

SOCY 105B: CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY

University of California, Santa Cruz, Summer 2023 (Session 2)

MW 1-4:40pm, Physical Sciences Building 140

Professor: Koda Sokol (they/he), isokol@ucsc.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10am-12pm, or by appointment ([Zoom link](#))

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Social theory is a powerful tool for helping us make sense of a complex world, craft transgressive solidarities, and engage in collective political action. In this class, we will start by reflecting on how each of us moves through the world with our own set of theoretical frameworks that make meaning of our personal experiences. From there, we will learn how to read the works of prominent twentieth and twenty-first century theorists carefully and reparatively, while also acknowledging their limits. We will discuss the ways in which theory can help us historicize, demystify, and denaturalize concepts that we often take for granted: race, gender, identity, capitalism, and power, for example. We will consider how the writings of different theorists were shaped by their own contexts, as well as the extent to which their insights can subsequently be “stretched” (Fanon, 1961) to other settings. Building on the foundations of SOCY105A, this class will delve into questions about knowledge production, the nature of power, the categories of identity, and the possibilities for revolutionary change.

Course goals are as follows:

- Engage actively and critically with the works of key twentieth and twenty-first theorists by reading their works closely and considering how they help us make sense of the world
- Compare and contrast different theoretical approaches to understanding social phenomena
- Debate the limits of different theoretical approaches
- Apply insights from theorists we have studied in this class to current events and cultural objects
- Use theoretical concepts and frameworks in your own writing

REQUIRED TEXTS

All required texts and media will be made available on the course’s Canvas site.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- **Reading, attendance, and active participation in seminar discussion**

Attendance is mandatory and extremely important for succeeding in class, so it will make up a large portion of your grade. This is doubly so considering we only meet for 5 weeks in the summer and because there are no sections where you can catch up on material you may have missed. You are expected to read the texts due by each class date and be prepared to participate by offering commentary, raising questions, and engaging with one

another. You are expected to bring the class's readings and a note-taking device (paper or digital) to class. If you are unable to come to class for whatever reason, please try to let the professor know at least one week in advance so that we can arrange the best way to accommodate your absence.

- **Reading responses (weekly)**

You will submit a total of five short (~250 words) reading commentaries in response to the week's assigned readings. Specific instructions and prompts for each assignment are posted to Canvas Discussions. Without precluding the possibility of critique or disagreement, you are encouraged to read the texts generously and reparatively, engaging with them on the basis of what they say and the contexts in which they were written. Post your responses to Canvas under "Discussions" by 1pm before Wednesday's class. We will be reading each other's responses during class as a way to launch discussion.

- **Final paper**

You will write a 5-7-page final paper that explicitly uses at least three readings to make an analytical argument about one cultural object (visual art, movie, album/song, TV show/episode, book, music video, ad campaign, etc.). You may analyze any cultural objects offered in the syllabus, or select your own. You should explore how the chosen theorists would approach the cultural object similarly and/or differently, as well as offer your own personal perspective. Complete final papers will include the following:

- A clear thesis statement/argument (stated in the introduction)
- Use of concepts and terms from class to help explain the argument
- At least four pieces of evidence (direct quotes, paraphrasing, and/or summarizing) from appropriate course readings with proper citation and full explanations of the evidence meaning and relevance
- A works cited page

Prior to submitting the final paper, you will submit a final paper outline identifying the chosen cultural object and readings. The outline should contain a well-crafted thesis statement and preview how the readings will be used to analyze the cultural object in relation to class themes.

- **Late work**

You are expected to do your best to turn work in on time to avoid falling behind in the course. At the same time, if there is a problem meeting a deadline, I expect you to let me know as soon as possible. Work turned in late without any communication will be subject to a late penalty. You may not turn in the final paper late.

