

ANTH 6010.090/RELS 6671.090/SOCY 6090.090  
**LE COLLÈGE DE SOCIOLOGIE**  
Tuesday, 6:30-9:15, Macy 110

Kent L. Brintnall, [kbrintna@uncc.edu](mailto:kbrintna@uncc.edu)  
Office Hours: Tuesday, 4:30-6:00PM, or by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The College of Sociology was a left-wing intellectual-political experiment in Paris from 1937-39, organized by avant-garde artists and Marxist social theorists Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, and Michel Leiris. The organizers were trying to develop a response to the rise of fascism, the horrors of Stalinist totalitarianism, the on-going alienations of capitalism, and the failures of Marxist agitation. Inspired in large part by the investigation of Emile Durkheim into “primitive” religions, they hoped to critique and revivify contemporary culture by returning to the sacred—after the death of God. The experiment, although short-lived, has on-going relevance for questions about the cultural operation of religion, the relation between the individual and the social order, the appeal of authoritarian political structures, the intractability of violence, and the political significance of art.

This course will give close and careful attention to the primary texts by the *Collège’s* organizers, works by their intellectual forebears, and secondary literature on this experiment. All texts will be read in English translation. It should be of interest to students in religious studies, sociology, anthropology, history, literary studies, and art history.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

Roger Caillois, *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. Claudine Frank (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*, trans. Meyer Barash (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001 [1939]).

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912).

Additional readings will be made available via e-mail.

***Please bring all assigned readings to the relevant class session.***

## **GENERAL RESPONSIBILITY**

***To succeed in this course, you must be proactive.*** This includes both doing the work outlined in the syllabus and taking initiative if problems arise. If you do not understand the material or my expectations, if life is impinging on you in some way, or if my teaching style is not working for you, let me know. I will not always be able to solve the problem, but I am completely unable to provide a remedy if I do not know one is needed.

***I want every student to succeed in this class.*** In selecting readings, crafting assignments, setting a schedule, I have tried to create a framework that will help you do your best work. In presenting material, articulating expectations, and responding to assignments, I strive to be clear. I will not, however, hunt you down or pester you to make sure you are doing what is required.

## **SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS**

You are expected to (1) attend, and be on time for, all class meetings; (2) read carefully all assigned readings prior to the class session for which they are assigned; (3) participate actively and productively in class discussions; (4) be familiar with the syllabus; (5) take responsibility for fulfilling all course requirements; and (6) check your NinerMail account regularly for communications from the instructor.

You are ***NOT*** expected to agree with the views espoused by the instructor, the course materials or other students; you are expected to manage any disagreement respectfully and productively.

## **ATTENDANCE**

As a graduate student, school should be your first priority. This means you should attend and be on time for all class meetings. Because life does not always accommodate our priorities, you will be given one excused absence for the semester. ***Every absence after that, for whatever reason, will result in a full letter deduction from your final grade for the course. Any two instances of arriving late or leaving early will count as an absence.*** If you are absent from class, you are responsible for getting any announcements, lecture notes, handouts or assignments.

The exception to this policy is absences necessitated by religious observance. You may miss two classes for religious observance, but you must provide me with written notice (which includes e-mail correspondence) of the class(es) you will miss for this reason no later than **Friday, January 25.**

## **ACCOMMODATION OF DISABILITIES**

If you have a disability that qualifies you for accommodations, please provide a letter from Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services ([www.ds.uncc.edu](http://www.ds.uncc.edu)).

## E-MAIL COMMUNICATION

I will communicate with you as a class and as individuals using your NinerMail (university e-mail) account. You are responsible for checking this account regularly and responding promptly to any requests. ***I will circulate readings for the course via e-mail. You are responsible for accessing these materials.***

## CLASS PREPARATION

Because this course focuses on close, critical analysis of difficult texts, you will need to devote sufficient time to preparing for class both to contribute to class discussion and to do well on assignments. You must read carefully prior to class taking note of the ideas and questions you want to bring to our collective conversation. At a minimum, you must be able to articulate the author's main points, summarize the evidence marshaled to support those points, characterize the chief rhetorical strategies employed and identify any notable short-comings in the analysis. You should also make sure that you have mastered any unfamiliar vocabulary and have investigated the relevant historical, cultural and intellectual background.

