

Contemporary Sociological Theories
2006
Dr. Slawomir Kapralski

1. Theorizing theory.

From the rejection of theory to the end of “crisis talk:” What happened in social theory in the last thirty years. Types of theoretical reactions to the crisis of structural-functionalist ‘paradigm.’ Theory as an art of seeing. Theory as an art of interpretation. Theory as an art of translation. Theory between chaos and order. Criteria for a good theory. Why do we need theory? The social construction of theory. Social theory as a product of modernity. Historical character of theory.

Seminar readings:

Jeffrey C. Alexander, Modern, Anti, Post, and Neo: How Intellectuals Have Coded, Narrated, and Explained the ‘New World of Our Time.’ In: J.F.Alexander, *Fin de Siecle Social Theory: Relativism, Reduction, and the Problem of Reason*, London, New York: Verso, 1995.

Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London-New York: Routledge, 1992; Chapter 1.

Bryan S. Turner, Introduction. In: Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition, Malden—Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

Recommended readings:

Richard Harvey Brown, *A Poetic for Sociology. Toward a Logic of Discovery for the Human Sciences*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989 (1977).

Gerard Delanty, The Foundations of Social Theory: Origins and Trajectories. In: Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition, Malden—Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

Gerard Delanty, *Social Theory in a Changing World. Conceptions of Modernity*, Cambridge, UK—Oxford, UK—Malden, MA, USA: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-modernism and the Social Sciences. Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Quentin Skinner, Introduction, in: Quentin Skinner, *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

2. Theorizing theory (2): Discussion of seminar readings.

Jeffrey C. Alexander, Modern, Anti, Post, and Neo: How Intellectuals Have Coded, Narrated, and Explained the ‘New World of Our Time.’ In: J.F.Alexander, *Fin de Siecle Social Theory: Relativism, Reduction, and the Problem of Reason*, London, New York: Verso, 1995.

Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London-New York: Routledge, 1992; Chapter 1.

Bryan S. Turner, Introduction. In: Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition, Malden—Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

3. Symbolic Interactionism and dramaturgical perspective in sociology: In search of subjectivity/agency. George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, Erving Goffman. Recent developments: Norman Denzin, Peter Hall. Interactionism as an inspiration: Anthony Giddens.

Subjective reaction to the modernization process. What is symbolic about interactionism? The structure of the Self. Deterministic and indeterministic interpretations of the Self. Symbolic interactionism between “situations” and “structures.” Goffman’s synthesis: the interaction order. Towards macrosociological interactionism: Norman Denzin, Peter M. Hall. Interactionist elements in Giddens’ sociological syncretism.

Seminar readings:

Peter M. Hall, A Symbolic Interactionist Analysis of Politics, in: K.Plummer (ed.), *Symbolic Interactionism*, Vol. II: *Contemporary Issues*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar (An Elgar Reference Collection), 1991.

Recommended readings:

Herbert Blumer, Society as Symbolic Interaction, in: H. Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969; pp. 78-89.

Tom Burns, *Erving Goffman*, London and New York: Routledge 1992.

Norman K. Denzin, *Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Studies. The Politics of Interpretation*, Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1992.

Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990 (1959), Chapter 1: *Performances*.

Erving Goffman, The Interaction Order, in: K.Plummer (ed.), *Symbolic Interactionism*, Vol. II: *Contemporary Issues*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar (An Elgar Reference Collection), 1991 (1982).

Ken Plummer, Symbolic Interactionism in the Twentieth Century. In: Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts, USA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

4. Phenomenological sociology and Ethnomethodology.

Phenomenology as “de-socialization” and “re-socialization.” Alfred Schutz: life-world, natural attitude, and sociology as a puppet show. Ethnomethodological field of studies. Reflexive character of daily life: “account-ability” of activities. Ethnomethodology as a foundational challenge for sociology.

Seminar readings:

Harold Garfinkel, *Ethnomethodology's Program. Working Out Durkheim's Aphorism*. Edited and Introduced by Anne Warfield Rawls. Chapter 1: The Central Claim of Ethnomethodology: Working Out Durkheim's Aphorism.

Recommended readings:

Jeff Coulter (ed.), *Ethnomethodological Sociology*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar (An Elgar Reference Collection), 1990.

Harold Garfinkel, *What is Ethnomethodology and Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities*, in: Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990 (1967), pp. 1-75.

John Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992 (1984).

John C. Heritage, *Ethnomethodology*, in: Anthony Giddens, Jonathan H. Turner (eds.), *Social Theory Today*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987.

Richard A. Hilbert, *The Classical Roots of Ethnomethodology: Durkheim, Weber, and Garfinkel*, Chapel Hill, London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

George Psathas (ed.). *Phenomenological Sociology*, New York: Wiley, 1973.

Harvey Sacks, *Sociological Description*, in: Jeff Coulter (ed.), *Ethnomethodological Sociology*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar (An Elgar Reference Collection), 1990.

Steven Vaitkus, Phenomenology and Sociology. In: Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts, USA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

5. Transformations of the revolutionary spirit: in search of the lost utopia? Jurgen Habermas and Critical Theory.

The contribution of Frankfurt School. Habermas' project: a theory with a practical intention. From a diagnosis of capitalist society to the theory of knowledge and cognitive interests. Types of action and rationality. Critical theory as a critique of distorted communication. System—Lifeworld relation. Modernity as an unfinished project. Habermas—Lyotard debate.

