
SOC 461: SOCIOLOGY OF ART

DR. RICHARD WESTERMAN

Fall 2015; Tues & Thurs, 3.30 – 4.50pm; Tory 1-83

Office Hours: Weds 12.00 – 2.00pm; Tory 6-22

Email: rwesterm@ualberta.ca

CONTENTS

Course Outline	2
Course Requirements.....	2
Course Objectives	2
Class Format.....	3
Reading Material	3
Grades & Assignments	3
Additional Instruction.....	3
Further Courses	4
General Course Policies.....	4
Waiving Penalties.....	5
Dealing with Problems	5
Reading Schedule	6
Writing Assignments	9
Mandatory Legalese	13

COURSE OUTLINE

What is Art? Can social theory explain the difference between ‘high art’ and popular culture? Is there any connection between aesthetics and the structure of society? Can art make a difference in spurring social change? This course will examine the relation between art and society through analysis and debate on a range of philosophical and theoretical texts, and the application of their ideas to examples of works of art. We will focus on the so-called ‘fine arts,’ looking at their formal and aesthetic qualities, and trying to relate them to underlying experiences of society; we will learn to discuss works and styles of art in terms of their social context. We will be concentrating on work in the German traditions of critical theory, including writers such as Kant, Hegel, Lukács, and Adorno, and will be examining their concepts and arguments directly, without empirical study. If your interests lie in empirical sociology, in studies of the mass media and pop culture, or in French theorists such as Derrida or Baudrillard, you may prefer a different course; if you are interested in rigorous philosophical exploration of art and aesthetics, this course is more likely to interest you.

Course Requirements

Thanks to the festival of stupidity that is the university’s set of regulations, the **only official requirement** for this course at present is **Soc 100, ‘Introductory Sociology.’** However, this is of no use whatsoever in preparing you for this course; I am therefore happy to waive it if you can demonstrate background knowledge in relevant areas. However, as a 400-level class, ‘Sociology of Art’ assumes a high degree of competence in dealing with theoretical and philosophical issues. Therefore, **if you have not already taken Soc 212 and a 300-level Social Theory course, you are very strongly advised to take those courses first.** These earlier courses are meant to prepare you to deal with the sort of questions discussed herein; many of the thinkers we encounter deal directly with the ideas explored in those classes. Alternatively, lower level courses in **History of Art, Philosophy of Art, or literary theory** will also prepare you well for the material we meet. Above all, the course requires a willingness to work independently and think creatively about philosophical problems. If you do not like working hard to understand difficult ideas, I cordially invite you to select a different course.

Course Objectives

The overall goal of the course is to give you some of the foundational language and concepts required to talk intelligently about the relation between art and society. The syllabus assumes you have experience in reading theoretical texts from lower-level classes; this course draws on the basic skills of comprehension and analysis learnt in earlier classes to meet the following objectives:

1. Substantive Knowledge & Critical Debates:

We will examine a number of the most important theoretical perspectives on art, learning how social theorists and philosophers of society have interpreted the aesthetic qualities of works of art as a lens on society, and how they understand the role art might play in stimulating social change. Grounding our account in the philosophy of art developed by philosophers such as Kant and Hegel, we will examine debates chiefly in the German Marxist tradition of the Frankfurt School and related philosophical paradigms.

2. Theoretical Skills:

Many different disciplines explore the general topic of Art from their own perspectives. By comparing sociological approaches to art with the philosophy and the history of art, we will learn to think and argue across disciplinary boundaries. We will practice the application of theories in explanation: you will be expected to use the theories we study to interpret and explain particular works of art, showing how they are related to a broader social context.

3. Discourse:

In considering the role of art, we will move from theoretical accounts to a broader philosophy of society that allows us to develop normative ideas on the basis of a descriptive understanding of society. We will, therefore, practice making informed, intelligent, well-founded judgements, grounded on scrupulous consideration of a range of theoretical perspectives. You will develop the intellectual flexibility that comes from adopting a number of different standpoints, and will be rewarded for thinking creatively and originally. Despite dull-witted neoliberal platitudes about university as job market training, this is the real purpose of education.

