repeat: example) of a structure for the use of scholars’ ideas, concepts, findings etc. is the following:

1)  
- Geertz says \(X\) and it is a useful (effective) concept to interpret this theme because…
- Weber says \(X\); Bauman says \(Y\).
  - They both point in the same interpretative direction with different approaches / focusing differently the theme…
  - Weber’s ideas help more than Bauman to…

2)  
I believe I found this: your argumentation about the theme — supported by your interpretations, findings (in your personal experience abroad / fieldwork / analysis of other sources).

**Conclusions:** concluding point(s) about the theme you have researched.

---

\(^1\) Take again a look to: the description of the course; the outline of the course content; the readings; the slides; the notes you took about class discussions.

\(^2\) For students who are writing a research paper with a biographical cut: try to point out possible links between themes you are exploring and your generation, or at least a group of young people (transcend and sociologically imagine yourself). Ex. “At the end of the semester I am a bit homesick because… I believe that all my peers are homesick too… I believe my generations compare to previous (parents, grandparents)”…
Bibliography (examples). APA or MLA… The important thing is that you let the reader know Who wrote What, When, Where (not for articles).

Books
– Last name of the author(s), initial of the first name (year) Title of the book. City: Publisher.
Ex.

Articles
– Last name of the author(s), initial of the first name (year) Title of the article, “Name of the Journal”, Number of the Journal: number of the pages.
Ex.

Format
– Use this format
– Submit the paper respecting the deadline.
– 5/10 pages double space (cover, index and bibliography excluded)
– Use a Times New Roman 12 (or similar).
– If you are using figures or tables, put the number and the description (Fig.1. Description; Tab.1. Description).

General suggestions
Sources
Search for sources using my blog and you library account. Besides database as “Academic search complete”, “JStor”, “Google Scholar”, another simple and effective way to move — whenever you are not sure if you are using a term in a correct way, or you want to check further meanings — is to search the “Oxford Reference Online Premium”. Among many, you can search the Dictionaries of: Sociology, Social Sciences, Companion of the Mind, Critical Theory, Companion to Philosophy etc.

Form
When you think you have finished your paper, take a one/half-day break. Afterwards, reread your essay and make all the changes and/or additions. Then go through a final review of the form (spelling and syntax) — printing out the paper normally allows you to see mistakes that you were not able to spot on your laptop screen. Hand over the paper to your peer, giving him/her enough time to read it. Go through all his/her observations and comments — preferably in a face-to-face meeting.
For more information, a useful online source is the Purdue Online Writing Lab.

Getting to the point: pay attention both to the content and the form; that is: do a good and neat job.

***

8
Suggested Readings