You should come to class having identified a few passages that struck you as particularly interesting, troubling, puzzling or generative. You should be prepared to discuss your reasons for selecting these passages and to guide your classmates through a consideration of the passage in relation both to the readings as a whole and the themes and questions of the course. ***All members of the seminar—students and instructor alike—are responsible for understanding, explaining, analyzing and teaching the material under discussion.***

We will not have time to discuss fully all of the assigned reading during class time. Our collective consideration should give you practice at engaging these texts, enhancing your ability to explore them more carefully and thoughtfully on your own. Our class meetings are an opportunity to deepen your understanding of, ask questions of, and develop ideas about the readings, as well as enhance your strategies and skills for analyzing them. Your written work provides further opportunities to demonstrate, develop and deepen this engagement.

## CLASS DECORUM

(1) Be on time for class. If you must arrive late or leave early, do so as unobtrusively as possible. (2) Strive to distract as little as possible from the business at hand: this includes eating and drinking, side conversations, getting situated at the beginning of class and after breaks, etc. (3) Phones should not be used *as phones* during class. If I observe you text-messaging during class, I may ask you to leave class and it will be counted as an absence. (4) Computers, electronic tablets and phones may be used during class only to take notes or read electronic readings. If I observe you using these devices for any other purpose, I may ask you to leave, it will be counted as an absence, ***and it will jeopardize use of such devices for the remainder of the semester for all students in the course.***

## DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Consistent with the University's commitment to inclusivity, I pledge to do my best to run the class in a manner that is respectful of difference, including but not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, body size, religious identity, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. You are expected to be respectful of these differences in your conduct in class and on campus.

As future members of the academy, you should write in a way that recognizes diversity. In other words, you should strive, at the very least, to use gender-inclusive language and also to be mindful of metaphors that may have problematic racial, ethnic, class, sexual or (dis)ability connotations.

## SCHEDULE

### 1.15 INTRODUCTION TO THE *COLLÈGE* AND COURSE

"Note on the Foundation of a College of Sociology," in *The College of Sociology, 1937-39*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing, 5 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 [1937]).

1.22 "Introduction" (Roger Caillois), "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" (Georges Bataille), "The Sacred in Everyday Life" (Michel Leiris), "The Winter Wind" (Roger Caillois), in *The College of Sociology, 1937-39*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing, 7-42 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 [1938]).

1.29 "Sacred Sociology and the Relationships between 'Society,' 'Organism,' and 'Being'" (Georges Bataille and Roger Caillois), "Attraction and Repulsion," (Georges Bataille), and "Power" (Roger Caillois), in *The College of Sociology, 1937-39*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing, 73-84, 103-36 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 [1937-38]).

Georges Bataille, "The Moral Meaning of Sociology," in *Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, ed. and trans. Michael Richardson, 103-12 (New York: Verso, 1994 [1946]).

2.5 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Introduction, Book I, chapters 1 and 4; Book II, chapters 1-4, 6-7

2.12 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Book III and Conclusion

**2.19** Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. XVIII, 69-143 (1961 [1921]).

Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," in *Visions of Excess*

"Declaration of the College of Sociology on the International Crisis," "The Structure and Function of the Army" (Georges Bataille) and "Brotherhoods, Orders, Secret Societies, Churches" (Roger Caillois) in *The College of Sociology, 1937-39*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing, 137-56 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988 [1938]).

Caillois, "The Nature and Structure of Totalitarian Regimes," in *Edge of Surrealism*

**2.26** Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*

Georges Bataille, "War and the Philosophy of the Sacred," in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, ed. and trans. Michael Richardson, 113-26 (New York: Verso, 1994 [1951]).

**\*\*\*First essay due by noon, Thursday, February 28.**

**3.5 SPRING BREAK – No Class**

**3.12** Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1989 [1948]), 9-61.

Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," "Sacrifices," and "The Sacred," in *Visions of Excess*.

**3.19 PROFESSOR IN BOSTON -- No Class**

**3.26 STUDENT PRESENTATIONS** (See Assignments: Book Presentation)

**4.9** André Breton, "What is Surrealism?"

Bataille, "The 'Old Mole'" and "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," in *Visions of Excess*

Georges Bataille, "The Surrealist Religion," in *Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, ed. and trans. Michael Richardson, 34-47, 71-90 (New York: Verso, 1994 [1948]).

"The Marquis de Sade and the Revolution" (Pierre Klossowski), in *The College of Sociology*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing, 218-32 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 [1939]).