Class Format

We will read a range of theoretical, philosophical, literary, and politically-engaged texts on the relation between art and society, and discuss them in class by trying to relate them to specific works of art, art movements, or artistic institutions. Therefore, classes will be **discussion-based seminars**, focusing on **texts to be read in advance of class**. Usually (but not always), I will introduce the debate with a short lecture giving an overview of the ideas to be discussed; we will then break in to small groups for further debate. **Class participation is a substantial component of your grade; attendance is mandatory**, and you will be penalized if it is clear from your contributions to discussion that you have not done the readings in advance. **If you miss six classes without good excuse, you will fail the entire course.**

Reading Material

The course will be centred on **readings from primary texts**, i.e. extracts from the writings of philosophers and theorists who have tackled the question of art, not a textbook about such theories. The selected **texts are often highly philosophical** in nature. We will not be looking at much empirical research; if you are more empirically-oriented, you may find this is not the course for you. You must read the texts in advance and come to class prepared to discuss them; although you may not understand them completely before class, you should at least be able to ask intelligent questions about them. If you are looking for supplementary reading to help you with the texts, I recommend, but do not require, two books. You can find a lot of good background information in *The Sociology of Art: A Reader* edited by **Jeremy Tanner** (Routledge, 2003; ISBN 978-0415308830). You may also be interested in *Art and Social Theory* by **Austin Harrington** (Polity Press, 2004), which gives an excellent overview of more theoretical and philosophical approaches to art.

Grades & Assignments

First, **attendance in class is mandatory**. If you **miss six or more** sessions without officially-documented excuses, **you will automatically fail the entire course**. If you miss a class, you have 48 hours to get in touch with me with an explanation. If you do not, and/or if you fail to provide the appropriate documentation subsequently, you will be counted as absent. I will take register every class, but it is your responsibility to contact me with explanations of your absence; I will not chase you in search of an explanation. This course relies on discussion and debate; if you miss class, you are missing its most important part. **If you feel yourself to be unlikely to attend class, therefore, you may wish to consider other course options.**

Apart from that caveat, your grade will be calculated from a number of tasks; for full details of these tasks, see below under ‘Assignments’ (where you can also find questions & topics). Note that you must complete *all* assignments; if you miss an assignment, you will fail the course overall. You will be given a letter grade for each assignment, which will be converted to a number score on the standard university scale, and then weighted as follows. (I will provide a skeleton of the Excel worksheet used to calculate the grade on eClass.)

- 1. 20% In-class participation:** general contribution to discussion, and demonstrated knowledge of texts set for class. May include short unannounced pop quizzes testing knowledge of texts.
- 2. 10% each for Assignments 1 & 3:** shorter (4-5 page) papers setting out a problem and framing it in terms of readings from 1st Sept-17th Sept and 15th Oct to 5th Nov respectively.
- 3. 30% each for Assignments 2 & 4:** longer (8-10 page) papers that incorporate work from Assignments 1 & 3, revising it in the light of feedback and answering the question you set up in the preceding paper with reference to readings from 24th Sept-13th Oct and 17th Nov-3rd Dec respectively.

Additional Instruction

Whether you’re having difficulty understanding a concept, figuring out what’s required for an assignment, or just want general advice, I’m here to help. My regular **office hours** are **Wednesdays 12.00 till 2.00pm**: you can drop by **my office (Tory 6-22)** without appointment to see me at those times. You can also **email with questions**. I may not be able to respond to emails immediately; therefore, if you have questions regarding your papers, you should email at least **48 hours before the deadline** to be sure of a response in time to be useful. If your question is longer and more complex, it is easier for me to give you the exact help you need if you ask in person, rather than over email. Please note that **I do not normally answer emails over the weekend**, because (implausible though it may seem) even professors must have a life.

Further Courses

If you are interested in the ways sociologists and other social scientists and humanists try to understand and interpret art and culture, you might like to look at the following courses:

- **Soc 344:** *Media, Culture, & Society*
- **Soc 346:** *Media and the Production of Culture*
- **Soc 444:** *Critical Media Studies*
- **Phil 280:** *Philosophy of Art*
- **Psyco 495:** *Psychology of Aesthetics*
- **Anth 485:** *Topics in Social & Cultural Anthropology* sometimes offered as Anth of Art by Prof. Zivkovic.

General Course Policies

Course policies are in place to ensure fairness in grading, so all students are judged by the same standards. In exceptional circumstances, I may choose to grant clemency (for, in the words of Carl Schmitt, '*Souverän ist, wer über den Ausnahmezustand entscheidet*') but I require appropriate documentation to do so. Otherwise, the following rules apply.

