

Sociology 612 (Spring 2012)

# Contemporary Sociological Theory

Seio Nakajima

Tuesday 12:00-2:30 p.m., KELL 414

Office hours: Tue. 2:30-3:30 p.m. or by appointment

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## Course Description:

This seminar has three major goals: (1) To familiarize students with the evolution and the current state of contemporary sociological theory by discussing texts written by key contemporary sociological thinkers (e.g., Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann) (mastering of theory). (2) To consider how theories we learn both inform and draw from actual empirical research by reading theoretically informed works by these sociologists (e.g., Bourdieu on the “field of cultural production,” Luhmann on “art as a social system”) (mastering of application of theory to empirical research). (3) To prepare a short research proposal as a final paper on a subject of the student’s choosing by explicitly engaging with one or more theorists we discuss in class (mastering of theoretically-informed methods and research design).

## Notes:

- Although the formal title of the course is "contemporary sociological theory," we will also discuss some “non-sociology” contemporary theorists (e.g., Foucault).
- This course is a theory course, but we also try to highlight the importance of “putting contemporary sociological theories to work” in concrete, empirical research settings. Roughly 50% of time and effort will be spent for achieving goal (1) above, 30% for goal (2), and 20% for goal (3).
- Students should be aware that this is an extremely reading and discussion-intensive course. Seminar participants are expected to attend every session and be prepared for every class.
- In addition to the three major goals above, whenever appropriate, we will discuss miscellaneous technical “know-hows” of doing academic research. E.g., how to find relevant academic literature, use of citation software for organizing references, etc. What to discuss each semester largely depends on the needs and interests of the students taking the course.
- This is a required course for sociology graduate students, but I understand students may come from diverse disciplinary background, so I do *not* expect all participants to have graduate-level knowledge in sociological theory and methods. I will provide “mini-lectures” on sociology (and other topics) whenever necessary so every student has an equal opportunity to learn from and enjoy this seminar!

## Required Texts:

- All the readings will be available at Laulima except those marked with @, which are available at UH Library Electronic Resources or publicly available on the Internet.

## Course Requirements: [Total = 100%]

- 1) Active participation in seminar discussions. [20%]  
Remember the aphorism: “Even to have expressed a false thought boldly and clearly is already to have gained a great deal.” (Ludwig Wittgenstein). So, don’t be shy and speak up!
- 2) Three short analytic papers. [60% = 20% x 3]  
Choose from contemporary theorists we read, and select some issues and write three papers (approx. 6-8 double-spaced pages). More detailed instructions TBA.
- 3) Final paper (a short research proposal). [20%]  
A short research proposal on a topic of student’s own choosing in consultation with the instructor, explicitly engaging with one or more theorists we discuss in class (approx. 6-8 double-spaced pages). I want you to come up with research questions that derive from the theories we learn, and briefly specify how you would go about collecting and analyzing empirical data. More detailed instructions TBA.

## Class Schedule

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### Week 1: January 10: Introduction: What is Contemporary Sociological Theory?

- @Markovsky, Barry. 2008. “Graduate Training in Sociological Theory and Theory Construction.” *Sociological Perspectives* 51:423-447.
- @Abend, Gabriel. 2008. “The Meaning of ‘Theory.’” *Sociological Theory* 26:173-199.

[Approx. total reading pages: 52]

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### Week 2: January 17: Michel Foucault I (1926-1984): Introduction/Theoretical Contexts

- Barth, Lawrence. 2008. “Michel Foucault.” Pp. 278-292 in *Key Sociological Thinkers, Second Edition*, edited by R. Stones. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, Michel. 2003. “What is Enlightenment?” Pp. 43-57 in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, edited by P. Rabinow and N. Rose. New York: The New Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2003. “Truth and Power.” Pp. 300-318 in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, edited by P. Rabinow and N. Rose. New York: The New Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2003. “The Subject and Power.” Pp. 126-144 in *The Essential Foucault*, edited by P. Rabinow and N. Rose. New York: The Free Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2003. "Governmentality." Pp. 229-245 in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, edited by P. Rabinow and N. Rose. New York: The New Press.

[85 pages]

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**Week 3: January 24: Michel Foucault II: The History of the Prison/The History of Sexuality**

Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books. Excerpt: pp. 3-31, pp. 170-228.

Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books. Excerpt: pp. 133-159.

