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Lecture/Discussion: **Faner 3410**  
Ws, 6:00-8:40 PM  
Office Hours: T+TH, 2:00-4:30 PM,  
W, 3:00-4:00 PM,  
and by appointment

**Theory and Society:**  
**A Survey of Contemporary Sociological Theories**

“The study of Sociology ... is an effort to understand ourselves in the hope that self-enlightenment will lead to improved lives.”

**Anthony Giddens**

“Theory is [used] to challenge the givenness of the social world ... to enable researchers to see new problems and new facts ... to theorize is to open vistas of understanding.”

**Craig Calhoun**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This is the second semester of a two-semester sequence in social theory. It provides an introduction to Contemporary Sociological Theories. It is intended to give students a broad understanding of theoretical issues and questions on society.

Overall, the course has the following objectives:

- To explore the ways contemporary sociological theory has been defined, interpreted, and developed by various theorists
- To examine the relationship between classical and contemporary theories
- To reflect on the uses, making-processes, and socio-historical contexts of theory itself
- To facilitate the development of critical and theoretical “thinking” about the relationship between personal experiences, social conditions, and the social processes through which these are constituted.
- To (re)activate our sociological imaginations in challenging ways so as to encourage thoughtful sociological research and open ourselves to new developments and possibilities.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

- *Sociological Theory* by George Ritzer
- *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* by Herbert Marcuse
- *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* by Erving Goffman
- *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* by Patricia Hill Collins
- *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva
- *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* by Anthony Giddens
- *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* by Michel Foucault
- *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, Volume I* by Manuel Castells
- *New Tech, New Ties: How Mobile Communication Is Reshaping Social Cohesion* by Rich Ling

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

- Several articles have been assigned to accompany some of the course themes.
- Other reading material will be made available for the seminar, should we collectively decide to include these.

**SOME RECOMMENDED TEXTS** (*For your Future Explorations*)

- *Critical Social Theory* by Craig Calhoun
- *Latin America and Global Capitalism: A Critical Globalization Perspective* by William Robinson
- *The Great Transformation* by Karl Polanyi
- *The Constitution of Society* (1984) by Anthony Giddens
- *The Social Construction of Reality* by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann
- *The Logic of Practice* by Pierre Bourdieu
- *Marxism and ideology* by Jorge Larraín
- *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* by Michel Foucault
- *Discipline and Punish* by Michel Foucault
- *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler
- *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* by Jürgen Habermas
- *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* by Fredric Jameson
- *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1989) by Jean-François Lyotard.

**REQUIREMENTS**

This course will be run as a graduate seminar, with full student participation and some lecturing by the instructor. You are required to engage in the careful reading / analysis of theoretical material and to come prepared to have meaningful discussions on the issues and questions at stake in the various theoretical readings we will be covering. Students will be responsible for leading class discussion each week, starting on Week II.

There is a considerable amount of reading to be covered during the semester, some of which is difficult. Working collectively, however, should make it a worthwhile endeavor. Please remember that it is normal to feel overwhelmed. You will “get” some of the material, and some of it you will not. This is expected. The point is that engaging with it will provide you with a good foundation from which you can negotiate your future theoretical readings. I urge to do as much reading and note-taking as you can. I also encourage you to think of our community as a source for the continued formation of your intellectual self. These approaches to learning will make for a better course experience and optimal course performance.

In addition to completing the assigned readings and presenting on these, you will be required to prepare 3 “Reaction Memos” based on the original texts and the readings under discussion. Briefly, **Reaction Memos** should assess the reading in question. This would consist of a critical evaluation of the ideas, themes, and arguments in the latter material and how it may relate to other readings. What this means is that your **Reaction Memos** should be analytical and critical; they should be more than description. Elaborate your thoughts/position as you react to the reading -- don't just provide descriptions – and connect it to the ideas, themes, and arguments discussed in the seminar setting. Your perspectives on the ideas/concepts presented in the course and your ability to organize and support your opinions in writing are important components of your development as a graduate student. Professor of Sociology William Roy from the University of California at Los Angeles recommends the following:

A Reaction [Memo] should share a thought or reflection that the student had about the readings ... for example, how the readings shared a common theme, an issue that was debated in the readings, a methodological difference or similarity, a conceptual development over time reflected in the readings, etc. (Roy 2003).