- **Assignments submitted after the deadline** will be penalized $\frac{1}{3}$ **grade for every day past the deadline** (i.e. an A falls to an A- after one day, to a B+ after two days etc.)
- **Plagiarism will not be tolerated.** If you are caught plagiarizing, you may be summarily failed. I am required to write a report on any plagiarism for the Registrar's Office, and to direct you to the university's website on academic honesty (<http://www.osja.ualberta.ca/en/Students.aspx>) where you may find out more about the definition of plagiarism. I have encountered an unusual number of cases of this recently; in addition to the overall dishonesty this entails, I am infuriated by the attempt to deceive me personally. **If I catch you plagiarizing, I will make your life as miserable as I possibly can. If you plagiarize at all in any of your assignments, I reserve the right to fail you for the entire course.** If you are in *any* doubt that you might be using materials in a way that constitutes plagiarism, consult me before submitting your work. You should also check out the university's guide to plagiarism at <http://www.governance.ualberta.ca/StudentAppeals/DontCheatsheet.aspx>
- **Attendance in class is mandatory.** Your participation grade will suffer if it is clear you are not reading the set texts (e.g. through repeated failure of unannounced pop quizzes), and if you miss class. If you **miss six or more sessions, you will fail the entire course.**
- **All assignments must be completed to pass the course.** If you miss an assignment without good cause and full documentation, you will not pass the course as a whole. If unexpected circumstances mean you are unable to attend a class in which you are due to make a presentation, let me know asap.
- Details on specific penalties applied to papers can be found on the **Paper Formatting Guide** on eClass.

However, all human life is struggle and despair: sometimes our best-laid plans come to naught, and problems arise. Therefore, you have **one 48-hour extension** to use at your discretion on one of your papers. You may use this for whichever paper you choose, but you can't split it up (it must be used only on one assignment), and once it's gone, it's gone. Simply email me by **9 a.m. the day the assignment is due** to let me know. If you have not already used it, you do not need permission to activate it, nor do you need to explain why you're using it: it is entirely at your discretion, to help you take responsibility for organizing your own work. This is a writing extension only; I cannot give guidance on your paper after the regular deadline has passed.

Use a **free, automatic backup service** such as **Dropbox** (www.dropbox.com) or **Google Drive**. Used correctly, these services will automatically backup your paper as you write and save it. **I will not accept computer crashes as an excuse for late submission:** you should use backup services such as this.

Waiving Penalties

If you are still unable to submit work on time, then **please provide documentation for any excuse**. If you cannot provide such evidence, you will be subject to the usual penalties. For example, you might provide an accident report if you have a car accident, or a note from religious leader in the event of a conflict of religious conscience. **Plan your paper in detail beforehand**: if you can show that you had been working carefully on your paper before disaster struck, I am more likely to believe that any delay is not your fault. **Medical absences and lateness** can be excused in the following ways:

- *University of Alberta Medical Statement* signed by a doctor (this cannot be required, but must be accepted if provided in lieu of other documents), available at <http://goo.gl/n2g7jL>
- *Medical Declaration Form for Students* (for Faculty of Arts students), available at <http://goo.gl/j7EGFZ>
- *Statutory Declaration* (for students in Faculties other than Arts, to be obtained from home Faculty or Office of the Registrar)

Dealing with Problems

Of course, sometimes everything comes tumbling down at once. You have four midterms, you fall sick, and your boyfriend or girlfriend leaves you for your best friend. If this happens, it's better to **let me know as soon as possible**. I'm happy to help you get back on your feet and make allowances, provided you can show me that the problems are genuine, not just the result of too many late nights on Whyte Avenue. Therefore, **please provide documentation** for any illnesses or other external problems. If your problems are more general, such as a lack of organisation or an inability to concentrate, then I'll want evidence that you are developing a strategy to overcome these problems. You might want to **consult the Student Counselling service** (<http://www.uhc.ualberta.ca/StudentCounsellingServices.aspx>), who have lots of experience in helping you deal with the stresses and anxieties that afflict many of us. At any rate, whatever the issue, it's much easier to deal with it when it arises, rather than leaving it until three weeks after the term ends.

READING SCHEDULE

All readings can be found on eClass, either as pdfs or as links to relevant files. If you are having trouble accessing a reading, please let me know asap. You **must read the texts before class**: the participation component of your grade is assessed in part on how well-prepared you seem to be for class, so if you have not read the texts, you will score miserably in this component. To help in this, I have supplied a few questions that you may like to think about while reading; you do not need to prepare written answers to these questions.

1. *Ars gratia artis*: Art without sociology

In the opening section of the course, we will look at different ideas of Art as a distinct and unique sphere of human experience. We will read a selection of philosophical and literary explanations of the power of art, and consider what they imply for the way we should try to understand individual artworks. We will also consider whether it is possible to understand art and its history entirely separately from the rest of human experience.