**4.16** Caillois, "The Praying Mantis," "The Function of Myth," "For a Militant Orthodoxy," "Interview with Gilles Lapouge," "Dionysian Virtues," "Aggressiveness as a Value," "Sociology of the Intellectual," in *Edge of Surrealism*

- 4.23** Michel Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, trans. Paul Hammond (London: Atlas Press, 2007 [1938]).  
Roger Caillois, "The Sociology of the Executioner," in *The College of Sociology, 1937-39*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing, 233-47 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 [1939]).  
Georges Bataille, "Reflections on the Executioner and the Victim," trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991 [1948]): 15-19.  
Georges Bataille, "Concerning the Accounts Given by the Residents of Hiroshima," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth, trans. Alan Keenan, 221-35 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995 [1947]).
- 4.30** Bataille, "Sacrificial Mutilation," "The Practice of Joy before Death," and "The College of Sociology," in *Visions of Excess*  
Georges Bataille, "Joy in the Face of Death" in *The College of Sociology, 1937-39*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing, 322-28 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 [1938-39]).  
Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. Bruce Boone, 11-48 (San Francisco: Lapis Press, 1988 [1939-40]).

**\*\*\*Second essay due by noon, Thursday, May 2.**

**FINAL EXAM MEETING: Tuesday, May 7, 8-10PM**

**\*\*\*Final Paper due by noon, Thursday, May 9.**

## ASSIGNMENTS

You must submit all assignments by e-mail (kbrintna@uncc.edu). If I am unable to open your attachment, I will notify you by replying to the address from which you have submitted the assignment. If you do not submit a readable version within 24 hours, I will grade the assignment at my discretion. All assignments must be double-spaced, in a 12-point font, with one-inch margins and no extra spaces between paragraphs. **No late papers will be accepted.**

### Essays (20%; 10% each)

You must write **two (2)** 4-6 page essays. **The first is due by noon on Thursday, February 28; the second is due by noon on Thursday, May 2nd.** These essays should focus on one or two specific passages from the reading to develop a particular theme, question or idea that you find interesting, troubling, puzzling or generative. This assignment is designed to help you begin sketching the topic(s) you will pursue in your final paper. You should use these essays as an opportunity to develop your own voice in relation to the voices of the *Collège*. You are strongly encouraged to return to the same idea, or small set of related ideas, across the essays, developing and expanding it/them as you engage a broader range of materials. Taken as a whole, your essays should balance exposition, interpretation, analysis, argument, and critique.

### Book Presentation (20%)

You must write a 4-6 page summary of a book that discusses the *Collège* and make a presentation about the book to the class. **This essay is due the day of the presentation, Tuesday, March 26.** This assignment is designed to give you an overview of the *Collège* and its context. You may choose from the following books. Only one student may present on each book.

Richman, Michèle H. *Sacred Revolutions: Durkheim and the Collège de Sociologie*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Falasca-Zamponi, Simonetta. *Rethinking the Political: The Sacred, Aesthetic Politics, and the Collège de Sociologie*. Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011.

Miller, Willie Watts and Susan Stedman Jones. *The Durkheimian Quest: In Search of Solidarity and the Sacred*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

Irwin, Alexander. *Saints of the Impossible: Bataille, Weil, and the Politics of the Sacred*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Biles, Jeremy. *Ecce Monstrum: Georges Bataille and the Sacrifice of Form*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

### Final Paper (60%)

You must write a 20-25 page paper at the end of the semester. **This paper is due by noon, Thursday, May 9.** Although this paper may return to ideas explored in your essays, it must be more than a summation of prior work. Ideally, you should produce a publishable piece of original scholarship that engages the work of the *Collège* in a sophisticated, meaningful, and substantial way.

## GRADING

In grading your assignments, I will use the following criteria:

- (1) Is the work satisfactory as an *expository* exercise? Does it summarize accurately the material under consideration? Does it give attention to the most relevant and important ideas? Does it characterize fairly and engage sympathetically ideas with which it disagrees? Does it consider a sufficient range of sources?
- (2) Is the work satisfactory as an *analytical* exercise? Does it have a clear thesis or central claim(s)? Is it expressed and organized in a persuasive manner? Does it evince intellectual engagement beyond summation and exposition? Does it engage questions, themes and ideas relevant to the course? Does it extend consideration of course materials beyond class discussion?
- (3) Is the work satisfactory as a *writing* exercise? Is it free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors? Does it provide accurate and adequate citations? Does it demonstrate some attention to rhetorical stylization?

Ideally, as a graduate student, your work should open up some new dimension of—i.e., teach me something about—the material. At a minimum, it must summarize the materials accurately, clearly and completely and present an analysis (evaluation, critique, application, extension) that engages the course’s themes and questions.

