

## CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Rutgers University, Spring 2002  
920:314 Section 1&2  
MTH 8:10-9:30am; 10:05-11:00am\*  
Beck Hall 250/011\*  
Instructor: King-To Yeung  
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*...merely looking at something cannot get us anywhere. All seeing becomes contemplation; all contemplation, musing; all musing, combinations; and so it can be said that every attentive look into the world involves theorizing. But to do this consciously, with self-knowledge, freedom, and, to use a daring word, irony—that skill is needed if the abstraction we are afraid of is to be harmless and the experienced result for which we hope is to be vital and useful.*  
--Goethe, *Doctrine of Colors*

### OBJECTIVES

Theories provide lenses through which we can see and understand the world; they are models for describing and explaining what goes with what. This class will explore those lenses offered by contemporary social theorists from the European and American intellectual world. Keep in mind, however, that theorizing is not only the privilege of the intellectual. We theorize all the time without putting ideas in a conscious format. It is the purpose of this class to help you develop your own theory of the world that is informed by previous theoretical work.

It is impossible to cover every issue discussed in the field. Among many theoretical debates and controversies, we will focus on the issue of **SOCIAL ACTION**. In the first part of the semester, we will explore the origins and processes of social action. What is action? How is social action possible? Why and how do social actors act? Where can we see social action? When does social action begin and where does it end? The second section of the semester will examine the idea of **POWER** as a consequence of social action. We will explore how power is manifested in social structures, social relations, collective action, and even the body.

### READINGS & BOOKS

(Available only in: Recto & Verso Bookshop, 90 Albany Street, New Brunswick)

- 1) The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, by Erving Goffman
- 2) Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, by Robert M. Pirsig.
- 3) The third book will be announced before the Spring Break, depending on our progress.
- 4) All other readings can be downloaded from the class website  
<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~kingto>

**Evaluation**

A	= 90% or above
B+	= 85% to 89%
B	= 80% to 84%
C+	= 75% to 79%
C	= 70% to 74%
D	= 60% to 69%
F	= Below 60%

**REQUIREMENTS**

1) Complete reading assignments.

2) **Quiz (25%)**—The purpose of quizzes is to encourage you to read before class and review class materials after class. The quiz will include both information on the reading assignment of the day and all materials (readings and lecture notes) from the last lecture. I will hand out the quiz at the beginning of each lecture (at 8:10am). You have 15 minutes to finish it. I will not distribute or accept any quizzes after 8:25am. The lowest two quizzes will be dropped in the final grading.

3) **Lecture Attendance (0%)**--There is no attendance requirement in this class, but obviously being late or absent will hurt your quiz grades. Legitimate absences will be accepted on the basis of formal documentation. Doctor notes or letters from the Deans will help bring up your final quiz grade (I will average out all quizzes at the end of the semesters).

4) **Papers (45%)**—Two papers are required. Please submit in hard copies: No papers are accepted by e-mail. Guidelines will be distributed 3 weeks before the due date:

**Paper 1 (20%):** March 15, 2002 (at my office hour, 11-12pm, the café inside the Livingston Student Center)

**Paper 2 (25%):** Scheduled final exam date and time (at my office)

Late papers will be accepted with a 5% discount (out of your paper score) per day (including holiday).

5) **Recitations (30%)**—Recitations will consist of group work, discussions, and presentations:

10%-Group Work

10%-Discussions/Participation/Attendance

10%-Presentations

6) **Not-for grade papers (0%)**—Learning is yours! In order to facilitate those who want to learn more, particularly in writing theoretical papers, I will assign 3 not-for-grade papers (usually shorter). These are papers that can serve as drafts for your for-grade papers. I will read and comment on these papers as serious as the other for-grade ones. Remember hard work pays! (Due dates: 1/28; 2/18; 4/15)

**CONTACT**

1) The best way to contact me is through e-mail: [kingto@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:kingto@rci.rutgers.edu)

2) Check the class web site all the time: <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~kingto>

3) In case of emergency, call me office number and leave a message: 732-445-7756 (However, I usually do not stay in my office).

4) My office is in Lucy Stone Hall, Livingston Campus, Room B225 (It is impossible to find, so ask around!). My office door does not have my name on it.

5) My office hour is every Friday, 11-12pm in the café inside the Livingston Student Center.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

Readings can be downloaded one week prior at <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~kingto> .  
Readings will be taken off two weeks after their posting.

### PART I: THEORIZING SOCIAL ACTION

#### Week 0-Jan 24: *Introduction*

#### Week 1-Foundations: What is social action?

- **Jan 28:** *Sociological Foundations*
  - Max Weber (1978), “The Definition of Sociology and of Social Action” in Economy and Society, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press) p. 4 - 26.
  - Optional—Richard Munch (1994), “The Theoretical Background of Max Weber: The German Tradition of Idealism and Historicism” in Sociological Theory Vol. 1. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, p. 160-163).
  
- **Jan 31:** *Psychological Foundations*
  - Sigmund Freud (1905), “The Unconscious,” in An Outline of Psychoanalysis, translated by James Strachey (W.W. Norton [1940], pp. 34-35; 37-9).
  - Sigmund Freud (1960), “Symptomatic and Chance Action,’ in The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, edited by James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton) p. 152-158; 191-216.

#### Week 2-The Individualized Actors

- Feb 4:** *Rational Choice Theory*
  - Jeremy Bentham ([1798]), An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (Selection).
  - Debra Friedman and Michael Hechter (1988), “The Contribution of Rational Choice Theory to Microsociological Research,” Sociological Theory 6:2:, 201-204.
  
