

MTS/ COMM 525- Special Topics

Ethnographies of Culture

Thursdays 11.00-1.45 PM

Claudio E. Benzecry

Professor, Communication Studies and Sociology

2-133 Francis Searle Building

claudio.benzecry@northwestern.edu

Office Hours: Wednesday 1 to 2.30 PM and virtually by appt.

The schedule listed is tentative and could be subject to change.

The professor reserves the right to make any changes and/or additions to this document.

1. Course Description

How do elite chefs come up with new recipes? What makes blues authentic? What makes a model successful? What is the difference between art and craft? How does an amateur learn glassblowing? Why do people still flock to the opera house? How does a museum store an installation? Is there a career for hip-hop street artists? What kind of job is being an influencer? Do record studio interns ever get a job? Why do we get the news that we get? And why should we care about all this?

This course looks at ethnographies of artistic practice to better understand how culture is made, circulated, and received in social life. Aiming to go beyond the personal idiosyncrasies of individual artists and media players, it shows through a myriad of studies in cultural production, what are the factors that play the greatest role in shaping contemporary cultural production: is it about professional traditions, forms of ownership and funding, government regulations, organizational factors or the social dynamics in the interplay between owners, workers, and audiences? Sorting out the factors that shape cultural production can best be accomplished via comparative research – across geographical regions, and institutional fields. This course offers a theoretical and methodological roadmap to such a project, helping students navigate through the landscape of how contemporary culture is produced.

The course has also a second objective, to sort out what is made visible and what remains invisible in contemporary society, as a non-reductive way to sociologically explore how power is aesthetically produced beyond categorical or representational analysis.

1. **Evaluation.**
2. Class participation: 25% of the grade. This course is organized as a seminar; your cooperation and willingness to participate actively are critical for creating the best learning environment. Come to class having done the readings and ready to share your thoughts. Learning is a collective enterprise, so everybody will benefit from an engaged, intense, and constructive conversation. This includes the weekly questions you are expected to send.
 - In order to participate, you have to actually come to class. Please, do not make yourself absent more than two times during the duration of the quarter. Maximum of two absences before it effects your participation grade

I'm going to be asking for questions on the readings to work in class (every class, you can only miss 2 sessions). These should be sent to me via email the night before the class (by 10 PM)

I'm also going to ask two students per class to present the readings from the week, as to organize and get the conversation started.

2. 4 reading-reactions memos. Every other week.

The memo is a short paper on the required readings for the coming class, a minimum of four double-spaced pages each due in class the day the readings are discussed (700 words).

These memos should briefly summarize the main points of the reading and critically analyze at least two issues, points, or concepts that you found to be the most useful for your own scholarly imagination or the most provocative.

Late memos will not be accepted

3. Final project. 50 % of the grade. Due on finals week at 12 PM.

Three possibilities.

1. a) Drawing on literature from this class formulate a research project to study cultural production or consumption in the Chicago area.
2. b) Drawing on at least 50% of the class material and a series of articles from the New York Times, The Atlantic, New York Magazine and the New Yorker please answer one of these two questions: What is an artist? How is culture produced?

The essay should be roughly 4000 words long and written for a lay audience (though still containing the key ideas from the literature reviewed in class)

1. c) A paper based on your own research as it touches upon themes and bibliography discussed on the course. Please consult with the instructor beforehand whether the topic is appropriate for the class.

1. University Policy Statements

Academic Integrity Statement

Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic Guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern or to download the guide, visit:

<https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html>

Accessibility Statement

Northwestern University is committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact AccessibleNU to move forward with the university's established accommodation process (e: accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; p: 847-467-5530). If you already have established accommodations with AccessibleNU, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of the term, so we can work together to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations, is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

COVID-19 Classroom Expectations Statement

Students, faculty, and staff must comply with University expectations regarding appropriate classroom behavior, including those outlined below and in the [COVID-19 Code of Conduct](#). With respect to classroom procedures, this includes:

- Policies regarding masking and social distancing evolve as the public health situation changes. Students are responsible for understanding and complying with current masking, testing, Symptom Tracking, and social distancing requirements.
- In some classes, masking and/or social distancing may be required as a result of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodation for the instructor or a student in the class even when not generally required on campus. In such cases, the instructor will notify the class.
- No food is allowed inside classrooms. Drinks are permitted, but please keep your face covering on and use a straw.
- Faculty may assign seats in some classes to help facilitate contact tracing in the event that a student tests positive for COVID-19. Students must sit in their assigned seats.