As a graduate student, your writing should be ***absolutely free*** of spelling, grammar, stylistic and citation mistakes. Your reader cannot engage your ideas if she or he is distracted by problems in your writing. ***If I find myself spending too much time copy-editing your work, I will deduct a letter grade, return it without comment and give you 24 hours to submit a revised version. If I find spelling errors that could have been caught by spell-check, I will give the paper a U and return it without comment.***

You must follow Turabian’s *Manual of Style*, 7th ed., for questions of grammar, style and citation form. Two additional style rules that will apply to assignments for this course:

- (1) Do not use “you” in formal writing.  
Incorrect: “This passage in Bataille makes you feel confused and disoriented.”  
Correct: “This passage in Bataille makes the reader feel confused and disoriented.”
- (2) Do not use contractions in formal writing.

Your writing should privilege depth over breadth. It is better to address a small point, and do it well, than to try something grand, and do it superficially. There is no expectation, in this class or the world, that you be exhaustive. Instead, you should frame a question well, engage texts attentively, represent others’ ideas accurately, explain your own thinking clearly, and write in an engaging, rhetorically sensitive manner.



You should consider issues beyond proofreading and clarity of expression. You should also think about rhetoric, form and style. You should be attentive to how you organize an essay, how you begin and end a paper, how you express yourself (from word choice to examples to metaphors), how use quotations, and how you vary the length and complexity of sentences and paragraphs. While I do not expect you to imitate the style(s) of any of authors from this course in any specific way, you should pay attention to what you like and dislike in their writing, what you think works and what you think fails, and try to incorporate that knowing into your own writing. In other words, you should read course materials not only to gain ideas, but also to glean insights about how you want to express ideas.

***Remember, you will not be in the room when I am reading your work: what you put on the page must be a clear, complete and precise statement of your ideas.***

\* \* \* \* \*

***Finally, you should familiarize yourself with and conform your conduct to the University's Code of Student Academic Integrity. Plagiarism on any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course.***

\* \* \* \* \*

## **GRADE DESCRIPTIONS**

Grades are not a judgment on you as a person or an evaluation of your *overall* capacity to perform academic work. They are a way of communicating how one particular assignment reflects analytical skills and writing ability with respect to a specific set of materials and questions. The range of grades used in graduate courses at UNC Charlotte is A (commendable), B (satisfactory), C (marginal), and U (unsatisfactory).

- A** Exceptional work. Evinces exhaustive preparation and thoughtful engagement in every aspect of the assignment. Careful, accurate, complete, sympathetic interpretation of material and presentation of ideas. General observations supported by specific, concrete detail. Contains a strong, clear thesis. Contributes something interesting, unique or creative beyond class discussion. Clear, well-organized writing free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors. ***At the graduate level, an A indicates you have demonstrated the analytical and writing skills needed to succeed in the academy by comprehending difficult concepts, generating engaging questions and expressing yourself clearly and cleanly.***
- B** Strong work. Attentive to the most significant details of the material under consideration. Conversant with the course's themes and questions. Expresses an obvious main point. Presents a reasonable interpretation supported by sufficient evidence. Clear, well-organized writing free of serious grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors. ***At the graduate level, a B indicates you must develop and refine your skills to succeed in the academy. Most A-level undergraduate work is B-level graduate work.***

- C** Inadequate work. Contains inaccurate or inadequate explanations of material under consideration. Shows inadequate comprehension of or engagement with the course's themes and questions. Unclear or unsupported thesis. Analysis too general and lacks adequate support. Writing unclear, unstructured or with numerous grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors. Failure to improve analytic precision or clarity of expression over previous assignments. ***At the graduate level, a C indicates that you have not demonstrated the skills essential to success in the academy. It is the equivalent of a D or F in undergraduate study.***
- U** Unacceptable work. Analysis too general, without support. Significant details presented inaccurately or overlooked; ideas that conflict with the paper's main point not considered. Discussion fails to engage course materials, questions or themes. Significant problems with the clarity or organization of the writing. Significant issues with grammar, spelling or style. Failure to address serious problems identified in prior assignments. ***A U indicates that success in the academy is out of the question with existing skills.***

One final grade of C automatically generates a written warning from the Dean of the Graduate School and may preclude further graduate work; a second C is sufficient grounds for permanent dismissal from the program.

The receipt of a U in any single graduate course while at UNC Charlotte results in immediate academic suspension, which effectively ends your graduate career at this institution.

***If you come to class, participate in discussion, work hard on your assignments and improve over the course of the semester, I will take that into consideration when translating your individual assignment grades into a course grade.***