Tues 1st Sep:	Introduction: Is that Art?	
Thurs 3rd Sep:	Taste and Beauty Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of the Power of Judgement</i> , extract 1.	<i>What's the difference between artistic nudes and pornography? Do we all have the same taste in art? Can we appreciate art that we don't personally like?</i>
Tues 8th Sep:	Art and the Subject Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of the Power of Judgement</i> , extract 2. Friedrich von Schiller, <i>Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man</i> ,	<i>What is it about a work of art that makes it 'beautiful'? How do we feel when we regard a real artwork?</i>
Thurs 10th Sep:	Artistic Expression Leo Tolstoy, <i>What is Art?</i>	<i>How far is the artwork the product of the artist's unique vision? Must art have an emotional content? Could a computer create art?</i>
Tues 15th Sep:	Art and the Human Spirit GWF Hegel, <i>Introduction to the Philosophy of History; Aesthetics</i> .	<i>Do different societies and periods in history have distinct artistic styles? What can we tell about societies from their works of art?</i>
Thurs 17th Sep:	The Autonomy of Art Erwin Panofsky, <i>Concept of Artistic Volition</i> . Heinrich Wölfflin, <i>Principles of Art History</i> .	<i>Can we consider art solely on its own terms? What features do we look at to distinguish different artists or styles of art?</i>
Tues 22nd Sep:	Writing Class	<i>Overview of papers; redrafting; formulating problems.</i>

FIRST ASSIGNMENT: SUBMIT VIA EMAIL BY 11.59PM, FRI 3RD OCT

2. Art as a Social Institution

Social scientists are, by definition, interested in the place of art in society, and the ways in which the idea of art is socially defined. In this section, we will consider this question through philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and historical lenses that will generate questions about the nature of art, and whether it is truly possible to consider aesthetics features without regard to the social context they are found in.

Thurs 24th Sep:	Aesthetics Across the World Clifford Geertz, 'Art as Cultural System.' Arthur Danto, 'Defective Affinities: "Primitivism" in 20 th century art'	<i>Do we take a different attitude towards things we see in art galleries compared to everyday objects? Do other societies set aside spaces for aesthetic contemplation? What role do aesthetic matters have worldwide?</i>
Tues 29th Sep:	The Institutional Theory of Art Arthur Danto, 'The Artworld.' George Dickie, 'The New Institutional Theory of Art.'	<i>Can we explain what makes something 'art' solely by reference to the qualities of the object? How can we recognize something as 'art'? Would we know it was fine art if no-one told us?</i>

Thurs 1st Oct:	The History of the History of Art PO Kristeller, <i>Renaissance thought & arts.</i> Gordon Fyfe, <i>Art, Power, & Modernity.</i>	<i>Is Instagram art? Why do we recognize things like painting and sculpture as 'Fine Art,' but not food or gardening? When did the idea of the 'Fine Arts' emerge? What sort of social forces defined what counted as art and what didn't?</i>
Tues 6th Oct:	Portrait of the Artist as a Worldly Man Howard Becker, <i>Art Worlds.</i>	<i>What goes on in the world of the arts? How do artists, art dealers, gallery owners, and audiences interact to produce art? How might artworks be shaped by basic factors such as the means of production available?</i>
Thurs 8th Oct:	Class and Classiness Pierre Bourdieu, <i>Distinction.</i>	<i>Are you an artistic snob? Do you like to boast about the sort of art you like? What can we tell about people by their taste in art? Is art just a mask for other social struggles? What classes of people tend to like fine arts?</i>
Tues 13th Oct:	Inverting the Economic Pierre Bourdieu, 'The field of cultural production, or 'The economic world reversed'	<i>Why are artists so often opposed to social norms? Are artists usually conservative or progressive? How does the world of art relate to the rest of society? What does it mean when we say an artist 'sells out'?</i>

SECOND ASSIGNMENT: SUBMIT VIA EMAIL BY 11.59PM, FRI 23RD OCT

3. Art & The Structure of Modern Society

While North American sociology of art has often taken a philistine approach to the artwork, ignoring the specific qualities of individual works or genres, European social theorists have in contrast paid close attention to aesthetics and the formal aspects of works of art. Drawing on the Hegelian tradition, they have posited links between the cultures and structures of society and the types and forms of art produced by such societies. This claim goes deeper than superficial semiotic analysis: we can, they suggest, gain unique insights into the experience of life in different societies through formal analysis of their works of art and aesthetic values.

Thurs 15th Oct:	This is the Modern World? Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life.' The Futurist and Vorticist Manifestos.	<i>How is life in modern, technologically-developed cities different from that in agricultural villages? What is different about our social relations? How could art depict the distinct character of modernity?</i>
Tues 20th Oct:	The Fractured Consciousness Walter Benjamin, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire.'	<i>How does the rapid-fire experience of modern life affect the individual? How might it change our very memory? Can this be depicted artistically?</i>
Thurs 22nd Oct:	A Novel Experience of Social Life Georg Lukács, <i>Theory of the Novel.</i> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic & Novel.'	<i>Why aren't grand epics like Homer's Iliad so popular anymore? Would they seem more or less believable than a novel? Can we explain the importance of epics and novels by the social structures that produce them?</i>
Tues 27th Oct:	Modernity and Formal Aesthetics Max Weber, 'The Rational & Social Foundations of Music,'	<i>Do you think modern society is more 'rational' than previous ones? Has this had any impact on the art we produce? How could music be described as 'rational'?</i>
Thurs 29th Oct:	The Rationalized Production of Art Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment.</i>	<i>What sort of concerns shape the production of mass culture, compared to fine art? How formally-complex is mass entertainment? What are the effects?</i>
Tues 3rd Nov:	Do Epochs Have Eyes? Karl Mannheim <i>Structures of Thinking.</i>	<i>Can art help us understand how different cultures view the world? How might culture shape aesthetic form?</i>
Thurs 5th Nov:	The Eye that Looks At Itself Michel Foucault, <i>The Order of Things.</i>	<i>Do different societies understand reality in the same way? How can art tell us about this?</i>