- **Final grade calculation**

Attendance and participation: 25%

Weekly assignments: 25%

Final paper proposal + bibliography: 15%

Final paper: 35%

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism is a serious academic violation. Plagiarism means using the intellectual material of another person or source as your own—this includes paraphrasing someone else’s ideas without a citation, or even using artificial intelligence like ChatGPT to complete assignments intended to be written by you. Any assignment that bears your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not been previously submitted for credit in another course. Students must properly cite sources of all work that is not their own. Visit the [UCSC Sociology Department’s Academic Integrity page](#) for helpful tips and clarifications. Students should be aware that penalties for plagiarism are outlined in [The Navigator](#) and the [UCSC Student Policies and Regulations Handbook](#). When in doubt, ask.

ACCESSIBILITY

UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Feel free to contact me directly to discuss ways we can ensure your full participation in the course. I encourage all students who may benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

TITLE IX

Title IX prohibits gender discrimination, including sexual harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. If you have experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence, you can receive confidential support and advocacy at the Campus Advocacy Resources & Education (CARE) Office by calling (831) 502-2273. In addition, Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) can provide confidential counseling support, (831) 459-2628. You can also report gender discrimination directly to the University’s Title IX Office, (831) 459-2462. Reports to law enforcement can be made to UCPD, (831) 459-2231 ext. 1. For emergencies call 911. Please note that I am required to report any incidences of sexual harassment or sexual violence to the Title IX office of the University. If you decide to talk to me, I will do my best to help you and will keep what you say private, only talking to Title IX and my supervisor to ensure that you receive the support that you need.

SEMINAR OUTLINE

What is theory good for?

Session 1: Introducing Theory

- bell hooks. 1991. “Theory as Liberatory Practice.”
- Judith Butler. 1999. “A ‘Bad Writer’ Bites Back.”

Session 2: The Production of Knowledge

- Patricia Hill Collins. 1990. "Black Feminist Epistemology."
- Donna Haraway. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective."
- Cultural Object: *Pleasure Gardens* (artwork by Tourmaline)

Optional/Additional:

- Sandra Harding. 2004. "Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate."

How does power make and shape us?

Session 3: Subjects and Power

- Louis Althusser. 1971. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)."
- Michel Foucault. 1978. "The Perverse Implantation." In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*.

Optional/Additional:

- Susan Stryker. 2014. "Biopolitics."

Session 4: Theorizing Sex and Gender

- Judith Butler. 1993. "Introduction." In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*.
- Zine Magubane. 2001. "Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the 'Hottentot Venus'."
- Cultural Object: *Becoming an Image* (artwork by Cassils)

How does race organize and affect our lives?

Session 5: Theorizing Race and Racism

- Michael Omi and Howard Winant. 1994. "Chapter 4." In *Racial Formation in the United States*.
- José Esteban Muñoz. 2000. "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho's 'The Sweetest Hangover (And Other STDs).'" *Theatre Journal*.

Optional/Additional:

- Franz Fanon. 1952. "Chapter 5." In *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Session 6: Racial Capitalism

- Cedric Robinson. 1983. "Racial Capitalism: The Nonobjective Character of Capitalist Development." In *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*.
- The Red Nation. 2019. "Revolutionary Socialism is the Primary Political Ideology of The Red Nation."
- Cultural Object: *Parasite* (movie)

How does identity shape cultural politics?

Session 7: Cultural Politics

- Stuart Hall. 1981. “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular.”
- Herman Gray. 2013. “Subject(ed) to Recognition.”
- Cultural Object: *Rush* (music video by Troye Sivan)

Optional/Additional:

- Antonio Gramsci. 1971. “Selections from the Prison Notebooks.”
- Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. 2002 (1944). “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.”
- Stuart Hall. 1993. “What is this ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?”

Session 8: Identity Politics

- The Combahee River Collective Statement. 1977.
- Liz Bondi. 2004. “Locating Identity Politics.” In *Place and the Politics of Identity*.

Optional/Additional:

- Stuart Hall. 1996. “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?.” In *Questions of Cultural Identity*

Why does affect matter?

Session 9: Feeling Theory, Theorizing Feeling

- Sara Ahmed. 2004. Introduction. In *Cultural Politics of Emotion*.
- Deborah Gould. 2009. Introduction. In *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS*.

Session 10: Conclusion

- Reserved for any student-recommended readings and/or final paper presentations