

Cultural Production and Institutions

Soc 3202

TuTh 11:00 – 12:15

Furman 226

Professor: Richard Lloyd

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Required Texts:

Baxandall, Michael. 1988. *Painting and Experience in 15th Century Italy*. Oxford University Press.

Mears, Ashley. 2011. *Pricing Beauty*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Stuart, Forrest. 2020. *Ballad of the Bullet*. New York: Princeton.

Course Description:

The 21st century thus far is an era of massive cultural disruption and dynamism, catalyzed by factors like globalization, social diversity, new media technology, and a largely unfettered marketplace. The products of 20th century mass culture – film, television, recorded music – continue to accumulate, presenting the consumer with a bewildering array of products from which to select, all accessible with unprecedented ease. Vying with these (as well as with venerable artforms like literature and painting) are new cultural products, from immersive video games to TikTok videos to things I haven't heard of yet. In this process, once powerful gatekeepers are displaced, with the economies sustaining cultural production destabilized. The definition of art and artists, and their role in society, is now fiercely contested, on not only aesthetic but also moral and political grounds.

In this course, we will develop a sociological approach to the production of culture, in both historical and contemporary contexts. This involves learning general principles designed to guide our inquiry, which are then elaborated via application to a range of empirical examples. Topics include the social context of the Italian renaissance; the production of popular music and motion pictures; the career paths of high fashion models; publishing and literary fiction; and the DIY efforts of Instagram influencers and Chicago drill rappers.

Class meetings will be a mix of lecture and discussion, with an emphasis on the latter. Students are expected to keep up with the material and prepared to share their insights in respectful discussion and debate. There will formal and informal opportunities for collaborative and team competitions. In addition

to the examples given by the readings, students are expected to produce ideas of their own, via themes, group projects, and a final paper.

Requirements

Attendance/Participation:

There is a cumulative dimension to the course readings, so that ideas we encounter early will continue to be relevant as we move along, and subsequent material will both amplify our earlier work and add new arrows to our conceptual quiver. We will also follow the syllabus precisely, and everyone is expected to have done the assigned reading for the week by our class on Monday. The more accountable individual students are to this expectation, the more rewarding and productive class meetings will be. This is not a class where anyone can just hide out.

Attendance Participation is worth 130 pts.

Themes

A total of eight short (two to three page) writing assignments assigned to specific weeks and topics over the course of the term. The instructions for each theme are in the associated Brightspace portal. Each theme must be turned in to Brightspace by 11:59 pm on the Friday of the week in which it is assigned. After that the portal will close, and no further submissions will be accepted.

Themes serve a variety of purposes, but the most important element is the opportunity to think *creatively* about course concepts. They are *not* tests. Ideally, students will get full credit for this assignment.

Themes are worth 15 points each (Bonus Round).

Group Project One: The Pitch

Groups must come up with an idea for movie, loosely based on some aspect of the course material covered in the first five weeks, and develop it. This involves coming up with a title and a logline; identifying its genre and themes; writing a treatment (five-page synopsis); sketching out the main characters; and identifying “comps.” Visual accompaniments are also encouraged. A packet containing those materials is due on February 19. The next week, groups will have the opportunity to pitch their idea to three Hollywood executives, who will select the best one to produce as a major motion picture.

As we will see early in the course, works of art involve collaboration. In addition to the collective submission, each student should write a two-to-three-page description of the groups collaborative process, including identifying specific strengths and contributions each student brought to the table.

Group Project Two: Building Your Brand

In the 21st century, digital media platforms have massively disrupted the means of cultural production, distribution and monetization. In some cases, this has created new cultural careers, like influencer, podcaster, gamer, blogger, vlogger and so on. In more established mediums, it provides opportunities to

circumvent traditional gatekeepers, but also creates new demands when it comes to building, and sustaining, an audience. In this project, groups develop a strategy for online brand building. What are you trying to sell? What niche in the attention economy does it occupy? How are specific social media platforms deployed in this project? How is this ultimately monetized?