THIRD ASSIGNMENT: SUBMIT VIA EMAIL BY 11.59PM, FRI 20TH NOV

4. Art & Social Emancipation

Our final section asks how art might contribute to social emancipation. Though shaped by social forces, can it have an effect on the society that produces it? Avant-garde artists have often taken a clear, radical stance against existing social norms – but does their work really influence the majority of people? Can the experience of works of art help lift us above our mundane, everyday experience, and raise us to consciousness of the possibility for change?

Tues 10th Nov:	NO CLASS: Reading Week	<i>Visit an art gallery, read Joyce's 'Finnegans Wake' or watch a seven hour Hungarian movie to relax.</i>
Thurs 12th Nov:		
Tues 17th Nov:	The Avant-Garde (I) Renato Poggioli, <i>Theory of the Avant-Garde</i> . Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch'	<i>Do you like the most progressive, avant-garde art? Are such artists usually conservative or progressive? Is there any link between being artistically innovative and aiming at social change?</i>
Thurs 19th Nov:	The Avant-Garde (II) Peter Bürger, <i>Theory of the avant-garde</i> Bertolt Brecht, <i>A Short Organum for the Theatre</i>	<i>Is avant-garde art popular? What effects might its relative popularity have for its potential as a source of social change? What sorts of art might best spur people to revolution?</i>
Tues 24th Nov:	Depicting Social Hierarchies Robert Witkin, 'Van Eyck Through the Looking Glass,'; 'A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Aesthetics.'	<i>How do powerful groups use art to convey their authority? Beyond the specific messages conveyed by art, does the form of an artwork suggest different levels of social emancipation?</i>
Thurs 26th Nov:	The stooge of global capitalism? Frederic Jameson, 'Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.'	<i>In the era of Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, do we really distinguish our 'inner lives' any more? What's below the surface? How do artistic forms convey the surface nature of postmodernism?</i>
Tues 1st Dec:	The joy of art Georges Bataille, <i>The Accursed Share</i>	<i>Are you using your time well? Why are you saving money? Do you think life would be different if we assumed we had plenty of wealth, instead of not enough? Can art help us reach that point?</i>
Thurs 3rd Dec:	Being in truth Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art.'	<i>How do we normally go about our business in the world – thinking about things, or just doing things? What perspective has told us most about art this semester? Can any perspective be complete?</i>

FINAL ASSIGNMENT: SUBMIT VIA EMAIL BY 11.59PM, FRI 11TH DEC

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment goals

The writing assignments in this course have two *substantive* goals and two *skills* goals. It's useful to think about these goals when planning and writing your paper, to ensure you're getting the most out of the assignments:

- **Thinking creatively about art as a social phenomenon:** You will have the opportunity to explore works of art by considering what we learn about them from their social context, or what we learn about a society by looking at different aspects of the art it produces. Beyond this course, this will help you think about the many ways social forces and structures can shape our daily experience.
- **Thinking critically about disciplinary paradigms:** You will contrast the ways different disciplines such as art history, philosophy, and social thought consider the same basic object of 'art.' This will help you consider the limits of each paradigm by thinking about what each reveals or misses about art. Beyond this course, this will make you more aware of the value of alternative perspectives to interpret problems.
- **Editing & redrafting skills:** You will build a final paper through revision of earlier drafts of your argument. You are expected to make points more clearly, to cut superfluous material, and to highlight the logic of your arguments. Beyond this course, this will make your writing more persuasive and efficient.
- **Formulating a problem or research agenda:** You will identify and lay out the terms of a question you intend to answer, setting up the problem you will solve and clarifying what you will need to do. You will delimit what you intend to do, in a way that allows you to produce a coherent, focused, thematically-unified piece of work. Beyond this course, this will help you in any creative nonfiction writing you produce, such as expressing an opinion about a contemporary issue, debating, or making a legal argument.

