

Call for Abstracts

Cultural Sociology

Special Issue

Revisiting Janet Wolff: Affinities between Art History and Sociology

Guest Editors: Maria Rovisco (University of Leeds, UK), Laura Harris (University of Southampton, UK) and Linzhi Zhang (University of Cambridge, UK)

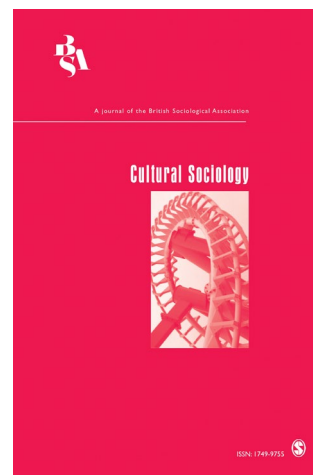
Deadline for submission of abstracts: 16 September 2025

This special issue seeks to articulate the affinities between sociological and art historical approaches to the study of artworks and art making, such that a disciplinary divide holds. It is inspired by the career and work of Janet Wolff, which was celebrated in the event 'The Social Production of Art Today: Revisiting Janet Wolff' held in June 2024. The editors argue that Wolff's complex and rich corpus capitalises on the affinities between the two disciplines, and that this great legacy of her work has yet to be fully embraced within sociology. Wolff's work has been unduly eclipsed in the teaching of the sociology of art in UK institutions, and this Special Issue is intended to both remedy this, and to understand how it came to be.

Wolff's institutional and personal trajectory has straddled sociology and art history. Her landmark book, *The Social Production of Art* (1981), was composed in the 1970s in the North of England. It was firmly rooted in Marxist traditions within sociology and the nascent Cultural Studies that she was exposed to. However, in the 1980s Wolff's disciplinary association shifted from sociology to art history as she moved to the West Coast of the USA in search of a more hospitable home for the interdisciplinary work she pursued. Wolff's refashioning as an art historian cemented her interests in subjectivity, the concrete detail as a legitimate focus in social analysis, and the marginality of feminist writing (Wolff, 1995). Despite her encounters with, and embedding in, the humanities, Wolff maintained her sociological focus, proposing in her 1995 book *Resident Alien: Feminist Cultural Criticism* a shift towards what she calls a 'sociology of creativity.' In *Resident Alien*, she also reflects on her own journeys between countries and disciplines. This sets a precedent for later work, where she turned to memoir in her exploration of the intersection of the personal, the political, and the cultural.

In *The Social Production of Art*, Wolff stated apologetically that 'this book fails to provide a Marxist-feminist sociology of art.' She went on to correct this deficit in later work. In *Feminine Sentences* (1990), Wolff challenged the male-centred concept of modernity in literature by discussing women's construction of identities in a patriarchal culture through the process of writing. The feminist gaze was also applied to her study of painting and modernity in *AngloModern* (2003). Alongside her disciplinary transgressiveness, this Special Issue will draw out the important feminist legacies of Wolff's work.

This Special Issue proposes to do two things. The first is to articulate the affinities between sociological and art historical approaches to the study of artworks and art making, inspired



and informed by the work of Wolff. Her feminist legacies are vital to this. The second is to ask critical (and feminist) questions around how sociological knowledge concerning the arts is produced and institutionalised that might be inspired, for example, by Wolff's professional biography. Through this, the editors hope to solidify Wolff's status as a vital figure in the social analysis of art, to understand the forces that shape that field, and to nurture the disciplinary intersection between sociology and art history where she made her most inspiring contributions.

Papers are solicited which address, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Wolff as a primary theorist in contemporary sociologies of art/ social and cultural analysis that explicitly mobilises the concepts and methodological tools from across her corpus;
- Feminist cultural criticism that explicitly draws on Wolff, or that expands her work for the purposes of intersectionality;
- Critical and interpretive reading of cultural objects (e.g., visual and literary texts, films, visual artworks, photographs) that builds upon Wolff's intellectual legacy;
- The production and institutionalisation of sociological knowledge concerning the arts, informed by Wolff's trajectory.

We welcome papers from **any discipline**, including sociology, cultural studies, art history, art theory, and beyond.

Instructions for authors

Please submit an extended abstract of 500 words. The abstract should engage directly with the Special Issue themes; state what examples/art forms are used (if any); state if images are used, and if so, how many. Abstracts should be submitted **by 16 September 2015**. **Decisions will be communicated to authors in mid-October 2015.** Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be invited to submit full papers which will undergo a fully anonymised peer review process to reflect the quality standards of *Cultural Sociology* and the BSA. Being invited to submit a full paper does not guarantee publication in the issue, as acceptance is dependent on the peer review process.

Submissions should be sent to the Editors through the *Cultural Sociology* Editorial Office by emailing Selina Hisir at selina.hisir@brisoc.org.uk

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 16 September 2015

Decisions on abstracts communicated to accepted authors: mid-October 2015

Submission of full papers: 14 April 2016

For any additional information or questions regarding the issue, please contact the guest editors: Maria Rovisco (M.Rovisco@leeds.ac.uk), Laura Harris (L.Harris@soton.ac.uk) and Linzhi Zhang (lz337@cam.ac.uk).

For queries about submission, please contact the *Cultural Sociology* Editorial Office by emailing Selina Hisir (selina.hisir@britsoc.org.uk).

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