

Contemporary Social Theory (SOCY 105B)

Tu/Th 9AM-12:30PM, Physical Sciences 110

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Course Description

Most simply, *theory* refers to anyone's attempt to explain the way things are, but *critical social theories* stand out because they teach us that things are not always as they seem. In other words, critical social theory explains what is hidden in plain sight. As opposed to developing universal social laws, social theories explain historically and geographically-specific circumstances. People use theories not only to explain the world, but also to construct it; and most social theorists are explicitly political in their aims—they explain the world as it is in order to shape it as they think it should be. Squids, who use ink as their weapon, are theorists' unofficial mascot! This class will focus on (most of) the critical social theories that have shaped sociology since the 1960s. We'll explore contemporary theories vis-à-vis thematic questions (i.e., the unit questions below), as opposed to the more traditional approach of covering theories temporally (e.g., post-Marxisms, post-structuralisms, post-modernisms).

Learning Objectives

At the end of the quarter, students will be able to:

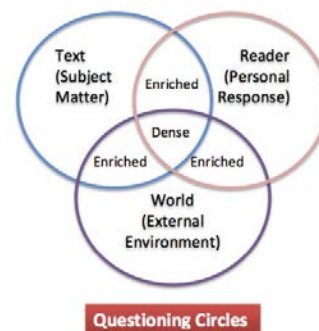
- Carefully explain answers to the “unit questions” listed below
- Apply and evaluate the usefulness of theories covered for explaining the formation of contemporary social structures and the possibilities for agency, subjectivity, and personhood within those structures
- Work collaboratively with other students to fulfill these objectives

Required Texts

- All readings will be posted on eCommons in the “Resources” file
- All films will be viewed in class, but are also available on multiple internet sites
- Please bring readings to class. We will use them in several activities.

Requirements & Assignments

- **Reading Responses (20%)** – For each class, you should bring in a 1-page reading response. The response should paraphrase the argument of each reading in 2-3 sentences. Also, it should offer a potential discussion question and your explanation of, or answer to, that question. **Post your question to eCommons 12 hours before class.** Please refer to the Questioning Circles diagram (to the right) to help you think of “enriched” or “dense” discussion questions.
- **Attendance & Participation (15%)** – Most of our learning will come from interactive discussions and activities, so attendance and participation is key, especially in a 5-week summer session! Participation is as much about active listening, reflecting, note-taking, and asking questions as it is about verbally sharing insight or opinions. If you think of videos, songs, or other **media that relate to theories** we cover in class, please send them to Christie!
- **Unit #1 Project (20%)** – See prompt below
- **Unit #2 Project (25%)** – See prompt below
- **Unit #3 Project (20%)** – See prompt below
- **MSI Extra Credit** – Go to 3 or more MSI sessions and get 3 extra credit points



Unit #1 – Culture Industries: Capital, Desire, and Authenticity

Guiding Questions:

- How does culture (e.g., religion, ideology, entertainment, material goods, music) uphold and/or challenge capitalist relationships of power? To what extent are people active and passive consumers?
- From where do our desires for material pleasures and/or authentic culture come? How can our quest for authenticity reproduce and challenge capitalist modes of production at the same time?

Grid Schedule for Unit #1:

Date	Theme	Readings and Assignments Due (at start of class)
7/28	Critical Theory Intro	Lecture on Althusser and Gramsci
7/30	Frankfurt School on Culture Industries	Horkheimer & Adorno – <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i> excerpt Marcuse – <i>One-dimensional Man</i> excerpts In-class Film Screening: <i>Exit Through the Gift Shop</i>
8/4	Beyond Frankfurt School – Questions about Authenticity	Draft of Unit #1 Project Due Banet-Weiser – <i>Authentic™</i> excerpts

Unit #1 Project: Film Review of *Exit through the Gift Shop*

In the words of many children, “let’s play pretend.” Much like dreams, in the game of “pretend,” time and space are not linear, and therefore, scholars like Banet-Weiser, Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Adorno can be contemporaries. Your job in this project is to pretend you are one of the Frankfurt School scholars and then write a review of the film from their perspective.

In order to contextualize why you judge the film as you do, you need to provide a short synopsis of the general Frankfurt School position on popular culture and then utilize that information to interpret the film. As any good scholar, you also want to acknowledge that Banet-Weiser has written about this film specifically. Briefly summarize her analysis on the film and then explain why you agree or disagree with her analysis. The review should be **2-3 pages**, so work carefully on conciseness! A **first draft of the review** is due at the beginning of class on 8/4. The **final review** is due at the beginning of class on 8/6.

Unit #2 – Bio/Necropolitics and Gendered Racial/Class Formations

Guiding Questions:

- How does power act on and through bodies?
- How does power act on and through populations? How are racial and gender groups formed and subjugated or privileged through these acts of power?
- How are prisons and criminality examples of power acting on and through both individual bodies and collective populations?
- What role does language play in the production of groups and power relationships between them?
- From where do notions of normality come and how do they produce power relationships?