[115 pages]

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**Week 4: January 31: Pierre Bourdieu I (1930-2002): Introduction/Theory of Practice**

Wacquant, Loïc. 2008. "Pierre Bourdieu." Pp. 261-277 in *Key Sociological Thinkers, Second Edition*, edited by R. Stones. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.  
([http://sociology.berkeley.edu/faculty/wacquant/wacquant\\_pdf/PIERREBOURDIE U2007-StonesProofs2.pdf](http://sociology.berkeley.edu/faculty/wacquant/wacquant_pdf/PIERREBOURDIE U2007-StonesProofs2.pdf))

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. "Structures and the Habitus." Pp. 72-95 in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. "Structures, Habitus, Power: Basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power." Pp. 159-197 in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[80 pages]

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**Week 5: February 7: Pierre Bourdieu II: Distinction/The Field of Cultural Production**

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Excerpt: Introduction (pp. 1-7), Chapter 1 (pp. 9-96, and Conclusion (pp. 466-484).

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed." Pp. 29-73 in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, edited by R. Johnson. New York: Columbia University Press.

[159 pages]

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**Week 6: February 14: Anthony Giddens I (b. 1938): Introduction/Structuration Theory**

**FIRST ANALYTIC PAPER DUE AT LAULIMA DROP BOX BY 11:59 P.M.**

- Cohen, Ira J. 2008. "Anthony Giddens." Pp. 323-337 in *Key Sociological Thinkers, Second Edition*, edited by R. Stones. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1993. "Problems of Action and Structure." Pp. 88-175 in *The Giddens Reader*, edited by P. Cassell. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

[103 pages]

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**Week 7: February 21: Anthony Giddens II: Modernity/Critical Theory/The Third Way**

- Giddens, Anthony. 1993. "The Nature of Modernity." Pp. 284-316 in *The Giddens Reader*, edited by P. Cassell. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1993. "Critical Theory." Pp. 317-342 in *The Giddens Reader*, edited by P. Cassell. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 2000. "The Third Way and its Critics." Pp. 1-26 in *The Third Way and its Critics*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

[85 pages]

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**Week 8: February 28: Jürgen Habermas I (b. 1929): Introduction/The Public Sphere**

- Baert, Patrick. 2001. "Jürgen Habermas." Pp. 84-93 in *Profiles in Contemporary Social Theory*, edited by B. S. Turner. London: Sage Publications.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by T. Burger. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. Excerpt: xv-xix, pp. 1-88, p. 89 (first paragraph), and p. 140 (full paragraph).

[105 pages]

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**Week 9: March 6: Jürgen Habermas II: The Theory of Communicative Action**

- Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. "Social Action and Rationality." Pp. 142-164 in *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*, edited by S. Seidman. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. "The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society." Pp. 77-103 in *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*, edited by S. Seidman. Boston: Beacon Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. "The Uncoupling of System and Lifeworld." Pp. 188-228 in *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*, edited by S. Seidman. Boston: Beacon Press.

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**Week 10: March 13: Niklas Luhmann I (1927-1998):  
Introduction/Exegeses/Applications**

**SECOND ANALYTIC PAPER DUE AT LAULIMA DROP BOX BY 11:59 P.M.**

Arnoldi, Jakob. 2001. "Niklas Luhmann." Pp. 249-259 in *Profiles in Contemporary Social Theory*, edited by A. Elliot and B. S. Turner. London: Sage Publications.

@Arnoldi, Jakob. 2001. "Niklas Luhmann: An Introduction." *Theory, Culture & Society* 18:1-13.

Moeller, Hans-Georg. 2012. *The Radical Luhmann*. New York: Columbia University Press. Excerpt: pp. 3-15, pp. 121-137.

Joas, Hans. 2009. "Niklas Luhmann's Radicalization of Functionalism." Pp. 249-280 in *Social Theory: Twenty Introductory Lectures*.

White, Harrison. 2008. "Functional Subsystems." Pp. 237-245 in *Identity and Control: How Social Formations Emerge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[95 pages]

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**Week 11: March 20: Niklas Luhmann II: An Example of a Subsystem: Art as a Social System**

Halsall, Francis. 2007. "Niklas Luhmann." Pp. 187-90 in *Art: Key Contemporary Thinkers*, edited by D. Costello and J. Vickery. Oxford, UK: Berg.

@Savänen, Erkki. 2001. "Art as an Autopoietic Sub-System of Modern Society: A Critical Analysis of the Concepts of Art and Autopoietic Systems in Luhmann's Late Production." *Theory, Culture, and Society* 18:75-103.

Luhmann, Niklas. 2000. *Art as a Social System*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Excerpt: pp. 1-4, 5-53, 102-132.