If a student fails to comply with the [COVID-19 Code of Conduct](#) or other University expectations related to COVID-19, the instructor may ask the student to leave the class. The

instructor is asked to report the incident to the Office of Community Standards for additional follow-up.

COVID-19 Testing Compliance Statement

To protect the health of our community, Northwestern University requires unvaccinated students who are in on-campus programs to be tested for COVID-19 twice per week.

Students who fail to comply with current or future COVID-19 testing protocols will be referred to the Office of Community standards to face disciplinary action, including escalation up to restriction from campus and suspension.

Prohibition of Recording Classes by Students

Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact [AccessibleNU](#). Unauthorized use of classroom recordings – including distributing or posting them – is also prohibited. Under the University’s [Copyright Policy](#), faculty own the copyright to instructional materials – including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.

Support for Wellness and Mental Health

Northwestern University is committed to supporting the wellness of our students. Student Affairs has multiple resources to support student wellness and mental health. If you are feeling distressed or overwhelmed, please reach out for help. Students can access confidential resources through the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Religious and Spiritual Life (RSL) and the Center for Awareness, Response and Education (CARE). Additional information on all of the resources mentioned above can be found here:

<https://www.northwestern.edu/counseling/>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/religious-life/>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/care/>

Guidance on Class Recordings

This class or portions of this class will be recorded by the instructor for educational purpose and available to the class during the quarter. Your instructor will communicate how you can access the recordings. Portions of the course that contain images, questions or commentary/discussion by students will be edited out of any recordings that are saved beyond the current term.

Exceptions to Class Modality

Class sessions for this course will occur in person. Individual students will not be granted permission to attend remotely except as the result of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodation as determined by AccessibleNU.

Maintaining the health of the community remains our priority. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID do not attend class and update your Symptom Tracker application right away to connect with Northwestern's Case Management Team for guidance on next steps. Also contact the instructor as soon as possible to arrange to complete coursework.

Students who experience a personal emergency should contact the instructor as soon as possible to arrange to complete coursework.

Should public health recommendations prevent in person class from being held on a given day, the instructor or the university will notify students.

1. Additional Statements

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion/Safe Space

I am firmly committed to diversity, equity and inclusion whereby barriers are removed to create space for all individuals to fully engage in all areas of campus life. At the Northwestern University School of Communication (SoC), we believe that diversity is a resource, a strength, and a benefit. By encouraging a multiplicity of perspectives, experiences, and points of view to exist in the work of our classes, everyone's education will be enriched.

Each student's voice has something of value to contribute and students are therefore encouraged to communicate and participate during class meetings. We must take care to respect the individual backgrounds, personal identities, intellectual approaches, and demographics expressed by everyone.

The content covered in this syllabus and beyond in our broader curriculum is intended to be respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Individual differences can deepen our understanding of one another and the world around us, thus making us global citizens. I strongly adhere to Northwestern University's non-discrimination policy and reserve our classroom as a safe space for unique and meaningful dialogue. Remember to keep confidential all issues of a personal or professional nature that are discussed in class.

Additional information about the University's discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct policies, including campus resources available to assist individuals with concerns, is available online on the [Office of Equity website](#).

Navigating Safety and Wellness at Northwestern

In addition to your academic advisor, [NUhelp](#) is designed to provide community members with access to university resources and services that serve NU students. You may share a concern for a student, identify safety and security resources, discover health and wellness programs, and find academic assistance specific to a college/school.

Land Acknowledgement Statement

We are on sacred ground. Northwestern University is on the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires—the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa—as well as the Menominee, Miami, and Ho-Chunk nations.

Before it was stolen from them through colonization and forced removal, this land was a site of trade, travel, gathering, and healing for more than a dozen other native tribes. The state of Illinois is still home to over 100,000 tribal members.

In the spirit of healing and making amends for the harm that was done, we acknowledge the native and indigenous peoples who called this land home. And we pledge ourselves as members of the Northwestern School of Communication to turn our statements into action and build better relationships with native and indigenous communities in Evanston, in Chicago, and throughout the region.

1. Readings

Almost all of the required readings will be available on the Canvas site for the course.

You need to buy the following books:

Dominguez Rubio, Fernando. 2020. *Still Life. Ecologies of the Modern Imagination at the Art Museum*. Chicago: Chicago UP.

Seaver, Nick. 2022. *Computing Taste*. Chicago: Chicago UP.

Stuart, Forrest. 2020. *Ballad of the Bullet*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.

Wohl, Hanna. 2021. *Bound by Creativity. How Contemporary Art is Created and Judged*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week 1- Introduction to the class: What is going on with Culture?

