

# SOC 280B Special Topics: Sociological Theory Through Film

Winter 2024 (18 December 2023- 12 January 2024, Binghamton University  
SOC 280B

General Education Fulfillments: Social Science (**N**), Critical Thinking and Reasoning (**T**)

Format: Online Asynchronous (**OA**)

Date: 18 December 2023- 12 January 2024

Instructor: John Peter Antonacci

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Office Hours: Online Virtual by Appointment

## Course Description

Film is a form of media that communicates ideas, tells stories, and conveys meanings in a multitude of ways. It entertains us, shows us different perspectives, and challenges us. Sometimes, films reflect on and explore the social world. At other times, films can themselves make their impacts felt on societies.

This course aims to explore this twofold character of films by engaging with them sociologically. We will watch a number of films throughout this course, aiming to unpack their sociological relevance, and explore themes in classical sociological theory through engaging with them. These films will highlight certain aspects of social life that classical sociological theorists saw as relevant to the modern experience. It will be our job to figure out what these aspects of modern life are, to critically reflect on how these films convey these ideas, and to and to explore why these topics are still relevant in contemporary life.

Classical sociological theorists lived through and thought about some profound transformations. We might call these transformations the “transition to modernity.” With the onset of revolutionary changes in the structure of social life—political, through the American and French Revolutions, and economic, through the development of the industrial revolution—sociology as a discipline took as its aim the development of a set of ideas that might help us understand what was new about this world. They argued that new forms of exploitation, anomie, and disenchantment characterized social life in the decades after these changes took place. Sociologists, today, argue that these changes have stayed with us. Why have these changes proved durable? Where and why do we still see exploitation, anomie, and disenchantment today? Why is it important for us to continue to think critically about these aspects of modern social life?

Week 1 will explore exploitation and modernity through film. We’ll take a look at the modern workplace, and at modern empires, and we’ll see why sociological theorists viewed work under capitalism as exploitative. In Week 2, we will explore anomie through film. We’ll explore modern urban life, and why and how it produces feelings of rootlessness and loneliness. Finally, in Week 3, we will study bureaucracy and disenchantment. We’ll ask why a sense of wonder and magic have been lost, and what this means for how we make meaning and find value in what we do.

## **Learning Objectives**

### Department of Sociology Learning Objectives

- 1.) The ability to critically read texts and analyze the social world around them using basic sociological concepts and ideas derived from significant sociological thinkers drawn from the past and contemporary periods.
- 2.) The ability to communicate effectively in writing that is coherent, well- developed, and expressive of ideas, concepts, and themes derived from sociological thinking.
- 3.) Knowledge of themes, perspectives, and paradigms in particular areas of sociological thought (especially those that reflect the three concentrations in the major: critical legal studies, historical sociology, and labor studies.)
- 4.) A basic understanding of the main questions regarding sociological methodology, particularly the qualitative variety.

### Course Learning Objectives

#### *As a Social Science Course*

- 1.) To introduce students to foundational texts in the discipline of sociology.
- 2.) To think critically about the origins of the modern world and its relevance today.
- 3.) To apply our sociological worldview in our consumption of culture.

#### *Course- Specific Learning Objectives*

- 1.) To reinforce sociological theory for an undergraduate audience.
- 2.) To familiarize students with ideas, concepts, and debates developed through the development of sociology as a field of study.
- 3.) To integrate classical sociological theory and contemporary sociological categories with a critical perspective on contemporary film.
- 4.) To showcase sociology's ability to help us make sense of the world around us.
- 5.) To view the sociological categories of exploitation, anomie, and disenchantment as continually relevant in social life.

## **Required Readings**

There will be no required textbook for the course. Readings will be posted on Brightspace in PDF form, and made available to students before the beginning of the winter session. Students are expected to attend class having read the assigned readings for each respective session.

## **Required Films**

Students are expected to watch films on their own time. Films can be accessed via library institutions, or rented from various streaming services.

## **Brightspace**

All readings will be posted on Brightspace, organized through modules by week. Assignment submission links will also be posted on Brightspace. All announcements between the professor and the class will be made using Brightspace's announcements feature (although emails between individual students and the professor are of course permitted and encouraged.)

