

Contemporary Sociological Theory

GENERAL OBJECTIVE OF THE COURSE

To develop students' ability to understand contemporary society and its general problems. Based on this, students are expected to: (1) analyze the impact of these problems on the theoretical-methodological tools of sociology; and (2) explore recent sociological approaches that address these issues.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

By the end of the course, students should have achieved the following learning outcomes:

1. Use various theoretical tools to approach contemporary social problems.
2. Understand the impact social problems have had on the theory and methodology of the discipline.
3. Identify various contemporary sociological approaches that address micro, meso, and macro social problems, at different levels of abstraction.

CONTENTS

1. Contemporary Problems of Classical Sociology

1.1. The emergence of modernity as a contemporary problem in classical sociology

- 1.1.1. Community, society, and capitalist experience
- 1.1.2. Sociological methods as responses to problems of past eras

1.2. Late 20th-century sociology and the problems it sought to address

- 1.2.1. New theoretical syntheses on the agency/structure problem
- 1.2.2. New social-scientific methods

2. Contemporary Cultural Sociology and its “New” Theory of Action

2.1. The problem of taste and aesthetic sociology (≠sociology of aesthetics)

2.1.1. The problem of taste

2.1.2. Generalizing the problem of taste into a sociological theory

2.2. Cognition, neuroscience, and sociology?

2.2.1. The relationship between psychology and sociology

2.2.2. Cognition, habits, fields, and human action

2.3. A contemporary reinterpretation of social methods

2.3.1. The interpretivist and naturalist tradition

2.3.2. Overcoming the qualitative/quantitative divide (=object/objective, ≠tools)

3. Grand Theory and Epochal Diagnoses

3.1. Contemporary grand theory and critical theory

3.1.1. Is grand theory over?

3.1.2. Rosa and contemporary critical theory

3.2. An empirical approach to critique and the generalization of social problems

3.2.1. Sociology of critique and the empirical question of social change

3.2.2. The motherhood effect as a contemporary global problem

3.3. The problem of love in contemporary society

3.3.1. The emergence of romantic love

3.3.2. The dissolution of love as a diagnosis of the times

4. The Social Beyond the Anthropos: The Problem of Animal Cognition and Language

- 4.1. Different perspectives in social theory: a critique of social anthropocentrism
- 4.2. Cognition in non-human animals and interspecies society
- 4.3. What can non-human animals teach us about the study of human action?

METHODOLOGY

The course methodology will consist of a presentation of the session's topic by the professor, followed by an analysis and discussion of the required readings. Therefore, in addition to adequate preparation for each session—which includes a close reading of the texts to be discussed—active student participation will be required.

EVALUATION METHODS

The course will be evaluated through two modalities:

1. **Written test (40%):** An individual handwritten test conducted during class hours. Each test will cover lecture content and required readings from the relevant units prior to the test date. The test will consist of multiple interpretive questions, from which students must choose two to answer.
2. **Oral exam (60%):** An individual oral evaluation conducted during class hours. The exam will cover the entire course content and required readings. Students will randomly draw two questions written on slips of paper and must select one to answer within a set time. Time will be given to select, think about, and develop a thoughtful response.
3. **Class participation:** Active participation during sessions, including reading the texts, offering commentary, and responding to questions, will be rewarded with 0.5 points in the written test and 0.5 in the oral exam.

PASSING REQUIREMENTS

ATTENDANCE:

Attendance is mandatory, requiring participation in at least 80% of the classes. Absences must be justified through the program secretary.

MINIMUM PASSING GRADE (Scale from 1.0 to 7.0): 5.0

REQUIREMENTS TO TAKE THE EXAM: Grade between 3.5 and 4.9

ABOUT PLAGIARISM:

Any information presented in assessable documents that does not cite its proper source, when known to originate from an external author, and/or any similarities, will be considered plagiarism. Plagiarism will be sanctioned according to the university's current regulations.

KEYWORDS: theory of action, methods, cognition, aesthetic sociology, critical theory, anthropocentrism, AI.

REQUIRED BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Contemporary Problems of Classical Sociology

1.1. Sociology and the emergence of modernity as a contemporary problem in classical sociology

No required reading for this session, but reviewing the complementary bibliography is recommended

1.2. Late 20th-century sociology and the problems it sought to address

Mills, C. W., Germani, G., & Torner, F. M. (1961). *La imaginación sociológica* (Vol. 2). México: Fondo de Cultura Económica. (Capítulo 1 23-44)

(If you haven't read it in full, it's highly recommended. A classic.)

2. Contemporary Cultural Sociology and its "New" Theory of Action

2.1. The problem of taste and aesthetic sociology (≠sociology of aesthetics)

Cerulo, K. A. (2018). Scents and Sensibility: Olfaction, Sense-Making, and Meaning Attribution. *American Sociological Review*, 83(2), 361–389.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418759679>

2.2. Cognition, neuroscience, and sociology?

Lizardo, O., Sepulvado, B., Stoltz, D. S., & Taylor, M. A. (2020). What can cognitive neuroscience do for cultural sociology?. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 8, 3–28.

2.3. A contemporary reinterpretation of social methods

No required reading for this session, but reviewing the complementary bibliography is recommended

3. Grand Theory and Epochal Diagnoses

3.1. Contemporary grand theory and critical theory

Rosa, H. (2011). Aceleración social: consecuencias éticas y políticas de una sociedad de alta velocidad desincronizada.

3.2. An empirical approach to critique and the generalization of social problems

Bacevic, J. (2024). What is social science if not critical? *The British Journal of Sociology*.