Grid Schedule for Unit #2:

Date	Theme	Readings and Assignments Due
8/6	Biopower and Biopolitics	Revised Unit #1 Project Due Foucault – <i>Discipline & Punish</i> excerpts Foucault – <i>History of Sexuality</i> excerpts
8/11	Gendered Racial and Class Formations	Omi & Winant - <i>Racial Formation in the U.S.</i> excerpt Mbembe – “Necropolitics” Davis – “Masked Racism” *Start reading for 8/13 class* In-class Film Screening: <i>The House I Live In</i>
8/13	Prisons: Gendered Racial and Class Formations and Bio/Necropolitics	Unit #2 Essay Outline Due Wacquant – <i>Punishing the Poor</i> excerpts (Ch 2 & 7) Richie – <i>Arrested Justice</i> excerpt <i>Optional:</i> Crenshaw – Black Girls Matter Report
8/18	Post-colonial Post-structuralism	Unit #2 Essay Due Derrida – <i>Of Grammatology</i> excerpt Said – <i>Orientalism</i> excerpt Lugones – “Heterosexualism and Colonial/Modern Gender System”

Unit #2 Project: “Lecture” Essay

Pretend you are a tutor for this class. A student in this class was sick for most of Unit #2 and missed all the classes. She’s asking you to lecture her on how you would answer the following questions: According to Foucault and Mbembe, what is the meaning and origination of biopower, biopolitics, and necropolitics? In general, what purpose do these forms of power each serve, and for whom/what do they serve that purpose? How are racial groups formed through biopower and bio/necropolitics? Using the US punitive state as an example, explain how racial formation is both classed and gendered through biopower and bio/necropolitics.

The essay you are writing is a written lecture to that student and should be **5-6 pages** in length. An **outline or idea map** of the lecture is due in class on 8/13. You will use that outline/map in small groups to brainstorm how to best answer these essay questions and write your final lecture. The **final lecture essay** will be due at the beginning of class on 8/18.

Unit #3 – Performance and Performativity

Guiding Questions:

- When a person talks or does something, who or what acts? Is there a doer behind the deed?
- To what extent are we agents of free will, acting as we please? Who or what constrains us, and in what ways? Is there anything within us that cannot be socially constrained?
- How do people find relative freedom in their actions?

Grid Schedule for Unit #3:

Date	Theme	Readings and Assignments Due
8/20	Regulated Improvisation	Bourdieu – <i>Outline of a Theory of Practice</i> excerpt Goffman – <i>Interaction Ritual</i> excerpt Greif – “The Sociology of the Hipster”

8/25	Discourse, Subjects, and Production of Agency	Cultural Studies Dictionary – “Subject Position” and “Subjectivity” Butler – <i>Gender Trouble</i> excerpts Spivak – <i>Can the Subaltern Speak?</i> In-class Film Screening: <i>Paris Is Burning</i>
8/27	Wrapping Up and Asking Next Questions	Unit #3 Project Due Presentations of Unit # 3 Projects Discussion of emerging theories and questions

Unit #3 Project: Graphic Guides to Performance and Performativity Scholars

Theories are complex explanations of the social world, and because they deconstruct our taken for granted assumptions, they can be especially difficult to understand at first (and second) glance. To aid our understanding of theories, we have often referred back to graphic guides and cartoon strips that break down theories into more mentally digestible bits. For this project, your job is to create a graphic guide that teaches people how Bourdieu, Goffman, Butler, and Spivak would answer our unit questions.

Revisit the graphic guides that we have referenced as models. You can create four separate cartoons for each one of those theorists, or you can create one long one that puts the theorists in conversation with one another. These guides should indeed have graphics of some sort, but please don't fret about the art! Captions that tell the reader what they are supposed to see in your simple drawings is totally acceptable! Focus your time on the written explanation of concepts.

You will work in pairs or triads to complete this project and as such, be given class time to collaborate. However, completion of the project will require outside work as well. This project is due at the beginning of class on 8/27, our final class when you will present these graphic guides to your peers.

Learning Accommodations

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please get an Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and bring it to me in office hours within the first two weeks of the quarter. For more information on how to file for these accommodations happen, please contact the DRC at 459-2089 or <http://drc.ucsc.edu>

Academic Integrity

Our historical moment is one marked by remixes and mash-ups, where one artist borrows from another to make something new and different. When you write academic papers, you too are creating a mash-up of ideas, and many of those ideas and arguments come from people other than yourself. Academic integrity means always referencing who informs your own ideas and the arguments you make in papers. Plagiarism is when you use someone else's words or thoughts as your own (i.e., without citations). Whenever you use someone else's ideas, you must cite them properly, whether you are paraphrasing them or using exact quotes from their texts. When in doubt, cite! For information on how to cite properly, see the Library Guide on Citing Sources and Plagiarism at NetTrail at <http://nettrail.ucsc.edu/> and <http://library.ucsc.edu/help/howto/citations-and-style-guides>. For the campus policies on academic integrity, please visit the following page: http://undergraduate.ucsc.edu/acd_integrity/index.html