

SYLLABUS
SOC493H1F – New Topics in Sociology: Sociology of Arts
L0101

Course Instructor : Marie-Lise Drapeau-Bisson

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Office Hours: By appointment

Class meets Mondays, 2:10-4:00

Location: FE 41 – 371 Bloor Street West (basement);

Online for the first two weeks

The following poem, wâkâyô's, is written by Jas M. Morgan (poem signed as Lindsay Nixon), a Toronto-based Cree-Métis-Saulteaux writer and curator. It is from their poetry book *bawajigaywin* (visions) published in 2016.

wâkâyô's

*I drive through the streets
of downtown Regina
in a car with my
high school friends
– white punks.
As we drive down Scarth,
We pass our local haunt
– O'hanlans.*

*Outside my brother wâkâyô's.
Our glances catch each other
as we drive by.
I see a smirk on his face
that I recognize so clearly.*

*A look that can only be described
by something he said to me once,
“You're the whitest Indian I know”*

*Maybe that became true.
When I cut off my hair
and bleached the brown
out of what was left,
dyed it blue.*

*When I pierced my skin
ornamented it, branded it,
so it was less ethnic, ancient.
More modern, white.*

*Like my white friends
shielding me from the settler gaze,
the Indian question, as they say.
Absorbed into the body politic.
Hiding in plain view.*

In this poem, Morgan talks about the paradox of visibility experienced by indigenous peoples. While indigenous people are underrepresented in most places (in government, on TV, in museums, in schools particularly in higher education, and the list goes on) and thus invisible, they are also hyper-visible as the target of “the settler gaze”. I find that Morgan evocatively explains this experience as “hiding in plain view”, and shares what it means for a teenager to be hyper-visible and to want to hide as a result. The poem also conveys the price to pay to blend in by “cut[ing] off [their] hair and bleach[ing] the brown]”.

This poem by a punk, queer, indigenous writer reminds us of the ongoing effects of colonization. As we engage with art and politics this semester, I encourage you to explore your own relationship to the land and engage with the indigenous peoples who's traditional, and often unceded, territory we live on.

PREREQUISITES

400-level courses are restricted to 4th year majors and specialists. Students need to have completed 1.0 FCE at the SOC300 level. Students without this requirement will be removed at any time discovered and without notice.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

What song got you through a hard time? What movie do you (re)watch every year with your family or friends? What protest poster made you feel connected to a cause? The sociology of arts has demystified the idea of pure art and showed the inequalities reproduced by the production and reception of art. In doing so, however, this field of sociological research often obscures the power of art to provide solace to individuals, to build community, and to inspire social change. In this course, we will engage with the work of scholars, artists and essayists to explore the emotionality of individuals' engagement with art, meaning-making and political imagination through artistic production, as well as the kinds of political work done through artistic engagements.

We will also engage with the epistolary genre, which means we will listen and read texts that are like letters, ranging from conversations captured in a podcast, correspondence through poems, open letters in newspapers and pieces of sociological theory. Letters are written with an audience in mind, either a single person or group of people, and are at times part of a larger correspondence between interlocutors. Letters may be private, written to share intimate experiences and thoughts, and they may also be public, written to a large group of people or to those in power to convey an argument. Because letters are personal, they often reveal the author's emotions as well as their standpoint, and what they are passionate about. Letters then are an alternative mode of knowledge production and circulation that grant us access to the affective charge of art and its capacity to build community.

In this class, you will write three letters in which you will share your experience with art; one to introduce yourself to your peers, another to a friend or someone closer to you recommending a book and a third to the general public and/or those in power. We will talk more about the content of these letters in class, but each letter will give you an opportunity to share the significance of a piece of art you have encountered.

HOW TO DO WELL

Students who don't come to class and don't read the assigned readings rarely do well. So, come to class, read the readings, and take notes on the readings. As this is a fourth-year seminar, doing well also means to develop (and practice!) your critical thinking skills. While semantically related, critical thinking does not mean to criticize everything. Instead, critical thinking is an invitation to challenge the taken-for-grantedness of the everyday, to question *how* we know what we know, and to be aware of our emotions and standpoint in the process of learning and doing sociology.

This might be the first time you are invited to read and write letters in a sociology class. To help you approach this new genre, here are a few tips on how to read letters:

- Identify the author and their context: Who are they? When did they write? What are their disciplines or practices?
- Identify the audience(s): To whom is this letter addressed or intended?
- What is the purpose of the letter? What does it seek to explain, explore, assess or criticize?
- Pay attention to how they talk about art: How do they assess its quality? How to they engage with its political content? How do they explain its significance to their interlocutor or audience(s)?
- What are aspects of the text you find useful, inspiring, convincing or disappointing? What is missing from their text? What surprised you?
- What is the tone of the letter? What emotions are conveyed to the audience(s)?

These items will also be useful for outlining your own letters.

Finally, the university offers a wide range of writing supports: from online tips, to writing workshops and writing groups. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of these services.

