SOC6518H: The Production of Culture in Creative Industries

Clayton Childress
CCChildress@gmail.com

Fri: [TBD]
Office Fri [TBD]

Course Description

Who thought spending $350,000,000 on John Carter was a good idea? Why is it so hard to figure out how much something costs in an art gallery? How do critics reach consensus? What do the different topics in 19th Century British and American novels tell us about the differences between these two societies? Is fame a mark of talent? Does conglomeration decrease product variety? When was the precise moment when quality gave way to market considerations? These are all questions we’ll be answering in this course (although two of them are admittedly trick questions).

It goes without saying that mediated cultural objects such as art, fashion, novels, and music are both produced and consumed. This course, drawing on the sociology of culture, economic sociology, organizational sociology, and business and management focuses on the production and distribution of culture within fields, industries, and organizations. As we’ll be covering a range of linked subfields and perspectives and our semester is short, we’ll be starting somewhat recently in the 1970s with the emergence of what can be loosely defined as “The Production of Culture” (PofC) approach, and focusing on how the perspective has matured, cross-pollinated, and evolved, albeit sometimes under different flags and names.¹ This means we’ll be missing some history and some perspectives from Ye Olde Sociology that have fallen out of favor or aren’t as widely used anymore. On the first day I’ll be providing some background on these alternate perspectives and how we got to where we are. Don’t worry; we won’t just be genuflecting to what we’re reading. Should you choose to work in this area, you will of course be getting jobs by building on the things we’ll learn in this course, or, dare I say, maybe even occasionally trying to tear them down.

Course Goals:

¹ See “The Production of Culture” or “Sociology of Culture” in North American sociology, “Creative Industries” in Business, Management, and Economics, “Cultural Industries” in European Sociology, and “Media Industries” in Media Studies and the like. As always, there are stakes and allegiances signaled with the usage of these terms, but for this course we’ll maintain terminological agnosticism while applying definitional skepticism.
• Students will leave the course with an understanding of the current issues and debates in the study of culture producing industries, as well as with an understanding of the recent historical antecedents to these issues and debates. Put another way, students will have a frame of reference for what people are talking about—and why they’re talking about what they’re talking about—when going to professional conferences and the like.
• Students will leave more equipped to take the Culture Area Exam.
• Students who seek to contribute to this area will have a storehouse of knowledge and citations to draw upon in order to maximize their contribution to the (perhaps dreaded) “conversation.”
• As this is a graduate-level course, the “hidden curriculum” of the course is to professionalize you (e.g. to get you ready for presenting at conferences, submitting articles for peer-review, and perhaps even going on the job market). As this is a topical seminar these things will never be our primary areas of foci, but we’ll be engaging them in many small and non-obtrusive ways.

Course Structure:
This is a weekly discussion-based seminar course. Each day will begin by thematically orienting the discussion topics everyone has brought in (see below), which will be followed by the scheduled presenter providing a brief summary of the readings and asking some of his/her own initial questions to get our conversation started. I’ll provide mini-lectures to give the requisite background when needed, but will mostly be working to keep our conversation on topic and productive. I’ll be asking you for your feedback on how things are going in the 6th week of the course, and we’ll adjust as we go.

Scholarly Attitude:
Usually called “participation”, the adoption of a “scholarly attitude” is worth 10% of your final grade. Students with a scholarly attitude take the student role seriously and demonstrate their commitment to academic pursuits by actively engaging in the material, reflecting deeply on the readings, raising thoughtful questions and comments in class, and generally going above and beyond the requirements of the course. Students who lack a scholarly attitude passively complete the readings and responses, occasionally engage in other activities in class (playing with phones, texting, daydreaming, and so on), and are primarily concerned with doing the minimum required in the course, obtaining a particular grade in the course, and cutting corners in an effort to appear more prepared than they really are. Graduate students who adopt a scholarly attitude are practicing their identity as they look forward to their future careers. Graduate students who do not adopt a scholarly attitude are still looking backward to the past and need to leave undergraduate expectations behind.

Additional Metrics of Evaluation:
• Each week you will bring two discussion topics pertaining to each assigned reading. Your discussion topics should make it clear that you’ve completed the reading and understand the questions and issues at hand (10% of final grade)
• We will be rotating presentation of the day’s topic. In your rotation you will be responsible for giving a ten minute summary, and posing initial questions and discussion topics. (10% of final grade)
• You are responsible for submitting reading responses at the beginning of five of the twelve class meetings. These should be 500-750 words, or two to three typed, double spaced pages.
You might want to match some of these up with your rotation in presenting the day’s topics. (15% of final grade)

- In Week 6 you will be submitting a one-page final paper proposal/outline. I will supply you with a sample proposal/outline in advance. (5% of final grade)
- In Week 12 we will be holding a mini-conference for our final class in which you will be giving a 15 minute, conference-style presentation on your term paper. Don’t worry, if you don’t know how to do this, I’ll show you. (15% of final grade)
- Your final paper, of about 15 pages, is due one week after the last class. I’ll provide guidelines. (35% of final grade)

Plagiarism and & Late Policies:
Late work will be graded down by the equivalent of one letter grade for each 24 hour period of lateness. You are better off handing in nothing than handing in something that is plagiarized. See policies here: http://goo.gl/1sJEzy and avoidance practices here: http://goo.gl/Ak47k

Course Outline
(Note: see Appendix for suggested/optional/or-your-records readings for each topical area)

Week 1:
Meetings and Greetings,
Plus the Older Ways to Study Cultural Production
(Translation: watch your professor be massively unfair to exceptionally bright historical figures)

Week 2:
Starting at Our Beginning


Week 3
Work in Culture Producing Industries


Week 4
Decision Making, and Debating Art & Commerce


**Week 5**

**Field Theory**


**Week 6**

**Concentration and Diversity**

(paper proposal/outline due)


**Week 7**

**Classification: Categories, Genres, and Types**


**Week 8**

**Critics and Prizes**

**Week 9**

**Status, Prestige, and Inequality**


Change this to Mears and Godart.


---

**Week 10**

**Networks, Teams, and Collaboration**


---

**Week 11**

**Values, Valuation, and Pricing**


**Velthuis**, O. (2003). Symbolic meanings of prices: Constructing the value of contemporary art in


---

**Week 12:**
**In-Class Mini-Conference**

---

**Appendix:** So you want to know more? You’re in the right place.

**Week 2:** Starting at Our Beginning  Additional Resources


**Week 3: Work in Culture Producing Industries Additional Resources**


van Dijk, N. (1999). Neither the top nor the literary fringe: The careers and reputations of middle group authors. Poetics, 26(5), 405-421.


**Week 4: Decision Making, and Debating Art & Commerce Additional Resources**


**Week 5: Field Theory Additional Resources**


**Week 6: Concentration and Diversity Additional Resources**


**Week 7: Classification: Categories, Genres, and Types**

**Additional Resources**


**Week 8: Critics and Prizes**
**Additional Resources**


Week 9: Status, Prestige, and Inequality

Additional Resources


**Week 10: Networks, Teams, and Collaboration Additional Resources**


---

**Week 11: Values, Valuation, and Pricing Additional Resources**


Foster, Pacey, Stephen P. Borgatti, and Candace Jones. 2011. “Gatekeeper search and selection..."