3.3. The problem of love in contemporary society

Illouz, E. (2020). *El fin del amor: Una sociología de las relaciones negativas* (Vol. 3104). Katz editores. (Capítulo 1, p. 11-44)

4. The Social Beyond the Anthropos: The Problem of Animal Cognition and Language

4.1. Different perspectives in social theory: a critique of social anthropocentrism

Meijer, Eva (2022) *Animales habladores. Conversaciones privadas entre seres vivos*. Editorial Taurus / Penguin. Introducción Capítulo 3.

4.2. Cognition in non-human animals and interspecies society

Meijer, Eva (2022) *Animales habladores. Conversaciones privadas entre seres vivos*. Editorial Taurus / Penguin. Capítulo 4 y 5

4.3. What can animals and AI teach us for the theory of action?

Martin, J. L. (2015). *Thinking Through Theory*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. (Chapter 5, pp. 175–215)

COMPLEMENTARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Contemporary Problems of Classical Sociology

1.1. Sociology and the emergence of modernity as a contemporary problem in classical sociology

Alexander, J. C. (1982). *Theoretical logic in sociology*. University of California Press.

Joas, H., & Knöbl, W. (2016). *Teoría social: veinte lecciones introductorias*. Akal.

Nisbet, R. A. (1969). La formación del pensamiento sociológico. (Primera parte p. 15-35, pero todo el libro es excelente la verdad)

Turner, S. P. (1986). *The Search for a Methodology of Social Science* (Vol. 92). Springer Netherlands. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-3461-5>

1.2. Late 20th-century sociology and the problems it sought to address

Abbott, A. (1998). The Causal Devolution. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 27(2), 148–181. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124198027002002>

Archer, M. S. (2009). *Teoría social realista: En enfoque morfogenético*. Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado. (capítulo 1)

Emirbayer, M. (1997). Manifesto for a Relational Sociology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(2), 281–317. <https://doi.org/10.1086/231209>

2. Contemporary Cultural Sociology and its “New” Theory of Action

2.1. The problem of taste and an aesthetic sociology (≠sociology of aesthetics)

Lembo, A., & Martin, J. L. (2022). The structure of cultural experience. *Poetics*, 91, 101562. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2021.101562>

Martin, J. L. (2011). *The explanation of social action*. Oxford University Press.

Martin, J. L., & Lembo, A. (2020). On the Other Side of Values. *American Journal of Sociology*, 126(1), 52–98. <https://doi.org/10.1086/709778>

Reed, I. A. (2024). Does an Aesthetic Sociology Need a Theory of the Sign? *The American Sociologist*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-024-09626-2>

2.2. Cognition, neuroscience, and sociology?

Cerulo, K. A. (2010). Mining the intersections of cognitive sociology and neuroscience. *Poetics*, 38(2), 115–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2009.11.005>

Lizardo, O. (2015). Culture, Cognition and Embodiment. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 576–581). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.10442-8>

Strand, M., & Lizardo, O. (2015). Beyond World Images: Belief as Embodied Action in the World. *Sociological Theory*, 33(1), 44–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275115572397>

2.3. A reinterpretation of social methods and theory

Abrutyn, S., & Lizardo, O. (2023). A Motivational Theory of Roles, Rewards, and Institutions. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 53(2), 200–220. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12360>

Lizardo, O. (2021). Habit and the explanation of action. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 51(3), 391–411. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12273>

Strand, M., & Lizardo, O. (2022). For a probabilistic sociology: A history of concept formation with Pierre Bourdieu. *Theory and Society*, 51(3), 399–434. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-021-09452-2>

Strand, M., & Lizardo, O. (2022). Chance, orientation, and interpretation: Max Weber's neglected probabilism and the future of social theory. *Sociological Theory*, 40(2), 124–150.

3. Grand Theory and Epochal Diagnoses

3.1. Contemporary grand theory and critical theory

Archer, M. S. (2019). Critical realism and concrete utopias. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 18(3), 239–257.

Strand, M. (2023). Why Don't Big Theory Books Work in the US? A Reply to Simon Susen. *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, 12(10), 1–18.

Turner, J. H., & Boyns, D. E. (2001). The return of grand theory. In *Handbook of sociological theory* (pp. 353–378). Boston, MA: Springer US.

3.2. An empirical approach to critique and the generalization of social problems

Boltanski, L. (2014). De la crítica: compendio de sociología de la emancipación. Madrid: Akal.

Haslanger, S. (2024). Social Structures as a Site for Injustice: Why Social Theory Matters. In *ASPLP 2024 Conference*.

Latour, B. (2004). Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern. *Critical inquiry*, 30(2), 225–248.

3.3. The problem of love in contemporary society

Luhmann, N. (2008). El amor como pasión (Vol. 304). Grupo Planeta Spain.

4. The Social Beyond the Anthropos: The Problem of Animal Cognition and Language

4.1. Different perspectives in social theory: a critique of social anthropocentrism

John McWhorter (2004) *The Story of Human Language*. The Great Courses. Virginia US.

Latour, B. (1990). Technology is Society Made Durable. *The Sociological Review*, 38(1_suppl), 103-131. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1990.tb03350.x>

Taylor, N., & Sutton, Z. (2018). For an emancipatory animal sociology. *Journal of Sociology*, 54(4), 467-487.

4.2. Cognition in non-human animals and interspecies society

Andrews, K., & Monsó, S. (2021). Animal cognition. Plato Stanford.

4.3. What can animals and AI teach us for a theory of action?

Carter, B., & Charles, N. (2018). The animal challenge to sociology. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 21(1), 79-97.

Esposito, E. (2022). *Artificial communication: How algorithms produce social intelligence*. MIT Press.