**Reactions Memos** should be at least 1.5 and not longer than 3 single spaced pp. They are intended to help you prepare for class discussions. These memos are also a venue for the further development of your critical thinking and writing skills. Critical thinking entails a willingness “to ask any question, no matter how difficult; to be open to any answer that is supported by reason and evidence; and to openly confront one's biases and prejudices when they get in the way” (Appelbaum and Chambliss 1995:4). “Critical” writing, moreover, reflects a concise understanding of a theme, idea, or concept, and also offers critical evaluation and/or (when possible) an alternative or more nuanced interpretation to material content.

You will also be required to submit a Final Paper. This will entail writing a paper that explores theoretical issues. This Final Paper may take one of the following forms:

- An extended **Review Essay** on one (or two) of the original books that we shall be reading
- A **Theory Paper** of your own making, related to seminar themes but specifically connected to a personal project.
- A **Review** of a theory book from a list of titles that I shall provide to you.
- A **Final Exam** on a question provided by me.

The **Final Paper** should be at least **15 pp.** in length.

**Due Dates for Writing Assignments:** Reaction Memos **2/16, 3/30, and 5/4**; Final Paper **5/11**, the assigned Final Exam date for this course.

Your Final Grade will be based on the Reaction Memos (100 points), presenting, leading, and contribution to weekly discussions (100 points), and the Final Paper (100 points).

### **READING SCHEDULE**

#### **WEEK I (1/19, Course Introduction/Overview/Assignments):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 6, pp. 207-235

#### **WEEK II (1/26, Contemporary Macro Theories: Functionalism and Conflict Theories):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 7 (all)
- PDFs on Davies & Moore, Parsons, Merton, Coser, + Dahrendorf available on Blackboard

#### **WEEK III (2/2, Contemporary Macro Theories: Radical and Marxist Theories):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 8 (all)
- PDF on C. Wright Mills' *Power Elite* available on Blackboard

#### **WEEK IV (2/9, Critical Theory):**

- *One Dimensional Man* by Herbert Marcuse, pp. TBA

#### **WEEK V (2/16, Symbolic Interactionism: On Goffman):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 10, pp. 369
- *Frame Analysis* by Erving Goffman, pp. TBA

#### **WEEK VI (2/23, Agency-Structure Theorizing: On Anthony Giddens + Pierre Bourdieu):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 14, pp. 520-537
- PDFs on Anthony Giddens + Pierre Bourdieu to be made available at the seminar setting

**WEEK VII (3/2, Feminist Theorizing):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 13 (all)

**WEEK VIII (3/16, Feminist Theorizing: On Patricia Hills Collins):**

- *Black Feminist Thought* (all)

**WEEK IX (3/23, Critical Race Theory):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 18, pp. 652-656
- *Racism without Racists* by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, pp. TBA
- PDF available on CRT available on Blackboard

**WEEK X (3/30, Queer Theory):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 18, pp. 645-652
- PDFs on Queer Theory to be made available on Blackboard

**WEEK XI (4/6, Modernity):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 15 (all)
- *Modernity and Self-Identity* by Anthony Giddens

**WEEK XII (4/13, Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, and Post-Modernity):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 17 (all)
- *Birth of the Clinic* by Michele Foucault (all)

**WEEKS XIII + XIV (4/20, 4/27, Network Society):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 18, pp. 656-661
- *The Rise of Network Society* by Manuel Castells, pp. TBA

*Recommended*

- *New Tech, New Ties* by Rich Ling

**WEEK XV (5/4, Globalization):**

- *Sociological Theory*, Chapter 16 (all)

**A COMMENTARY ON CLASS PARTICIPTION AND OFFICE HOURS**

“The mere assemblage of facts, no matter how great, is of no worth without the habit of reflective inquiry to judge them”

**Evelyn Wortsman Deluty**

“Dialogue with the people is radically necessary to every authentic revolution.”

