

ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Sociology 4033 – Advanced Sociological Theory, Fall 2023

Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00-11:20AM, MMH 202

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Office hours: by appointment via Zoom (email to schedule a meeting)

Course Description

This class in sociological theory will explore key themes in our discipline and prepare you for more advanced study in sociology at the graduate level. It will also help students think about contemporary social problems from a sociological perspective. We will be picking up the key theme of modernity in sociological theory, and reflecting on contemporary society as we see it today. This class is taking place against the backdrop of momentous historical change: the mutation of neoliberal capitalism into something entirely new and more unequal; the largest land war in Europe since 1945; a pandemic that has killed millions of people; a new economic landscape marked by the highest inflation and interest rates in decades; a global affordable housing crisis; an ecological emergency that we seem unable to address without destroying our economy; and the continuing permutations of global inequalities that warp global social relations and that pervade understandings of global society, particularly amongst relatively privileged social groups. We are living through what the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci called an ‘organic crisis,’ the complete upending of our cultural, political, economic, and even environmental ways of life. From this, something new must come, perhaps better, but maybe worse.

Our main task in the class will be to acquire a greater understanding of how modern societies work, and how to situate ourselves within them. What are the key objects we study when we study sociology? What are we supposed to pay attention to? Why is sociology also so often a normative discipline—in other words, it doesn’t just describe social reality, but also engages in debates about how society should be different than it is. This latter point is particularly important given our current historical moment. Readings for the class focus on theoretical approaches that interpret our modernity and give us a better sense of where we have come from, who we are, and where we might be going.

Learning Outcomes

After this class, you will have acquired:

- A better understanding of modernity and the forces shaping modern society;
- An ability to connect ideas from classical sociology with more contemporary

- theoretical approaches and debates;
- An ability to explain key concepts and connect them to contemporary events;
- An appreciation for the linkages between material changes in capitalism and cultural changes in norms and values

How will the course be run? COVID MEASURES

Unfortunately, the SARS-2 pandemic is not over—particularly in my household, which has an immuno-compromised member. If you are feeling sick (even if you are sure it is just allergies or a normal cold), please do not come to class. I will help you catch up later if need be. Your age group is not generally at serious risk of “severe disease” from acute COVID-19, but you are at risk of developing long-term symptoms of Long-Covid, such as chronic fatigue, which effects a significant portion of mild cases. With two substantially new variants in circulation this fall (EG.5 and BA.2.86), even those of you with the most up to date vaccines or recent infections are prone to further infection, and there is evidence that subsequent infections are worse for you. So be careful. Members of my family are at higher risk of severe outcomes—including Long Covid—and therefore I am requesting that we all mask while in class.

Experts expect a new Covid wave this fall, but there is still disagreement as to whether it will rival the one from 2021-22. In the event of severe levels of community transmission (or in the event that several members of the class are absent due to illness), it is possible that we will opt to meet online. In that event, our classes will take place synchronously, at the regular time via Teams. If you are not well enough to come to class, but are well enough to participate via Teams, it is easy to arrange your participation in class if you can inform me of your intention to participate remotely at least 12h beforehand. I will do my best to accommodate you at the last minute as well, but it will depend on whether I receive your message in time.

Office meetings are also online, or outdoors after class. Please email me to arrange a time. I am always available to meet one on one over the internet. I will also field questions over email.

Course Material

Pierre Bourdieu. 1984. *Distinction : A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge.

This book is available from online booksellers. Two copies are available in the HIL, and other copies can be borrowed through document delivery.

Bellah, Robert, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton. 1985. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*.

Used copies of this book are not hard to find for less than \$10, but it is also available from the HIL. I will also post parts of the readings on moodle.

Coulthard, Glen. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks*, University of Minnesota Press.

Joe Sacco. 2020. *Paying the Land*. Macmillan.

This is a graphic ethnography available from your favourite online or in-person bookseller. You will need it by reading break in November.

All other course texts are available on Moodle.

Full bibliographic information for course readings is provided below.

Assessment:

Participation: 10%

In class Mid-term, October 19th : 30%

The mid-term will be composed of two questions on material from weeks 1-6.

November essay assignment, due Nov. 30th: 20%

The assignment will ask you to relate material from Part V of the course to Joe Sacco's exploration of colonialism in Dene territory, a land we also call the Northwest Territories. **You will be asked to write a 4-5 page paper** taking up key concepts and discussing them in relation to the characters and situations introduced to us by Joe Sacco.

Final sit-down exam, Tuesday, December 12th, 9AM: 40%

Plagiarism

Please abide by St. Thomas's policy on academic honesty. Anti-plagiarism software will be used in this class. In a fourth-year course, cases of plagiarism from the internet or from other sources will be dealt with rigorously. If you are in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me or consult the academic honesty guidelines in the STU calendar. If you need extra time to finish assignments, please contact me.