Assignment schedule

The structure of the assignments is determined by these goals. You will write **two extended papers**, one for the first half and one for the second half of the semester. However, each paper will itself be divided in two: you will first write a 4-5 page paper that interprets the question in the way you intend to answer it, and frames the material through reference to the writers we cover up till that point; I will give you feedback on this paper, and you will then revise and extend it to an 8-10 page paper completing your answer to the question. You should treat your initial papers as complete works in themselves, with their own introduction and conclusion. You will need to reframe your argument somewhat in your second paper so that it reads as a coherent paper in itself: **it is not enough simply to add new material to the end of the old.** The schedule is as follows:

	Paper 1: What is Art?	Paper 2: Art as Social Phenomenon
Theme	Explore differences between sociological and philosophical analyses of art; evaluate the strengths & weaknesses of each; show how sociological analyses are intended to critique philosophical and art-historical ones.	Explore specific ways art might give us insights in to the society that produces it; discuss whether art as a social institution can be an effective social force for change or merely reflective of social reality.
Part I (10% of final grade)	Use material from 1 st -17 th Sept to set out philosophical attempts to define the essence of 'Art,' and standards for evaluating it. Submit by email by 11.59pm, Fri 2nd Oct.	Use material from 15 th Oct-5 th Nov to explore what formal analysis of works of Art might tell us about <i>modern</i> society. Submit by email by 11.59pm on Fri 20th Nov.
Part II (30% of final grade)	Use material from 22 nd Sept-13 th Oct to show how sociology, history, and anthropology question the nature of Art as defined philosophically or art-theoretically. Submit by email by 11.59pm, Fri 23rd Oct.	Use material from 17 th Nov-1 st Dec to explore how Art might play an active role in moving beyond social contradictions, or in bringing about social change. Submit by email by 11.59pm on Fri 11th Dec.

Your options

To provide more scope for you to develop your own creativity, you may choose between the following two options for each of your assignments. **If you choose Option B, you must consult with me before writing, to formulate an answerable question and ensure you have a clear direction for your work.** If you have a particular theme or artistic phenomenon you would like to explore in more depth, or would like a slightly different structure of assignment (e.g. producing a single extended paper in four instalments over the course of the semester), I am happy to work with you to design something suitable. (Do not try to design your own assignment without consulting me, or your life will be filled with more than the usual sorrow and regret.)

	Option A: Theory	Option B: Artistic phenomenon
Task	Focus on theoretical or philosophical topics relating to art, directly dealing with the conceptual issues raised.	Analyse a particular work of art, artist, or other artistic phenomenon of your choice, by using the texts and ideas we read.
Questions	Choose questions from those set below.	You may choose one of the questions below to focus your argument, or formulate a new question in discussion with me.
Pros & Cons	Allows less scope for free expression, but provides more structured, clearly-defined task. Requires no extra independent research.	Doesn't provide as much supportive structure, but allows you to pursue your own interest. Requires more

Evaluating your paper

As this is a 400-level class, I expect you to be independent, self-motivated learners; at this level, my role is to facilitate your intellectual exploration, not to spoon-feed you knowledge. I am looking above all for your papers that constitute a **coherent, unified exploration of a clearly-defined problem**. The questions I have provided are deliberately open-ended: it is up to you to define the terms and the scope of the paper you will write and to explore it to an appropriate depth. **A paper that simply summarizes a series of ideas or writers we read will not be successful.** In addition, your papers should exhibit:

- **Evidence of thoughtful engagement with the text:** Show me that you have read and considered the ideas we read, and can explain its basic claim as well as the way it makes its argument. In addition, you might wish to criticise some of the claims or implications of the text: do you find the author's claims plausible or not? Why/why not? Do not oversimplify the text, especially if you disagree.
- **Application of ideas to the interpretation of art:** Show that you have understood the ideas we will be discussing by applying them to specific artistic phenomena (such as a work of art, an artist, or artistic institution). Use theory to reveal specific aspects of art, and use art to test and enlarge theory.
- **Independence of thought:** To achieve the highest grades, you should show your willingness and ability to think for yourself. I may be flattered if you simply repeat what I say in class, but I will not be especially impressed. I will reward students who pursue their own ideas, even to the extent of conducting further research into the topics that interest them most.
- **A foundational knowledge of what makes a good paper,** acquired from earlier classes. You should at the least be capable of writing in clear, thematically-unified paragraphs, of stating your overall claim explicitly, and of joining your evidence together in a coherent argumentative framework.

Late assignments will be **penalized 1/3 grade for every day late** (i.e. A becomes A- etc.) Fortune, of course, is fickle, and life is filled with unexpected despair. Yet I am (somewhat) merciful: to thwart the Fates, you are allowed **one forty-eight hour extension** to be used at your discretion on any assignment.