September 21

Read Simon Reynolds, *Retromania*, pages 55-75

Reckwitz, Andreas. 2017. *The Invention of Creativity*. London: Polity. Chapter 1.

Ranciere, Jacques. 2004. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury. Pages 7-42.

Franklin, S. 2023. *The Cult of Creativity*.

Puchner, Martin. 2022. *Culture, the Story of Us*. Intro

Primer, how to study cultural production

Readings:

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Haute Couture and Haute Culture" in *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage. Pp 132-138.

Becker, Howard S. 1974. "Art as Collective Action." *American Sociological Review* 39: 767-776

Week 2- How to study cultural production (continued)

September 28

Menger, Pierre-Michel. 2001. Artists as Workers: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges." *Poetics*Links to an external site. 28(4):241-254

Debate between Pierre-Michel Menger and Andrew Abbott. 2016. *Culture* 28 (2)

David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker. 2009. "A Very Complicated Version of Freedom": Conditions and Experiences of Creative Labour in Three Cultural Industries. *Poetics*Links to an external site. 38 (1): 4-20

How is it to work in creative industries?

Gina Neff, Elizabeth Wissinger and Sharon Zukin. 2005. "Entrepreneurial Labor among Cultural Producers: "Cool" Jobs in "Hot" Industries." *Social Semiotics* 15 (3).

Duffy, Brook Erin. 2017. *(not) getting paid to do what you love. Gender, social media and aspirational work*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Introduction, Chapters 1 to 4, 7.

Recommended:

Neff, Gina. 2012. *Venture Labor. Work and the Burden of Risk in Innovative Industries*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Sensitizing readings:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/01/the-death-of-the-artist-and-the-birth-of-the-creative-entrepreneur/383497/Links to an external site.> (ALSO AS PDF ON CANVAS)

Week 3- What kind of job is producing culture?

October 5

Ailsa Craig. 2007. "Practicing Poetry: A Career Without a Job." In Craig Calhoun and Richard Sennett (Eds.) *Practicing Culture*. Oxford: Routledge.

Alison Gerber. 2014. "The Audit of Venus." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 58 (1)

Frenette, Alex. 2013. "Making the Intern Economy: Role and Career Challenges of the Music Industry Intern." *Work and Occupations* 40(4) 364–397

How does someone make it? Managing risk and uncertainty:

Mears, Ashley. 2011. *Pricing Beauty. The Making of a Fashion Model*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Chapter 3 and 4)

Leschziner, Vanina. 2007. "Kitchen Stories: Patterns of Recognition in Contemporary High Cuisine." *Sociological Forum* 22(1).

Recommended: Zafirau, Stephan. "Reputation Work in Selling Film and Television: Life in the Hollywood Talent Industry." *Qualitative Sociology* (2008) 31:99–127

Sensitizing readings:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/magazine/what-hollywood-can-teach-us-about-the-future-of-work.htmlLinks to an external site.>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/education/edlife/12edl-12mfa.htmlLinks to an external site.>

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Week 4- Boundaries: What distinguishes and bounds art from craft, commerce, and outsider art? Who decides what counts?

October 12.

Becker, Howard S. 1982. "Arts and Craft" in *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Olav Velthuis: 2005. "The Architecture of Markets" in *Talking Prices : Symbolic Meanings of Prices on the Market for Contemporary Art* . Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fine, Gary. 2003. "Crafting Authenticity: The Validation of Identity in Self-Taught Art." Theory and Society 32 (2): 153-180.

Chong, Philippa. 2020. *Inside the Critics' Circle. Book Reviewing in Uncertain Times*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1 to 5

Recommended:

Fine, Gary. 2004. *Everyday Genius. Self Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity*. Chicago: Chicago UP. Chapter 1.

Week 5- Who or what creates?

October 19

Winnie Won Yin Wong. 2013. "Imagining the Great Painting Factory." Chapter 1 in *Van Gogh on Demand*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mialet, Helene. 2012. "The Assistants and the Machine." Chapter 1 in *Hawking Incorporated*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Blumer, Herbert. 1969. "Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection." The Sociological Quarterly 10 (3): 275-291.

Michael P. Farrell. 2001. *Collaborative Circles: Friendship Dynamics and Creative Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1, 2 y 7.

Week 6- Art from beginning to end

October 26

Becker, Howard, Robert R. Faulkner, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. 2006. "Editor's Introduction: Art from Start to Finish"

Menger, Pierre Michel. 2006. "Fragments of the unfinished" in Becker, Howard, Robert R. Faulkner, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. *Art from Start to Finish*

Childress, Clayton. 2017. *Under the Cover. The creation, production and reception of a novel*. Chapters 1 to 5.