AI

There will be no use of AI permitted for course assignments in this class.

Readings:

PART I – Beyond Marx

Weeks 1 and 2: David Harvey, Culture and Capitalism (September 7, 12, 14)

Harvey, David. 1990. "The Political-economic transformation of late twentieth-century capitalism," in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, pp. 121-197.

This week we will look at Marxist structuralist explorations of cultural change through an exploration of the work of Marxist geographer David Harvey. Harvey's work will enable us also to engage with a broader literature of critical sociology, especially the French regulation school, which attempted to think through transformations of capitalism that were occurring in the 1980s and 1990s. Harvey will enable us to better understand what 'neoliberalism' is about, and how it shapes the world we live in today.

Keywords: regime of accumulation; mode of regulation; Fordism; Taylorism; Keynesianism; flexible accumulation

PART II: Beyond Marx and Weber

Weeks 3 and 4: Ulrich Beck and Risk Society (September 19 and 21)

Beck, Ulrich. 1992. [1986] *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London: Sage.
Ch 1: On the Logic of Wealth Distribution and Risk Distribution., pp. 19-50.
Ch. 7: **Science Beyond Truth and Enlightenment, pp. 155-182.**

We look at the risks of industrial society and how these change the contours of modernity and modernization, as they have been understood by the classics of sociological theory. The development of this type of society is a major factor determining the condition of our social lives today and well into the future. We will also discuss the global challenge of carbon pollution, and how this brings into being a new type of global society, calling for new political agents of change.

Keywords: Risk; risk distribution; risk tolerance.

Weeks 5, and 6: Pierre Bourdieu and Field Theory (September 26 and 28, October 3 and 5)

Ritzer, George and Douglas J. Goodman. 2004. "Habitus and Field," in *Modern Sociological Theory*, 6th edition. Boston: McGraw Hill, pp. 387-398.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1986) 'The Forms of Capital' in Richardson (ed) *The Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241-258.

From *Distinction*:

1. Bourdieu, Pierre (1984) The Social Space and its Transformation, *Distinction*, Chs 2-3: pp. 93-108; 122-123; 162-163; pp. 165-171.

2. Ch. 4, The Dynamics of the Fields: 223-254. Ch. 7, The Choice of the Necessary, pp. 375-385.
3. Selections (empirical interview transcripts from the book), Ch. 5: 271-275 (the grand bourgeois). Contrast with pp. 392-394 (the effects of working for somebody else).

Bourdieu's work is paramount to modern sociological theory, and particularly to attempts to bridge critical sociology to empirical research on inequalities. We will study his main concepts of social field and habitus and discuss in detail how our own lives are wrapped up with economic, cultural and social capital, symbolic power, and social distance. We will also look at how the Oedipal Complex plays out in a society rapidly changing in terms of distribution of capitals and opportunities for social mobility. We will try to use these ideas to understand the contemporary social and political scene.

Keywords: field; habitus; capital; symbolic space; practice; distinction.

PART III: Topics in Contemporary Feminism Beyond the Second Wave

Week 7: Capitalism and Care, (October 10 and 12)

Fraser, Nancy. 2016. Contradictions of Capital and Care. *New Left Review* 100, pp. 99-117.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2003. "The Culture of Politics," in *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes From Home and Work*, pp. 213-223.

Feminist sociological theory has followed several lines of inquiry, but one important one that we will touch on briefly in this class is the historical transformation of gender relations, the social power of women, and of capitalism implicit in the mass integration of women across much of the world into the paid, capitalist labour force, beginning in the 1970s. Of particular importance to us here is the impact this development has had on traditions of care, which had been feminized in earlier phases of capitalism, and as a result of patriarchal traditions in much of the world.

Week 8: Judith Butler, Post-structural feminist critiques of gender (October 17)

Butler, J. 2004. Gender Regulations, in *Undoing Gender*, pp. 40-56. Routledge.

This week we look at Judith Butler's work on gender, and how it situates itself within broader debates about subjectivity and personhood. It will be a short but hopefully productive introduction to one of sociology's most important thinkers.

Keywords: Performativity; Regulation(s); Subjectivation; Sex

OCTOBER 19: In-Class mid-term exam

The exam will incorporate all material from weeks 1-7. To study for this exam, concentrate on key concepts from readings and seminar discussions/lectures.

Week 9: Raewyn Connell, *Gender* (October 24 and 26)

Connell, Raewyn. 2009. Gender relations, in *Gender: Short Introductions*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, pp. 72-93.

Connell, R.W. 2005. The Social Organization of Masculinity, in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, edited by C. McCann and S.-K. Kim, pp. 232-243.

Demetriou, Demetrakis. 2001. Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique. *Theory and Society* 30(3): 337-361.

This week we will be looking at Connell's work on gender orders in global perspective, looking at how organizations, but also global politics, are shaped by particular discourses and practices that perform a gendered social order.