Paper 1: Art as Social Phenomenon

This paper explores the way social scientific analyses question the claim of Art to be a special realm of human experience. Kant, Tolstoy et al disagree on *what* Art is, but they all see it as having some special quality. Good Art is that which most exhibits this essence. Social scientists challenge this; there is, they claim, no clear way to decide what is and is not Art. You will explore this debate, showing how sociological critiques are aimed at aspects of the concept of Art. **Choose one of the questions below** to answer in two instalments as follows.

Assignment 1 (due by email, 11.59pm, Fri 2nd Oct), 4-5 pages (10% of final grade)

- Your paper should set out the terms of the questions according to your interpretation: **what exactly is at stake in this paper?** (e.g. e.g. the first question below might refer to the idea that Art is universal rather than subjective, or alternatively to the nature of the pleasure we get from Art).
- Choose at least two writers from 1st Sept-17th Sept. How do they engage with this theme? Do they agree or disagree? Remember: you are describing a debate *within* philosophy and theory of art.

Assignment 2 (due by email, 11.59pm, Fri 23rd Oct), 8-10 pages (30% of final grade)

- Extend your first paper to include the perspective of the social sciences. You will explain how the social sciences challenge the ideas of Art in your earlier paper. You will revise the first paper in response to my feedback, and to reframe it for the debate here: you will describe a debate *between* social sciences and philosophy. **It is not enough simply to tack new material on the end of your earlier work.**
- Choose at least two of the writers from 24th Sept-13th Oct to write about. You might argue that social scientists share common ground in opposition to philosophers, or consider them as more divided.

1. 'I don't know much about Art, but I know what I like.' Discuss.

How might philosophers of art or fine art connoisseurs judge art? Where do they get their standards from? How might we judge the aesthetic value of objects that are not intended to be Artworks as such? What's the difference between liking something and finding it beautiful? How does class affect taste? What role do institutions have in defining good or bad art?

2. How are 'works of Art' produced?

What is the role of the 'artist'? What is 'expressed' in works of art? How does art differ from crafts? What institutions designate things as art? What roles are there in art worlds or institutions? What role do gatekeepers play in defining something as art? What role do economic or material factors have in producing art? How far do social relations shape the sort of art produced?

3. Is there any difference between Art and entertainment?

Why do certain types of product get classified as 'high art' rather than as popular culture? What reasons do people have for consuming 'high art'? How do they demonstrate their appreciation? How would we recognise something as Art instead of popular culture? How do we distinguish the 'beautiful' from the merely agreeable?

4. Could we ever find a formula or rules for producing works of art that everyone would like?

In what sense might art be seen as governed by rules? If the appreciation of art is truly grounded in universal, shared attributes (e.g. rational subjectivity), shouldn't we be able to produce art to simulate those features? What does Kant mean by saying the genius is the one who sets a rule? How would Tolstoy react to removing the artist's individual expression?

5. Do we need to know about the Artist to understand the work of Art?

How important is the artist's emotion or expression in works of art? Can artworks be seen as representative of their age? What sort of social relations are artists caught in? Is art the product of genius? How was it decided what sort of producers would be called 'Artists'? How did artists acquire independence? How can we analyse the relationships between artists and patrons?

6. Do works of art transcend their context?

What does it mean to claim that beauty is universal, as Kant does? Why might those in the art world seek to assert the autonomy of art? What would such a 'pure' interpretation of art look like? How does sociology challenge this perspective? How did Art come to be seen as autonomous historically? Is this the case across all cultures?

Paper 2: Art as a social phenomenon

For theorists such as Weber, Lukács, or Mannheim, the formal qualities of art can tell us something about the society that produced them: they reflect either forms of social organization, or how people in that society experience the world. Can art go further, and help transform the society it reflects? In this paper, you will explain how our theorists believe art reflects something about the modern world, and whether its character as Art offers a way to transcend it. **Choose one of the questions below** to answer in two instalments:

Assignment 3 (due by email, 11.59pm, Fri 20th Nov), 4-5 pages (10% of final grade)

- Your paper should set out the terms of the questions according to your interpretation: **what exactly is at stake in this paper?** (e.g. for Qu.1, you might focus on the way *aesthetic forms* tell us about society, or you might focus on the *substantive values* we learn from symbolic analysis of art.)
- Choose at least two writers from 15th Oct to 5th Nov. You will be focusing on the *nature of the connection* they draw between art and society. You may also need to **refer to earlier writers**, e.g. Kant, Hegel.

Paper 2 (due by email, 11.59pm, Fri 11th Dec), 8-10 pages (30% of final grade)

- In this paper, you will extend the previous assignment to show what sort of social change might be either *possible* or *desirable* if we accept what art indicates about society. You will need to link your account of social change back to diagnoses of (modern) society described in your earlier paper. Once again, **it is not enough simply to tack on new material**: make sure your paper makes sense as a single whole.
- Choose at least two of the writers from 17th Nov-3rd Dec. You may refer to earlier writers.