Recommended: Benzecry, Claudio E. 2022. *The Perfect Fit*. Chapter 1, 4, 5, 7 and Conclusion.

Santana Acuña, Alvaro. 2014. "How a literary work becomes a classic: The case of One Hundred Years of Solitude." American Journal of Cultural Sociology Vol. 2, 1, 97-149.

Week 7- How does creativity happen?

November 2

Becker Howard. 1995. "The Power of Inertia." Qualitative Sociology 18 (3): 301-309.

Becker, Howard. 2017. "Creativity is not a scarce commodity." American Behavioral Scientist 61(12): 1579-1588

Opazo, Pilar, 2016. "The Bittersweet taste of relentless innovation." Chapter 4 in *Appetite for Innovation*. New York; Columbia UP.

Wohl, Hanna. 2021. *Bound by Creativity. How Contemporary Art is Created and Judged*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1,2,3 and 6.

Recommended:

Fine, Gary. 1992. "The Culture of Production: Aesthetic Choices and Constraints in Culinary Work" American Journal of Sociology 97 (5): 1268-1294

Week 8- Technological disruption and control

November 9

Stahl, Matt. 2013. *Unfree Masters. Recording Artists and the Politics of work*. Durham: Duke UP. Introduction. Pp. 1-28.

Siciliano, Michael. 2016. "Disappearing into the Object: Aesthetic Subjectivities and Organizational Control in Routine Cultural Work." Organization Studies 37 (5): 687-708

Something on journalism...Petre?

Stuart, Forrest. 2020. *Ballad of the Bullet*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.

Week 9- What does the digital challenge mean for the study of culture?

November 16

Christin, Angele. 2020. "The ethnographer and the algorithm: beyond the black box."

Theory and Society

Gillespie, Tarleton. 2018. *Custodians of the Internet*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

How to live with algorithms?

Seaver, Nick. 2022. *Computing Taste*. Chicago: Chicago UP. Selections TBA.

Siles, Ignacio. 2023. *Living with Algorithms in Costa Rica*. Boston: MIT Press. Selections TBA.

Week 10- The Sciences of Subjectivity.

November 23

Shapin, Steven. 2012. "The Sciences of Subjectivity." Social Studies of Science 42: 170-185.

Shapin, Steven. 2016. "A taste of science: Making the subjective objective in the California wine world." Social Studies of Science 46 (3): 436-460.

DeNora, Tia. *Music in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford UP. Chapter 5.

Hennion, Antoine. 2001. "Music Lovers. Taste as Performance." Theory, Culture, Society 18 (5): 1-22.

Recommended: Benzecry, Claudio E. 2009. "Becoming a Fan. On the seductions of opera." Qualitative Sociology

Week 11- The Infrastructural turn in the study of culture.

November 30.

Leigh Star, Susan and Geoffrey Bowker. 1999. "Some Tricks on the Trade of Analyzing Classifications" Chapter 1 de *Sorting Things Out*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Molotch, Harvey. 2002. Place in Product. IJURR

Mukerji, Chandra. 2015. "The Material Turn."

Dominguez Rubio, Fernando. 2020. *Still Life. Ecologies of the Modern Imagination at the Art Museum*. Chicago: Chicago UP. Selection by author

Recommended:

McDonnel, Terry. 2023. "Cultural Objects, Material Culture, and Materiality." Annual Review of Sociology.

Adler Jr, DellaPosta, and Lankes. 2022. Aesthetic Style: How Material Objects Structure an Institutional Field. Sociological Theory

Claudio E. Benzecry and Fernando Domínguez Rubio. 2018. "The Cultural Life of Objects." *Handbook of Cultural Sociology*, edited by Laura Grindstaff, John Hall and Ming-Cheng Lo.

Sensitizing readings:

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/28/arts/music/28pareles.html?_r=3 & Links to an external site.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/arts/design/curators-straddle-the-museum-gallery-divide.html> & Links to an external site.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/10/arts/design/art-thats-made-not-to-last.html>Links to an external site.

Ask papers to include from:

Evans, Jabari (week of Forrest)

Jung, Philip (if ASR, week of) from beginning to end,

Peterson, Chelsea

Peterson, Jon, Ocejo, Grazian? Something on Authenticity? Recommended,

Bunz, Matt. 2014. *In Search of the Lost Avant Garde*. Chicago: Chicago UP. WHERE?

Work, Pray, Code?