Keywords: gender regime; gender order; gender ideologies; masculinity; hegemonic masculinity

PART IV: Beyond Durkheim

Week 10: Cultural Sociology and Individualism in Contemporary American Life (October 31 and November 2)

Bellah, Robert, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton. 1985. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, New York: Perennial, pp. 3-51, and 85-112.

This week applies a sociological imagination to cultural life, and to the ways individuals justify and make sense of their dispositions and actions. We will engage with American cultural sociology. As an example of this work, we will historicize our own individualism, and our attachment to particular types of individual projects and individualistic ways of living with the help of Robert Bellah's classic work. This week, students will learn to identify different forms of individualism present in the arguments in favour of vaccine mandates, as well as anti-vaxxers and those opposed to mask mandates.

Keywords: Religious individualism; republican individualism; utilitarian individualism; expressive individualism; therapeutic self

READING BREAK November 6-11

Week 11: Jeff Alexander, Cultural Sociology and Cultural Trauma (November 14 and 16)

Alexander, Jeff. 2004. Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by J. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N. Smelser and P. Sztompka. University of California Press, pp. 1-30. (This reading is available as an e-book through the HIL library)

Alexander, Jeff. 2016. Cultural trauma, morality and solidarity: The social construction of the 'Holocaust' and other mass murders. *Thesis Eleven* 132(1): 3-16.

Additional reading from *The Cultural Trauma of Decolonization: Colonial Returnees and the National Imagination*, by Ron Eyerman and Giuseppe Sciortino. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Jeff Alexander is the leading theorist of cultural sociology, an approach that builds on Emile Durkheim's key concepts of solidarity and collective effervescence. We will be thinking about Alexander's work on the cultural understandings of the Holocaust and their importance to post-World War II international human rights regimes and global societal democratization. We will also explore how his cultural sociology might help us understand the trauma process that Canada is now entering.

Keywords: Cultural trauma; trauma process; solidarity; radical evil; inclusion/exclusion; responsibility; circle of the we

PART V: Into Classical Theory's Colonial and Imperial Blind Spots

Accompanying this section of the course, we will read Joe Sacco's 2020 graphic ethnography, *Paying the Land*.

Week 12: Glen Coultard and the critique of colonial Canada (November 21 and 23)

Coultard, Glen. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks*, University of Minnesota Press. Chs 1, 2 and 5, pp. 25-78 and 131-150.

(optional: Coulthard, the whole book, starting from the introduction, esp. pp. 1-17)

A sociological imagination has a starting point or position. What of ours? Where are we? Who are we? Is the place we think we speak from—Canada—more an illusion of Eurocentric forms of social organization than of a shared and welcoming community? This week draws our attention to Coultard's critique of Canadian imperialism in the Northwest Territories, where colonization began in earnest in the 1950s and 60s. We will read about the land of the Dene, and attempt to understand modernity and modernization from their standpoint.

To accompany the Coultard reading, we will also be reading Joe Sacco's graphic ethnography, *Paying the Land*, which will take us to the Northwest Territories, to explore

how Dene in the Mackenzie Valley interpret the transformation that has taken place on their territory and in their lives. Together, these readings provide us with a standpoint for reconsidering what Canada is, as well as the ongoing settler colonialism in New Brunswick and what that means from different social positions here.

Keywords: recognition; decolonization; extractivism; essentialism / anti-essentialism

Week 13: Aníbal Quijano and the critique of Eurocentrism (November 28 and 30)

Quijano, Anibal (2000) "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and America." *Neplanta: Views from the South* 1(3): 533-574.

This week looks at the work of the Peruvian social theorist Anibal Quijano. Quijano draws our attention towards how modernity and the modern project of emancipation through reason were deeply affected by the European societies from which they sprung. Contemporary relations of domination are, in part, the offspring of the original colonial experience, and the way in which colonizers misrepresented and misunderstood the places and people they came to conquer. The structures of colonial extraction that came out of the colonial experience eventually ricocheted throughout the world, undermining previous social structures and establishing a new logic of individual orientation to the world: a Eurocentric, individualistic orientation, deprived of the insights of other worldviews.

Keywords: coloniality of power; eurocentrism; race; evolutionism and dualism

Week 14: Gurminder Bhambra's Connected Sociologies (December 5 and 7)

Bhambra, Gurminder K and John Holmwood. 2021. *Colonialism and Modern Social Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, pp. 1-24.

Bhambra, Gurminder K. 2014. Introduction. *Connected Sociologies*. University of Bristol Press, pp. 1-14.

Bhambra is at the forefront of scholars rethinking sociology from a global perspective, one that acknowledges empire and colonialism, which have for so long been taboo topics in the sociological canon. In the process, we uncover a different narrative of sociology and the societies and social relations we are trying to uncover.

Keywords: Connected histories; modernity