[117 pages]

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**Week 12: March 27: Spring Break: NO CLASS**

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**Week 13: April 3: Jeffrey Alexander (b. 1947): From Neo-Functionalism to the New American Cultural Sociology**

Colomy, Paul. 2003. "Jeffrey C. Alexander." Pp. 9-16 in *Key Contemporary Social Theorists*, edited by A. Elliot and L. Ray. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. "After Neofunctionalism: Actor, Culture, and Civil Society." Pp. 210-232 in *Neofunctionalism and After*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

@Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2002. "The Strong Program in Cultural Theory: Elements of a Structural Hermeneutics." Pp. 135-150 in *Handbook of Sociological Theory*, edited by J. H. Turner. New York: Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers.  
([http://ccs.research.yale.edu/alexander/articles/2002/alexsmith\\_strongpr.pdf](http://ccs.research.yale.edu/alexander/articles/2002/alexsmith_strongpr.pdf))

@Alexander, Jeffrey C. and Philip Smith. 1993. "The Discourse of American Civil Society: A New Proposal for Cultural Studies." *Theory and Society* 22:151-207.

[104 pages]

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**Week 14: April 10: Rational Choice Theory: James S. Coleman (1926-1995) and After**

Lindenberg, Siegwart. 2003. "James Coleman." Pp. 90-121 in *The Blackwell Companion to Major Contemporary Social Theorists*, edited by G. Ritzer. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

@Coleman, James S. 1986. "Social Theory, Social Research, and a Theory of Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 91:1309-1335.

@Hechter, Michael and Satoshi Kanazawa. 1997. "Sociological Rational Choice Theory." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23:191-214.

@Boudon, Raymond. 2003. "Beyond Rational Choice Theory." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29:1-21.

[104 pages]

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**Week 15: April 17: Some Frontiers in Contemporary Social and Sociological Theory I: Actor Network Theory: John Law (b. 1946), Michel Callon (b. 1945), and Bruno Latour (b. 1947)**

**THIRD ANALYTIC PAPER DUE AT LAULIMA DROP BOX BY 11:59 P.M.**

Law, John. 1999. "After ANT: Complexity, Naming, and Topology." Pp. 1-14 in *Actor Network Theory and After*, edited by J. Law and J. Hassard. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Callon, Michel. 1999. "Actor-Network Theory—The Market Test." Pp. 181-195 in *Actor Network Theory and After*, edited by J. Law and J. Hassard. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Excerpt: pp. 1-17, pp. 159-262.

[150 pages]

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**Week 16: April 24: Some Frontiers in Contemporary Social and Sociological Theory II: New German Sociology of Media: Friedrich Kittler (1943-2011), Dirk Baecker (b. 1955), and Nobert Bolz (b. 1953)**

Kittler, Friedrich. 2010. *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*. Cambridge: Polity. Excerpt: pp. 1-17, 19-28, 29-46.

Laermans, Rudi. 2011. "After Luhmann': Dirk Baecker's Sociology of Culture and Art." *Cultural Sociology* 5:155-165.

@Baecker, Dirk. 2001. "Why Systems?" *Theory, Culture & Society* 18:59-74.

Bolz, Nobert. 2002. "Rethinking Media Aesthetics: An Interview with Nobert Boltz." Pp. 18-27 in *Uncanny Networks*, edited by G. Lovink. Boston, MA: MIT Press.

[84 pages]

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**Week 17: May 1: Some Frontiers in Contemporary Social and Sociological Theory III: The Pragmatist Revival: Axel Honneth (b. 1949), Hans Joas (b. 1948), and Neil Gross (b. 1971)**

Joas, Hans. 1998. "The Inspiration of Pragmatism: Some Personal Remarks." Pp. 190-198 in *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture*, edited by M. Dickstein. Durham: Duke University Press.

@Honneth, Axel. 2006. "Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View." Pp. 91-135: The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Delivered at University of California, Berkeley, March 14-16, 2005.

([http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/Honneth\\_2006.pdf](http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/Honneth_2006.pdf))

Joas, Hans. 1993. "Institutionalization as a Creative Process: The Sociological Importance of Cornelius Castoriadis's Political Philosophy." Pp. 154-171 in *Pragmatism and Social Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

@Gross, Neil. 2009. "A Pragmatist Theory of Social Mechanisms." *American Sociological Review* 74:358-379.

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**Exam Week: May 8**

**FINAL PAPER DUE AT LAULIMA DROP BOX BY 11:59 P.M.**

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- a. Cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty.
- b. Furnishing false information to any UH official, faculty member, or office.
- c. Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any UH document, record, or form of identification.

The term ‘cheating’ includes, but is not limited to: (1) use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; (2) use of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; (3) the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the UH faculty, staff or student (4) engaging in any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion.

The term ‘plagiarism’ includes, but is not limited to, the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.”

[E7.208 UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEMWIDE STUDENT CONDUCT CODE, July 2009]

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