## **Technology Requirements**

By nature of the course's format (Online Asynchronous), students need consistent access to a working computer for this course. Students are responsible for becoming accustomed with any software applications used for the course, such as Word (and its formatting settings), Brightspace, and TurnItIn, and for electronically turning in work as required.

## **Student Accessibility Services**

Students wishing to request academic accommodations to ensure equitable access and participation in this course should contact Binghamton University's Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office. Please visit the [SSD website \(www.binghamton.edu/ssd/\)](http://www.binghamton.edu/ssd/) for contact information, Disability Documentation Guidelines, services, policies, and procedures.

## **Chosen Names and Personal Pronouns**

Students have the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity. If your preferred name or preferred pronouns do not match roster records, please feel free to indicate that to the instructor. Also, chosen name and personal pronouns may evolve over time, so if at any point during the semester you would like to be addressed differently, please let the instructor know.

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

Because grades are partially based on participation, and because classroom discussions are enriched by a diversity of perspectives and experiences, the instructor is committed to ensuring each student feels safe and welcome to participate in the class. While we may discuss controversial issues, it is vital our discussions remain respectful and sensitive to avoid talking over, past, or down to one another, and to consider which voices might have historically been silenced and marginalized because of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, or disability.

## **Structure of the Course**

The course will be conducted via an Online Asynchronous format. Students are expected to watch all films and lectures and read all readings on their own time. Sessions will be recorded. They begin with a brief Question and Answer/ Announcements session, where technical aspects of the running of the course (due dates, postings on Brightspace, changes) will be communicated. (~5-10 mins.) If you have any technical questions about the class, please email me at [jantona2@binghamton.edu](mailto:jantona2@binghamton.edu).

After an initial Q&A, each week will begin by reviewing questions students post to forums- where the professor will answer questions and respond to comments- questions and comments on the

films and readings can range from: what surprised you? What interested you? What points require clarification? Where do you see connections between what we've read previously, either in this course or outside of it? Where so we think our discussion should go? (~15-30mins.)

Each session will then have a lecture, designed to identify points for further discussion, contextualize the readings, offer interpretations of them, and set- up a more focused discussion. (~45mins.)

## Assignments and Grading

### *List of Assignments with Breakdown \**

\* More detailed Assignment Overview Sheets will be provided

Each week, students will write a 2-page reflection paper on the topics and concepts covered throughout the respective weeks. For each week, students will be provided with a prompt, that provokes reflection based on the week's readings. Generally, each 2 page paper will ask you to connect what you have read in the texts and heard in the lectures to the films you watch. Our lectures will only cover the texts—it will be your job to watch the films, think and write about the connections you see, and articulate these ideas in the discussion forums and papers. **More detailed paper prompts will be provided for each of the 3 weeks of our class. Papers are due on the Sunday of each week.**

Participation will be evaluated through students' engagement with discussion forums. A discussion forum will be setup for each week, where students post questions and comments from the readings for discussion by the professor in the recorded lectures. Students are expected to post at least (but not limited to) once per week, each post either asking a question or making an observation about the films and/or texts that we engage with. **Discussion posts are due on the Friday of each week.**

## Final Grade Breakdown

Assignment 1.....	25%
Assignment 2.....	25%
Assignment 3.....	25%
Participation.....	15%
Attendance.....	10%

## Grading Scale

93-100% A	73-76.9 C
90-92.9 A-	70-72.9 C-
87-89.9 B+	67-69.9 D+
83-86.9 B	63-66.9 D
80-82.9 B-	60-62.9 D-
77-79.9 C+	> 60% F

## Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

As a composition course, one of the class's objectives is to have students engage with source material in effective and appropriate ways. This entails citing sources correctly in written form. Students are encouraged to ask questions about the citation process/ avoiding plagiarism. However, violation of the Academic Honesty Code, constitutes plagiarism, which can result in failure of the course or suspension from the University. [The Academic Honesty Code](#) defines *plagiarism* as:

Presenting the work of another person as one's own work (including papers, words, ideas, information, computer code, data, evidence-organizing principles, or style of presentation of someone else taken from the Internet, books, periodicals or other sources). This includes:

- quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing without acknowledgement, even a few phrases;
- failing to acknowledge the source of a major idea or ordering principle central to one's work;
- relying on another person's data, evidence or critical method without credit or permission;
- submitting another person's work as one's own or using unacknowledged research sources gathered by someone else. (<http://bulletin.binghamton.edu/integrity.htm>)

Although not plagiarism, even submitting a piece of your own writing that you've used in another class can be considered academically dishonest. It is your responsibility to ask your instructor questions before submitting anything you are not 100 percent sure of, related to concerns of academic honesty.