<https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science/Links to an external site.>

QUERCUS

This course uses the University's learning management system, Quercus, to post information about the course. This includes posting readings and other materials required to complete class activities and course assignments, as well as sharing important announcements and updates. The site is dynamic and new information and resources will be posted regularly as we move through the term, so please make it a habit to log in to the site on a regular, even daily, basis. To access the course website, go to the U of T Quercus log-in page at <https://q.utoronto.ca>. Once you have logged in to Quercus using your UTORid and password, you should see the link or "card" for SOC493H1F L0101 – New Topics in Sociology: Sociology of Arts. You may need to scroll through other cards to find this. Click on the SOC493H1F L0101 – New Topics in Sociology link to open our course area, view the latest announcements and access your course resources. There are Quercus help guides for students that you can access by clicking on the "?" icon in the left side column. **SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT GRADES POSTED ONLINE:** Please also note that any grades posted are for your information only, so you can view and track your progress through the course. No grades are considered official, including any posted in Quercus at any point in the term, until they have been formally approved and posted on ACORN at the end of the course. Please contact me as soon as possible if you think there is an error in any grade posted on Quercus.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Part I: Individual engagements with art

Week 1, September 13th – Introduction: Talking about art

Listen: *A piece of work* podcast by Abbie Jacobson with RuPaul
: <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/pieceofwork/episodes/rupaul-performance-art-yoko-ono> (Links to an external site.)

Week 2, September 20th – Companion texts

Read: *Living a Feminist Life*, by Sara Ahmed. Read the introduction and conclusion
1: <https://books-scholarsportal-info.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/duke/2018-08-02/1/9780822373377>Links to an external site.

*** Letter 1 due between September 20th and 27th ***

Week 3, September 27th – Art: escape or subversion?

Read: *Reading the Romance*, by Janice A. Radway. Read Chapter 3 “The Act of Reading the Romance: Escape and Instruction”

Part II: Art and Community

Week 4, October 4th – Art and political imagination

Read: *Feminist Art and the Political Imagination*, by Amy Mullin: <https://www-cambridge-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/core/journals/hypatia/article/abs/feminist-art-and-the-political-imagination/734036FEE8926A74B096CF9DEA3F9695>Links to an external site.

Read: Poetry is not a Luxury by Audre

Lorde: <https://makinglearning.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/poetry-is-not-a-luxury-audre-lorde.pdf> (Links to an external site.)

*** Letter 1 feedback due between October 5th and 12th ***

*** Thanksgiving – No class October 11th ***

Week 5, October 18th – Making art, making politics

Read : *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Fold Music and Race in the United States*, by William G. Roy. Read Chapter 10 “How Social Movements Do Culture” and any other chapter you are curious about: <https://books-scholarsportal-info.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks3/proquest-up/2018-09-25/10/9781400835164>Links to an external site.

Listen: *A Change is Gonna*

Come: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEBlaMOmKV4> (Links to an external site.)

Consult: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-unlikely-story-of-a-change-is-gonna-come> (Links to an external site.)

Week 6, October 25th – On the limits of political art

Feeling reconciliation, remaining settled by Dylan Robinson (book chapter).

Watch: *Dear White People*, available on Netflix, at least one episode.

Consult: *Walking Eagle News* <https://walkingeaglenews.com/> (Links to an external site.)

Week 7, November 1st – Workshop

Workshop: Letter 2 (5%)

Everyone will share their companion text/work of art with the class. Provide a brief summary of the piece, discuss the relevant course's topics and concepts, share the angle of your second letter.

Part III : Art and social change

*** Three announcements: ***

Letter 2 due between November 5th and November 12th

Reading week – No class November 8th

Fall Drop Date – November 8th 2020

Week 8, November 15th – Art commentary and reporting

Méndez Berry, Elizabeth and Chi-hui Yang, July 5th 2019, “The Dominance of the White Male Critic” in *The New York Times*, available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/05/opinion/we-need-more-critics-of-color.html> (Links to an external site.)

Girls, Girls, Girls by Roxane Gay in *Bad Feminist* (Essay)

You can also read her more recent writing

here: <https://www.nytimes.com/column/roxane-gay> (Links to an external site.)

Week 9, November 22nd – Art commentary and reporting (cont'd)

Guest speaker – TBC

A Culture of Exploitation: “Reconciliation” and the Institutions of Canadian Art, a Yellowhead Institute Special Report by Lindsay Nixon/ Jas M. Morgan (see PDF)

Week 10, November 29th – Using art for politics

Read: *The Souls of Black Folk*, by W.E.B DuBois. Pay closer attention to Chapters I, II, IV and XVI: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm> (Links to an external site.)

Listen: *Octavia's Parables*, episode 1 and any other episodes you want to listen to!
Available online at: <https://anchor.fm/oparables/episodes/Parable-of-the-Sower-Chapter-1-efo9cf> (Links to an external site.)

Listen : *Aack Cast* by Jaime Loftus, Episode 1 and any other episode you are intrigued by, online : <https://www.iheart.com/podcast/1119-aack-cast-by-jamie-loftus-83922273/> (Links to an external site.)