- Feb 7:** *The Problem of Collective Action*
  - Barry Barnes (1995), “Individualism” in The Elements of Social Theory (Princeton: Princeton University Press) p. 10-30.

### **Week 3-The Socialized Actors**

#### **-Feb 11:** *The Unit Act and Action System*

- Talcott Parsons (1937) “The Unit Act of Action Systems” from The Structure of Social Action (New York: Free Press, pp. 43-48).

#### **-Feb 14:** *The Oversocialized Actor*

- Talcott Parsons (1951) “Dilemmas of Orientations and the Pattern Variables” from Toward a General Theory of Action, New York: Harper Torchbooks, pp. 76-91).
- Optional—Dennis Wrong (1961), “The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology,” *American Sociological Review* 26.2: 183-193.

### **Week 4-From Action to Interaction**

#### **-Feb 18:** *Symbolic Interactionism*

- Georg Simmel (1908), “The Problem of Sociology” in Georg Simmel, 1858-1918, edited by Kurt H. Wolff (Ohio State University Press, selection).
- Joel M. Charon (1995), “Symbolic Interactionism as a Perspective” in Symbolic Interactionism, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Prentice-Hall, pp. 23-28).
- George H. Mead (1912), “The Mechanism of Social Consciousness” The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods 9.15: 401-406.

#### **-Feb 21:** *Mind*

- Joel M. Charon (1995), “The Human Mind” in Symbolic Interactionism, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Prentice-Hall) p. 93-101.
- George H. Mead (1922), “A Behavioristic Account of the Significant Symbols” The Journal of Philosophy 19.6: 157-163.

### **Week 6-From Self to Society**

#### **-Feb 25:** *Self & Society*

- Charles Horton Cooley (1902), “The Looking-Glass Self,” from Human Nature and the Social Order (New York: Scribner).

- George H. Mead (1934), Mind , Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist (University of Chicago Press) p. 136-144;195-196.
- Optional—George H. Mead (1930) “Cooley’s Contribution to American Social Thought” *American Journal of Sociology* 35.5: 693-706.
- Optional—Joel M. Charon (1995) “Social Interaction,” in *Symbolic Interactionism* 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Prentice-Hall, pp. 145-156).

**-Feb 28:** *The Dramaturgical Self*

- Erving Goffman (1959), “Introduction” and “Performances” in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York: Doubleday)

**Week 7-The Presentation of Self**

**- March 4:** *Team work*

- Erving Goffman (1959), “Teams” in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York: Doubleday)

**- March 7:** *The Splitting Self*

- Erving Goffman (1959), “Front and Back Regions” in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York: Doubleday)

**Week 8-Communicative Action**

**-March 11:** *Communication and Rationality 1*

- Jurgen Habermas (1984) Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 1. Reason and the Rationalization of Society (Boston: Beacon Press) p. 85-101.
- Optional—Georgia Warnke (1995), “On Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Rationality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, edited by Stephen K. White (Cambridge, pp. 120-129).

**-March 14:** *Communication and Rationality 2*

- Jurgen Habermas (1981) “Social Action, Purposive Activity, and Communication,” in *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, edited by Maeve Cooke (MIT, pp. 112-129).

## **PART II: THEORIZING POWER**

### **Week 9-Foundations**

#### **-March 25:** Sociological Foundations

- Karl Marx (1884), “Estranged Labor”; (1845-46) “Camera Obscura”; (1848) Communist Manifesto; (1867) Capital (The Values of Commodity) (The Fetishism of Commodities) (Labor-power and capital)—all selection from Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings, edited by Charles Lemert. 2nd edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).
- Optional Karl Marx (1852) The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (selection), in Lemert ed.
- Reinhard Bendix (1960), “Domination, Organization, and Legitimacy” “Legal Domination” in Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, pp. 290-297; 417-430.)

#### **-March 28:** The Three-Dimensions of Powers

- Steven Lukes (1974), Power: A Radical View (M, pp. 11-25).

### **Week 10-Critical Theory**

#### **-April 1:** From Marx to Freud

- Hebert Marcuse (1964), One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society (Boston: Beacon, pp. 1-18).

#### **-April 4:** Critical Theory American Style

- C. Wright Mills (1958), “The Structure of Power in American Society,” The British Journal of Sociology 9.1.

### **Week 11-Power Structures**

#### **-April 8:** Structures, Power, and Resources

- Anthony Giddens (1979) selection from Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis (Stanford University Press).

#### **-April 11:** Social Exchange & Power

- Peter Blau (1964) Exchange and Power in Social Life (Allyn and Bacon).

### **Week 12-Power in Micro-interaction**

#### **-April 15: Conversational Power**

- Randall Collins (1975) Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science. (New York: Academic Press, pp. 56-60; 114-139).

#### **-April 18: Resistance**

- James C. Scott (1990) “Preface” and “Domination, Acting, and Fantasy,” in Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. ix-xiii; 17-36).

### **Week 13-Symbolic Power**

#### **-April 22: Visions and Divisions**

- Pierre Bourdieu (1989), “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” Sociological Theory 7.1: 14-25.
- Pierre Bourdieu (1984), Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste, translated by Richard Nice. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 190-93; 298-301; 347-349; 372-375).

#### **-April 25: Taste and Distinction**

- Repeat Readings for April 22.

### **Week 14-Action, Habitus, and Social Reproduction**

#### **-April 29: The Pugilistic Habitus**

- Loic Wacquant (1992), “The Social Logic of Boxing in Black Chicago: Toward a Sociology of Pugilism” Sociology of Sports Journal 9: 221-254.

#### **-May 2: Social Action & Power**

- Repeat Readings for April 29.

### **Week 15 (May 6)-Conclusion**