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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Sociology 4033 – Advanced Sociological Theory, Fall Semester, 2021

Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10-11:20AM, GMH 204

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Course Description

Sociology is fundamentally the study of individual biographies as they run through history. It is about understanding how those biographies are shaped by historical social forces, and trying to uncover how individuals adjust to these forces, and sometimes resist and contest them. We live in a particularly interesting historical moment—the coronavirus pandemic and the collapse of American liberal democracy—which forms the backdrop of our course, and which informs the selection of texts for this class in advanced theory.

The class is developed around one of sociology's central themes: the relationship between individual consciousness and the material and cultural social structures that influence and shape it. Are we free as individuals to develop our own ideas? Do people who think mask wearing is tyranny develop these ideas *sui generis*. We will be exploring how individuals come to see themselves, and how this motivates particular types of actions and emotions. This is an important issue for our deeply divided early 21st century liberal democratic polities. They face a need for important structural reforms in light of the climate emergency and growing economic inequality, as well as new (and old) geopolitical tensions. Yet, our societies somehow seem sclerotic and unable to adjust to new material and ideological conditions. As Antonio Gramsci put it, “the old is dying, and the new cannot be born.” This course will forefront historical social forces. But we do so in a context. We will start with the sociological question: what are the conditions for these ideological divisions, and how might we understand them? Sociology can help us understand how current social divisions are the product of cultural worldviews and material positions and interests that struggle for dominance within liberal democratic polities.

Course Material

Pierre Bourdieu. 1984. *Distinction*. New York : Routledge.

Stuart Hall. 2016 [1983]. *Cultural Studies 1983 : A Theoretical History*, edited by JD Slack and L

Grossberg. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Fraser, Nancy. 2019. *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot be Born*. London: Verso.

Malm, Andreas. 2020. *Corona, Climate and Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Verso,

Other reading material will be available on Moodle.

How will the course be run?

“In these Covid Times...” No one says this anymore, but last year, this is all we said. This fall, we are back in person, but we are back in person in an unknown set of circumstances. The classroom is, therefore, not a risk-free environment. If you are feeling sick, please do not come to class. We will catch you up later if need be. If you are not fully vaccinated, get vaccinated ASAP! In addition to the risk of death (albeit not very high for your age group), you are at risk of developing long-term symptoms of chronic fatigue—like having mono all the time. You do not want mono all the time. The risks of the virus far outweigh the risks of the vaccines, including in your age group.

Don't take my word for it, read what the experts say:

Nature is one of the top science journals in the world: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-01935-7>

And Science Daily reporting on the findings of a study published on young adults in *Nature Medicine*: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/06/210623113911.htm>

Due to the high risks posed by the ongoing pandemic, we will remain masked while in class for the time being—even when speaking. If it becomes possible to change that later this fall, of course, we will!

In the likely event that classes go online (I certainly hope they won't but no point pretending it is not a possibility), our class meetings will take place on Teams at the regularly scheduled time. Classes will be synchronous on Teams, I am not intending to post lectures.

Office meetings are also online. Please email me to arrange a time. I am always available to meet one on one over the internet. I will also field any and all questions over email.

I will make use of forum discussions on the moodle page to open additional space for dialogue and class discussion, and I will monitor that periodically. Participation and discussion on the forums will count towards your participation grade of 10%. So if you are quiet in class or on Teams (in the event we revert to Teams), you can still demonstrate your engagement with the course online.

Assignments:

Engagement: 10%

This grade will be assigned based on your participation in class and in discussion forums on moodle. The forum discussions are a *sharing* space, not a space of hierarchical distinctions. You don't need to show you are the smartest, all you are doing here is practicing your use of key concepts: forum discussions will focus on that. You will be graded based on your continuous, consistent and effective participation with your colleagues in the class—whether in person or online.

6 weekly commentaries on course readings, due each Tuesday (e.g., before lectures), 5% each, total: 30%

Commentaries should be 350-500 words. These commentaries are short, and can be in

response to reading questions that will be posted to moodle to assist with your reading of the texts. The intention here is to make sure you stay on top of the readings for the course, and thinking about key concepts. You will be graded based on your engagement with the reading, not based on whether you fully capture the theorist in question. In the event that no reading notes are posted to moodle for the week in question, the syllabus includes keywords. Base your commentaries on those keywords.

Mid-term 1: due October 23rd, 15%

You will have to choose from two questions dealing with material from weeks 1-6 (Bourdieu and Hall). Your answer should be 1000-1250 words long. The assignment will be handed out on October 16th.

Mid-term 2: due November 25rd, 15%

You will choose from two questions dealing with material from weeks 7-10. Your answer should be 1000-1250 words long. The assignment will be handed out on November 18th.