**Paulo Freire**

Discussion in the classroom facilitates the learning process. Asking questions, therefore, plays an important role in what you learn. “Questioning involves speculating about possibilities both real and unreal, given and hypothetical.” Good “questions are designed to probe, to find something that is *not* already there, to discover relationships and possibilities that are not given. ... By

posing questions [you] want answered,” you will invest yourself “more fully and care more deeply” about the subject matter (Bowker 2010: 129, 133).

“Inquiry is liberating” for it helps us “formulate[] our perspective on the world and transforms [us] in the process” (Deluty 2010: 137).

Your class participation in the form of your directed inquiries plays an important role in what you learn. Come prepared to ask questions during the seminar period. Bring your discoveries, identified contradictions, and / or your perspective on the readings to our get-togethers. As you engage with the course material, work to formulate questions for you to bring to class. Develop your questions: 1) After a good-faith reading of the material; 2) based on concepts, arguments, and assumptions in a theory or theories; 3) on a “critical” evaluation of these theoretical elements; and/or 4) on the connections between and within weekly readings.

I mention the issue of participation not to intimidate you but rather because I feel dialogue is conducive to the learning process. My role as an instructor is to stimulate the (further) development of “critical thinking.” An important element to such development or practice is a question-centered approach to the learning process itself.

I invite you to attend office hours. I am available to address any concerns or issues connected to your academic experience. Please feel free to talk to me about the subject matter or assignment strategies. You will do well in this course if you are prepared to study hard. Taking advantage of a more “accessible” setting may help your learning efforts. I am available to see you one-on-one in order to address your issues, questions, concerns, ideas, or discoveries. I am interested in your reactions, responses, views, or perceptions. Part of the learning process requires meaningful dialogue between the professor and the student. Therefore, your individual feedback is important and sharing your thoughts, ideas, perceptions, concerns, questions, or doubts are essential to the learning process itself.

## **TWO COMMENTARIES ON TEACHING**

“The main function of higher learning and of its faculty is not ‘teaching’ but providing an intellectual environment that will encourage the learner to dispense with intellectual authorities and to become her own authority. In the main, the learner becomes autonomous when she can confront the letter and the meaning of a text directly, without the mediation of a teacher. This does not exclude the value of mentorship, but the object is to achieve separation rather than acolytism. ... The best kind of schooling provides the student with the chance to become self-directed, and to rely as much, if not more, on her own peers as on the teacher” (Aronowitz 2000: 143-44).

“[T]eaching [is] a revolutionary act... Learning and teaching are complex, endlessly fascinating collaborations. [A teacher can] learn enormous amounts from the students ... [Students are] colleagues and companions on an intellectual, potentially life-changing journey.... [Good goals for teaching] include the development of critical thinking skills, acquiring the ability to work collaboratively, honing the art of applying theoretical concepts to actual historical and contemporary situations, and making connections between what we study and how we live” (Foran 2003:02).

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### **References**

- Appelbaum, Richard and William J. Chambliss. 1995. *Sociology*. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers.
- Aronowitz, Stanley. 2000. *The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning*. Boston: Bacon Press.
- Bowker, Matthew H. 2010. “Teaching Students to Ask Questions Instead of Answering Them.” *Thought and Action* 26: 127-134.
- Deluty, Evelyn W. 2010. “Asking Questions: Cultivating the Habit of Inquiry.” *Thought and Action* 26: 135-137.
- Foran, John. 2003. Syllabus for Sociology 130ST, *Radical Social Change from Chile to Chiapas*, at UCSB, Summer Sessions.