Week 11, December 6th – Workshop (5%)

Workshop: Letter 3

Bring your outline of your second letter. Be prepared to summarize your argument to your peers and narrative arc of the letter.

*** Letter 3 due Dec 8th to 15th ***

EVALUATION

Evaluation Format	Due Date	Weight
Art journaling	5 entries	10% (2% each, with possibility for 2-point bonus)
Participation	Weekly	10%
Workshop participation	Nov 11 th and Dec 6 th	10%
Letter 1	September 20 th - 27 th	10%
Letter 1 feedback	October 5 th - 12 th	10%
Letter 2	November 5 th - 12 th	25%
Letter 3	December 13 th - 17 th	25%

Art journaling (10%)

The art journaling assignment is an opportunity for you to practice writing about art and politics to a variety of audiences. You can think of it as a letter to yourself, to a friend, your peers, to the maker of the piece you will write about and/or to the author of the week's readings. Every letter should be titled, dated, and signed. The entries will be accessible to the class and should be written at the latest on Sunday evening at 8pm so that your peers and myself can consult them prior to the class discussion. It is a participation grade, so you will receive 2pts for each entry, with a possibility of a 2-point bonus. **There are no make-ups for the journal entries.**

Participation (10%)

The participation grade will consist of your participation in the sharing of first impressions at the beginning of every class (what we will call the *Tour de Table*) and your participation to the weekly discussions.

Effective participation requires regular attendance. If you regularly miss class, your attendance record will likely result in a low participation mark. **There are no make-up participation exercises.**

Three letters: Each letter must be titled, dated and signed.

- **Introducing yourself: a letter to your peers (1-3 pages)**

Write to your peers about a piece of art that is important to you. You might share, for instance, an encounter with a song or album, piece of visual or performance art, a movie or any other form of artistic production. Tell them about the aspects of your identity, significant relationship(s), connection(s) to the land, life experience(s), heritage and/or community that the work evokes for you. Note that this will be made available to your peers and myself so share only what you are comfortable discussing with your classmates.

- **Sharing art: a letter to a friend (3-5 pages)**

Pick a piece of art that is important to you and write a letter recommending it to a friend. The letter should include a brief discussion of what the piece is about (without spoiling it!), explain its significance, share what it evokes for you and why it made you think of them. The letter should also engage with at least once concept we have discussed in class and discuss its significance for the piece of art you are recommending. You will also have the opportunity to workshop this letter in class.

- **About art: open letter (3-5 pages, depending on the genre)**

This third letter is an opportunity to write to a broad audience about an issue relating to art that is important to you. The genre of this third letter is more flexible; you may choose to write an open letter, and essay or a report. We will read and discuss examples of such letters in class to help you find your voice.

We will discuss each letter and workshop letters 2 and 3 in class prior to the due dates. All three letters are to be submitted via Quercus.

Feedback on letter to your peers (10%):

You will be asked to provide feedback to a peer on their first letter. Think of this feedback also as a type of letter, address the person's art piece choice directly, tell them what you liked about their letter, what surprised you, what you learnt and what might be improved. Refer to the guidelines on how to write a letter as inspiration for your feedback. Remember, you will receive feedback on your letter too so be mindful about how you talk about your peer's work.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS:

All assignments (except for discussion leadership and participation exercises) should be uploaded to Quercus. Assignments submitted by email will not be accepted.

Assignments submitted to Quercus will automatically be screened for originality through Turnitin.com **unless a student provides, along with their assignment**, sufficient secondary material (i.e.: reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own

LATE ASSIGNMENTS:

Make-ups for participation and journaling will not be offered for absences.

Assignment due dates are provided as range to help you manage your time in work-intensive moments of the semester. If you need more time than the time range provided due to serious illness or a difficult learning context, please reach out to me so we can come to an arrangement. Also note that if a personal or family situation prevents you from meeting a deadline, you can contact your college registrar and have them email me about the situation.

Given the current Covid context, you do not need to hand in the usual documentation (medical notes or the verification of illness form) for a late assignment due to medical reasons. Instead, you need to email me and to declare your absence on ACORN.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is an academic offence that consists of representing someone else's ideas or words as your own. Instructors are required to report suspected plagiarism to the University.

You must familiarize yourself with the University's policies on academic integrity before submitting written assignments for this course. If you still have questions about what constitutes plagiarism and how you can avoid it, please visit UofT's Academic Integrity

website: <https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/perils-and-pitfalls/Links to an external site.>

If you need further clarification, feel free to get in touch with me.

ACCESSIBILITY

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodation, please feel free to approach me and/or AccessAbility Services (room SW302, ability@utsc.utoronto.ca, www.utsc.utoronto.ca/ability).

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH ME

I will respond to emails within 2 business days. Please note that I do not check emails after 5 pm, so emails sent in the evening will be considered received the following morning. Please use the course code (SOC493) in the subject line and use your utoronto email address for all email correspondence.