1. What does Art tell us about Society? *or* What does Society tell us about Art?

Should we look at the form or the content of artworks to understand society? What different ways have sociologists used art to analyse society? Is art characteristic of society as a whole, or a specialized phenomenon? How does the world of art think of its own position in relation to the society? Can we detect social structures within art? What aspects of art lie outside the purview of sociological analysis? How do the processes by which art is created tell us something about the works themselves?

2. Why do works of art look the way they do?

Is there any connection between social structures, social groups, and the aesthetic forms of works of art? How might art reflect the experience of everyday life? How might historical experience change art? Why would a Greek statue count as 'art,' but not an identical style of statue these days? How far might the personal experience of the artist shape the work?

3. Can art in some way transcend the everyday realities of modern society?

Is Hegel right to see art as a form of consciousness in which societies represent their problems to themselves? How might the Kantian sublime lift us above ourselves? How could avant-garde art awaken us to the problems of society? How might Adorno's 'promesse du bonheur' alert us to social problems? How do Heidegger and Bataille present art as an alternative way of being?

4. Must Art be aesthetically revolutionary in order to be socially revolutionary?

What is the place of art in modern society? Does this place give it potential to help or hinder struggles for emancipation? What would it mean for art to be 'aesthetically revolutionary' or avant-garde? Why might 'kitsch' or the culture industry hinder progress? How might an aesthetically-shocking experience spur social change? What sort of social changes might art help with?

5. What is Art, as a social phenomenon?

How does Art come to be defined as such, historically and sociologically? What role do artists have in broader social structures? Why might art be a field of contestation between different groups? Does Art truly represent society as a whole? Why might there be a need of something like art to represent society? What aspects of a society could be represented? What is the function of art?

6. Is the artistic world really 'the economic world reversed'?

Is art truly autonomous in the modern world? Why do artists present themselves in such a fashion? What might help preserve the autonomy of art? How do artists regard everyday society? Do they view themselves as supporters or critics of the social order, in general? How far do economic factors play a role in art? Can art be as independent as it might claim?

MANDATORY LEGALESE

One sad consequence of the current neo-liberal hegemony is a proliferation of overpaid administrators and bureaucrats at the top of the university: instead of paying staff more, or hiring tenure-track faculty instead of exploiting vulnerable adjunct professors, universities are increasingly hiring needless managers at inflated wages. These people need to justify their existence, and so invent pointless regulations so as to look busy. In addition, they like to cover their asses in case any of you decides to sue the university for some reason. Therefore, they insist that the following passages be included on every syllabus. (Common sense might suggest that the University distribute a single copy of these notices to every student at the start of the year, rather than insisting they be duplicated on every syllabus, or that these officials spend their time focusing on advancing teaching rather than on legalese of this type, but this would require a world rather better than the one we live in.) With that in mind, I am required to include the following in my course outline:

Course Outlines:

Policy about course outlines can be found in Section 23.4(2) of the University Calendar.

Academic Integrity:

The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.governance.ualberta.ca) and avoid any behaviour that could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from University.

Learning and working environment:

The Faculty of Arts is committed to ensuring that all students, faculty and staff are able to work and study in an environment that is safe and free from discrimination and harassment. It does not tolerate behaviour that undermines that environment. The department urges anyone who feels that this policy is being violated to:

- Discuss the matter with the person whose behaviour is causing concern; or
- If that discussion is unsatisfactory, or there is concern that direct discussion is inappropriate or threatening, discuss it with the Chair of the Department.

For additional advice or assistance regarding this policy you may contact the student ombudservice: (<http://www.ombudservice.ualberta.ca/>). Information about the University of Alberta Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures can be found in the GFC Policy Manual, section 44 available at <http://gfcpolicymanual.ualberta.ca/>.

Recording of Lectures:

Audio or video recording of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the instructor or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Recorded material is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the instructor.

Plagiarism and Cheating:

All students should consult the “Truth-In-Education” handbook (<http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/TIE/>) regarding the definitions of **plagiarism** and its consequences when detected. **Students involved in language courses and translation courses** should be aware that on-line “translation engines” produce very dubious and unreliable “translations.” **Students in language courses** should be aware that, while seeking the advice of native or expert speakers is often helpful, **excessive editorial and creative help** in assignments is considered a form of “cheating” that violates the code of student conduct with dire consequences. An instructor or coordinator who is convinced that a student has handed in work that he or she could not possibly reproduce without outside assistance is obliged, out of consideration of fairness to other students, to report the case to the Associate Dean of the Faculty. Before unpleasantness occurs consult <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/TIE/>; also discuss this matter with any tutor(s) and with your instructor.