Final Take Home Exam: 30%, due December 17th

The final exam will be a question related to the terms' course material. There will be some choice of which question to answer.

Readings:

Week 1: Intro to the course (September 9th)

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

Weeks 2-4: Pierre Bourdieu and Field Theory (September 14, 16, 21, 23, 28)

Note: there is no class on September 30

(Optional) 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.

Week 2-3 readings:

1. Bourdieu, Pierre (1984) 'The Social Space and its Transformation', *Distinction*, Chs 2-3: pp. 93-150; 162-163; pp. 165-171.
2. Ch. 4: 223-254.
3. Selections, Ch. 5: pp. 257-264, 271-275.

Week 4 readings:

1. Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. "The Choice of the Necessary" and "Classes and Classifications, in *Distinction*. London: Routledge, pp. 373-397; 468-486.
2. Bourdieu, Pierre (1999) 'The contradictions of inheritance' in *The Weight of the World*,

Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 507-513.

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.

Weeks 5 and 6: Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies (October 5, 7, 12, and 14)

Hall, Stuart. 2016 [1983]. *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*, edited by Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg. Durham and London: Duke University Press, Lectures 4-8, pp. 74-206.

Stuart Hall is one of the most important theorists of our neoliberal culture, and a discussion of some of his key concepts will allow us to explore key aspects of our present predicament. In these readings, Hall is providing an overview of key problems in Marxist thought. We will be along for the ride, as he introduces some of the main issues that other theorists discuss, as well as his own exploration of these problems. Taking place against the backdrop of Margaret Thatcher's re-election campaign in 1983, Hall's thoughts on the problems of Marxism would become very significant in later years, as the working classes abandoned the Labour Party in order to support Thatcher's conservative politics. This will provide us with a conceptual window onto the problems of contemporary Canadian and American society, divided as they are in the 'culture wars.'

Keywords: structuralism, culturalism, ideology, hegemony, class consciousness, domination, resistance

Weeks 7 and 8: David Harvey, Culture and Capitalism (October 19, 21, 26 and 28)

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

Week 9: Nancy Fraser, Late Capitalism (November 2, 4)

Fraser, Nancy. 2019. *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot be Born*. London: Verso, 63 pp.

This week we will explore the denouement of neoliberal capitalism in the austerity years of the 2010s. This will help us explore the current ‘conjuncture’ and situate ourselves in a historical timeline marked by changes in the material relations of production. One of the key ideas we want to focus on here—and very relevant for the Canadian situation—is the association between the Conservative Party of Canada and a style of politics that is ostensibly ‘pro-working class.’

Keywords: Gramsci; ideology; hegemony

Reading break: November 9, 11

Week 10: Late Capitalist Crises of Care (November 16, 18)

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

Hochschild, Arlie. 2003. “Love and Gold,” and “Emotional Geography and the Flight Plan of Capitalism.” *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 185-212.

This week we will take a different angle on the economic crisis and capitalist contradictions studied in weeks 7, 8 and 9. Feminist sociologists have long drawn attention to how capitalist competition reshapes relations of care and love. We will be looking at capitalism from the vantage point of the household and of social reproduction, key concepts of feminist political economy and sociology. The crisis we are living through is also a crisis of care, and this becomes clear through the readings of Nancy Fraser and Arlie Hochschild. We might think of the degree to which this crisis of care also informs how different social positions react to the crisis of capitalism.

Keywords: regimes of care; commodity frontier; global care chains; rationalization; speed-up in the family

Week 11: Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (November 23, 25)

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; heterosexualism

Week 12: Crisis (November 30, December 2 and December 7)

Malm, Andreas. 2020. Chs 1 and 2. *Corona, Climate and Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Verso, pp. 1-107. (This may seem like a lot, but words per line, and therefore per page, are 50% less than in other texts used in the course)

Dawson, Ashley. 2018. "Capitalism's Organic Crisis," *Verso Blog*:
<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4141-capitalism-s-organic-crisis>

This week's readings address the 'organic crisis' of contemporary late capitalism, one that is substantially exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Malm provides an interesting place for us to think about the limits of contemporary capitalism, buffeted by both climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. How should we characterize this period, and the instability we see in the headlines? Where are we going? What theoretical tools do we need to grasp for? How can we find a way out?

Keywords: organic or general crisis; structural crisis; systemic crisis; Keynesianism; neoliberalism; chronic emergency; pathological exchange; zoonotic spillover

Week 13: Pandemic and Beyond (December 9)

Any reading for this week will be TBD, and will be short. We will conclude the class with a reflection about sociology at the juncture between the time before the pandemic, and whatever may come after (assuming that the after is near). This class will also serve as a review for the final exam.