Important: The use of AI to write constitutes plagiarism in this class. I'll be using an AI detection software to check your papers. I want you to practice making sociological observations, and to practice being able to articulate them in your own words. AI makes this impossible.

## **Reading and Lecture Schedule\***

\*Subject to change- Any changes will be communicated via the “Announcements” feature on Brightspace.

### **Week #1- Class and Exploitation in Film**

**Film to Watch for the Week:**

*Modern Times* (1936)

Required Reading:

#### **Session 1- Monday: Syllabus and Course Introduction**

No Readings- Review Syllabus and Technical Details of the Course

#### **Session 2- Brief Introduction to Classical Sociological Theory**

No Readings- Watch lecture posted on Brightspace.

#### **Session 3- The Class Struggle**

Marx, Karl. 1848. “Ch. 1: Bourgeois and Proletarians” in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. PDF.

#### **Session 4- Industrial Production and the Working Day**

Marx, Karl. [1867] 1982. “The Working Day.” *Capital: Vol. 1*. New York, NY. Penguin. Pp. 340-416.

#### **Session 5- Asynchronous Review Session**

Email me with any questions/points you need clarified. Work on your papers and discussion posts.

**DISCUSSION POST 1 DUE- Friday, 22 December 11:59pm EST.**

**ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE- Sunday, 24 December 11:59pm EST.**

### **Week #2- Modern Life and Anomie in Film**

## **Films to Watch for the Week:**

*Chungking Express* (1994)

*Zootopia* (2016)

Required Reading:

### **Session 6- Modernity and Anomie**

Durkheim, Emile [1897] 1979. "Anomic Suicide" in *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. New York, NY. Free Press. Pp. 241-277.

### **Session 7- The Transition from Rural to Urban Life and the Transition to Modernity**

Tönnies, Ferdinand. [1887] 2013. "Community and Society" in *The Urban Sociology Reader*. J. Lin & C. Mele, eds. New York, NY. Routledge. Pp. 16-22.

### **Session 8- Urban Life and Anomie**

Simmel, Georg. [1903] 2013. "The Metropolis and Mental Life" in *The Urban Sociology Reader*. J. Lin & C. Mele, eds. New York, NY. Routledge. Pp. 23-31.

### **Session 9- Urbanization as a Mode of Life**

Brenner, Neil. 2017. "Cities for People, Not for Profit?" and "Planetary Urbanization" in *Critique of Urbanization*. Berlin, DE. Baurverlag. Pp. 147-157; 186-191.

### **Session 10- Asynchronous Review Session**

Email me with any questions/points you need clarified. Work on your papers and discussion posts.

**DISCUSSION POST 2 DUE Friday, 5 January, 11:59pm EST.**

**ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE- Sunday, 7 January, 11:59pm EST.**

## **Week #3- Bureaucracy and Disenchantment in Film**

## **Films to Watch for the Week:**

*Brazil* (1985)

*Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989)

Required Reading:

## **Session 11- Bureaucracy and Modernity**

Weber, Max. [1922] 1978. "Bureaucracy" in *Economy and Society*. Berkeley, CA. University of California Press. Pages TBD.

## **Session 12- Work and Bureaucracy**

Graeber, David. 2018. "What is a Bullshit Job" in *Bullshit Jobs*. New York, NY. Simon & Schuster. Pp. 1-26.

## **Session 13- Disenchantment in the Modern World**

Weber, Max. 1919. "Science as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. H.H. Gerth & C.W. Mills, eds. New York, NY. Oxford University Press. Pp. 129-156.

## **Session 14- Final Wrap-Up**

Final reflections on the course.

## **Session 15- Asynchronous Review Session**

Email me with any questions/points you need clarified. Work on papers and discussion posts.

**DISCUSSION POST 3 DUE- Friday, 12 January, 11:59pm EST.**

**ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE- Sunday, 14 January, 11:59pm EST.**