Sociological consideration of the arts has a long history. It extends back to the works of such classic writers as Max Weber and W.E.B. Du Bois and has burgeoned greatly in recent times. In studying realms of artistic creativity, scholars have connected those realms to key concerns in sociological theory – such as commodification, inequality, legitimation, and racialized hierarchies – while also drawing recently upon a host of cutting-edge methodologies related to multiple correspondence analysis, social network analysis, topic modeling, and so forth. Put another way, this graduate seminar on a specialized topic also ties directly to the core of sociology.

We will seek a purchase on this sociological work by discussing classic works in class and by reading contemporary works addressing themes that currently enliven the sociology of the arts. We will explore such topics as artistic careers, fields of artistic production, aesthetic boundaries, the audiences for artistic works, and the import and impact of critics. Besides providing students with grounding in the sociology of the arts, this seminar will also prepare them for doing their own research in this area of scholarship, as well as in sociology more broadly. In particular, we will give special attention to methods and designs employed in current research. Thus, by the end of the semester, all will have a grasp of the field and an understanding of how to conduct their own research.

COURSE READINGS

We will draw upon four books and upon a host of articles / chapters posted on the Canvas site. I will provide each student with their own copies of the four books, which are as follows:


COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course is organized as a seminar, which entails the combination of a fair amount of reading, class discussion, and a final paper. Given this organization, you are expected to attend each class and to participate.

A) Attendance

If you must miss a class, please inform me ahead of time so that we can make the necessary arrangements. Note that unexcused absences will negatively affect your final grade.

B) Class Participation and Discussion

Active participation requires adequate preparation. You should read the assigned material before class and develop your own assessment of this material. Such careful preparation will improve the quality of class discussion. Of course, class discussion should be both informed and respectful; moreover, it should be a forum wherein all can raise questions, explore ideas, and express misgivings. Most of all, this discussion should be fun. Class participation comprises 75% of your final grade.

C) Electronic Device Policy

Electronic devices, such as laptops and tablets, can be very useful in terms of taking notes. However, when students use them in class to do other things (e.g., surf the Internet, order from online stores, check social media posts) that proves detrimental both to student participation and discussion. Note that using devices in a non-curricular way, most definitely, will affect your final grade in a negative fashion.

D) Final Paper

The following is the default for that the final paper will take: You will answer a set of questions over the span of a week after the last class meeting. These questions will be in the format of our
program’s preliminary examination. As a result, this assignment will allow you to synthesize what you have learned throughout the semester, as well as offer “practice” for prelim-type exams. This assignment comprises 25% of your final grade. If you prefer that the final paper take another form, I am happy to discuss that option with you.

E) Final Grade

My starting assumption is that you will earn an “A” in this seminar. If you do the work and contribute to the class, then all is fine. If you fall below expectations, I will let you know, so that you can adjust accordingly. Of course, if you are having difficulties, please contact me.

COURSE RESOURCES

Throughout the semester, course readings and explanatory slides will be posted on the Canvas site for SOC 561 (see http://canvas.emory.edu). I encourage you to make much use of that site.

If you have any special needs, please contact me at the beginning of the semester, and we will discuss the necessary arrangements (for additional information, visit Emory Department of Accessibility Services’ website; see http://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/access/index.html).

NOTES ABOUT THE COURSE READINGS

One way that people identify what constitutes “the arts” is by defining them as not being popular culture—that content which is mere entertainment and distributed for profit. According to that approach, then, the arts are high culture that edify (rather than entertain) and are pursued for art’s sake (rather than for fun or money). In everyday life, the line between high culture and popular culture is often blurred. To give but one example, there are creators who claim the mantle and sensibilities of “artist” while nonetheless working for for-profit corporations. Rather than avoid that blurriness, we will often discuss it in class, and our readings often will address it as well.

In everyday life, not only is the definition of “the arts” blurry, the enactment of the arts is also complicated. At any point in time or place, the arts involve the simultaneous confluence of aesthetics, audiences, content, creators, networks, and various “social boundaries” (e.g., those raised by racism or sexism). The articles and chapters that I have selected for our readings allow us “analytically” to separate those elements for pedagogical and substantive reasons. The books that we will read in full, meanwhile, are places where we see how such elements fit together—how they make for that complicated confluence that occurs in everyday life.

The readings listed below will exhaust neither all there is to know about the arts nor all the various approaches and theories that scholars apply to the arts. However, I do think that they provide a helpful entrée and grounding for students. That being said, I am also a fan of many works and approaches not assigned below, and I am happy to point students towards those as well.
Finally, I have assigned several of my own articles, not because I necessarily think that they are canonical readings, but because they allow us to delve into the research, theorizing, and writing processes that preceded their eventual publication.

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**COURSE SCHEDULE**

*(Subject to Revision)*

**August 30:**  
**Introductions**

**September 6:**  
**Be(com)ing an Artistic Career**


**September 13:**  
**Navigating Creative Careers: Artistry and Its Challenges**


September 20:    Artists, Aesthetics, and Evaluation in Action


September 27:    Aesthetic Classification: Canons and “High Culture”


October 4:    Arts Organizations: Arbiters, Nodes and Context


October 11: FALL BREAK (No Class)

October 18: Arts Organizations: Patronage and the Marketplace


October 25: Arts Audiences: The Complexities of Class and More


November 1: Intermediaries and Arts Audiences


**November 8: Criticism and Influence in the Digital Age**


**November 15: The Arts, Audiences, and Place**


**November 22: THANKSGIVING BREAK (No Class)**

**November 29: The Arts, Aesthetics, and Globalization**


**December 6:**


**December 6:** Questions Posted for Paper

**December 13:** Final Paper Due