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Survey of the Sociology of Art

Takeshi Yamagishi

I may define the sociology of art as follows: The sociology of art is a science which reveals the social structure, social function, and styles of art in relation to social structure, social change, cultural structure, and cultural change.

In a sense the sociology of art which is a branch of the sociology of culture may be the sociology of symbols or the sociology of communication.

Sociologists have been slow in recognizing the significance of art as a social phenomenon. The sociological study of art is comparatively new and its achievements are modest but the sociology of art may contribute to the understanding of social structure, social change, cultural structure, and cultural change.

For example we can recognize a sociological approach to art in works of H. Taine, E. Grosse, J. M. Guyau, H. Spencer, M. Weber, P. A. Sorokin, T. Parsons, R. Mukerjee, and H. D. Duncan.

Art is neither an escape from reality nor a mere play, but is essentially a revealing interpretation of certain aspects of human life and the contemporary social environment. Art is not only a mode of apprehension and communication but also a social product and an established means of social control. Art has both aesthetic and non-aesthetic functions.

Future studies in the sociology of art can be achieved by an analysis of (1) the social structure of art, for example including the interrelation between the artist and his public; (2) the social function of art; and (3) the form, motif and theme of art in relation to the social historical setting.

We may establish a general theory of the sociology of art through

a sociological study of music (the sociology of music), of film art (the sociology of film art), and of architecture (the sociology of architecture) etc.