A written summary of the group's strategic plan is due on April 16. In the following week, groups will have the opportunity to present their work before a panel of media promotion professionals who will give feedback and select the top entry.

Group Projects are worth 150 points each.

Exams:

There will be one midterm and a final exam. Exams are in class and based entirely on the assigned material.

Exams are worth 100 pts. each

Final Paper:

A research paper is due on Monday, April 17. The paper involves performing a sociological analysis of an original topic relating to cultural production. A successful final paper will combine one or more central themes from the course with original research. The paper should be between ten and fifteen pages in length, and include citations and a bibliography.

The Final Paper is worth 300 points.

Grading Breakdown

Attendance/Participation: 130

Themes: (15 pts each): 120

Exams (100 pts each): 200

Group Projects (150 pts each): 300

Final Paper: 250

925-1000: A

900-924: A-

880-899: B+

820-879: B

800-819: B-

780-800: C+

720-779: C

700-719: C-

600-699: D

Schedule:

Aug 24: Introduction

Discussion: What's the hook? Four Truths and a Lie.

Aug 29-31: Sociology of Art

Reading: Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* Ch. 1

Theme One due Sept 3: Four Conventions and a Lie

Sept 5: Collaboration and Conventions in Pop Music

Reading: John Seabrook, "What Kind of Genius is Max Martin?"

Sept. 7: The Film Industry

Readings: Suzy Woltman, "How to Pitch a Movie"; Michael Schulman, "How the Marvel Cinematic Universe Swallowed Hollywood"; "How to Write a Logline"

Theme Two due Sept 10: Loglines

Sept. 12: *The Devil Wears Prada*: Theme, Character, Structure

Readings: Screenplay Packet

Sept. 14: Three-Act Structure and Other Film Conventions

Theme Three due Sept. 17: Film Conventions

Sept 19: The Social World of the Italian Renaissance

Reading: Michael Baxandall, "Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy" p. 1-109

Sept. 21: The Period Eye

Sept. 26: The Hand of the Master

Movie Night: *The Lost Leonardo*

Sept 28: Auteur Theory

Martin Scorsese, "I Said That Marvel Movies Aren't Cinema: Let Me Explain"

Theme Four due Oct. 1: Ways of Seeing

Oct 3: Auteur Issues

Kelefa Sanneh, "The Rap on Rockism"; Saul Austerlitz, "The Pernicious Rise of Poptimism"; Wesley Morris, "The Morality Wars"

Oct: 5: Don't Get Me Started on Artists!

Claire Dederer, "What Do We Do with the Art of Monstrous Men?"

Group Project Write-Up: Due Oct. 8

Oct 10: Run through

Oct. 12: Pitch Day

Theme Five: Collaboration Report

Oct. 17: Midterm Exam

Oct. 24-26: The Aspiration Economy

Mears, *Pricing Beauty* Ch. 1-2; Childress, “Authorial Careers”; Barrett Swanson, “The Anxiety of Influencers”; John Seabrook, “So You Want to be a TikTok Star”

Oct. 31-Nov 2: Digital Infamy

Forrest Stuart, *Ballad of the Bullet* Intro, Ch. 1-4

Theme Six due Nov. 5: Becoming an Influencer: Niche, Channel, Brand

Nov. 7-9: Race, Violence and Authenticity

Stuart, Ch. 5-6

Theme Seven due Nov. 12: Final Paper Proposal

Nov. 14-16: Bodily Capital

Michael Rosenberg, “USC’s Dying Linebackers”; Rebecca Jennings, “The Sexfluencers”; Mears, Ch. 3

Group Project Write-Up: Due Nov. 26

Nov. 28: The Run-Through

Nov. 30: The Pitch

Theme Eight due Dec. 2: Final Paper Proposal Revision

Dec. 5-7: Gatekeepers

Childress, “Decision Making”; Mears, Ch. 4; Hannah Giorgis, “Not Enough has Changed Since *Sanford and Son*”

Final Paper Due: Friday Dec. 8

Final Exam: Friday December 15 3:00

Final Exam Alternate: Monday December 11 12:00 PM