Seminar readings:

Jurgen Habermas, The Task of a Critical Theory of Society; Social Action and Rationality; The Concept of the Lifeworld and the Hermeneutic Idealism of Interpretive Sociology; in: Steven Seidman (ed.), *Jurgen Habermas on Society and Politics. A Reader*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Recommended readings:

Jeffrey C. Alexander, Habermas Critical Theory: Beyond the Marxian Dilemma?, in: A.Honneth, H.Joas (eds.), *Communicative Action. Essays on Jurgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. (Also in: J.C.Alexander, *Structure and Meaning. Relinking Classical Sociology*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989)

David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory. Horkheimer to Habermas*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.

David Ingram, *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987.

6. New developments in Critical Theory.

Critical theory and contemporary world: “emancipation in the age of global social movements.” Feminism and critical theory. Politics of identity, politics of difference.

Seminar readings:

Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory*. Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell 1995. Chapters 6 and 7.

Recommended readings:

Craig Calhoun, *Social Theory and the Public Sphere*. In: Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts, USA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

Larry J. Ray, *Rethinking Critical Theory: Emancipation in the Age of Global Social Movements*, London, Newbury Park, New Delhi: Sage, 1993.

Richard Rorty, *Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity*, in: R.J. Bernstein (ed.), *Habermas and Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 (1985).

Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction, Postmodernism and Philosophy: Habermas on Derrida*, in: Maurizio Passerin d’Entreves and Seyla Benhabib (eds.) *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996.

7. The Mainstream strikes Back: From Functionalism to Neofunctionalism. Jeffrey Alexander, Paul Colomy, S. Eisenstadt.

New philosophy of social sciences. Post-Parsonian period in sociology. Fields of reconstruction and continuation (action, order, equilibrium, ideology). Neofunctionalist research programs in sociology of culture (Alexander) and in sociology of social change (Colomy).

Seminar readings:

Jeffrey C. Alexander, Three Models of Culture and Society Relations: Toward an Analysis of Watergate, in: P. Colomy (ed.), *Neofunctionalist Sociology*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar (An Elgar Reference Collection), 1990.

S. N. Eisenstadt, The Order-maintaining and Order-transforming Dimensions of Culture, in: R. Munch, Neil J. Smelser (eds.) *Theory of Culture*, Berkeley—Los Angeles—Oxford: University of California Press 1992.

Recommended readings:

Jeffrey C. Alexander, The Centrality of the Classics, in: Anthony Giddens, Jonathan H. Turner (eds.), *Social Theory Today*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987.

Jeffrey C. Alexander, General Theory in the Postpositivist Mode: The 'Epistemological Dilemma' and the Search for Present Reason, in: Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Fin de Siecle Social Theory. Relativism, Reduction, and the Problem of Reason*, London, New York: Verso, 1995.

Jeffrey C. Alexander, Paul Colomy, Toward Neo-functionalism, in: P.Colomy (ed.), *Neofunctionalist Sociology*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar (An Elgar Reference Collection), 1990.

Paul Colomy, Recent Developments in the Functionalist Approach to Change, in: P.Colomy (ed.), *Neofunctionalist Sociology*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar (An Elgar Reference Collection), 1990.

8. Neofunctionalism. The 'German' Branch (Niklas Luhmann, Richard Munch).

Richard Munch: structure—action dilemma. General theory of action: symbolic complexity and action contingency. Niklas Luhmann: types of systems and their modes of reproduction; temporality of social systems; communication as an elementary unit of sociological analysis.

Seminar readings:

Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion. The Codification of Intimacy*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986. Chapter 2: Love as Generalized Symbolic Medium of Communication, Chapter 12: The Discovery of Incommunicability, Chapter 15: What Now?

Recommended readings:

Niklas Luhmann, *Essays on Self-Reference*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

Niklas Luhmann, The Self-Description of Society: Crisis Fashion and Sociological Theory, in: Paul Colomy (ed.), *Neofunctionalist Sociology*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar (An Elgar Reference Collection), 1990.

Richard Munch, Code, Structure, and Action. Building a Theory of Structuration from a Parsonian Point of View, in: Jonathan H. Turner (ed.), *Theory Building in Sociology. Assessing Theoretical Cumulation*, Newbury Park, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989.

9. In search of the conceptualization of our time. Postmodernism and social theory.

Postmodernism as a way out, as an attitude, as a transition. Postmodernism and modernity. Postmodernism and ambivalence. Deconstructing narratives in the era of simulation (Derrida—Lyotard—Baudrillard). Postmodern conceptions of social sciences. Discontinuity and dissemination; linguistic turn: the postmodern conception of fact; localization of truth; limited methodology and methodological polycentrism. Sociologist as an anti-foundational, self-critical, interpreter.

Seminar readings:

Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 7.

Barry Smart, Postmodern Social Theory. In: Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts, USA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

Recommended readings:

Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory. Critical Interrogations*, New York: The Guilford Press, 1991.

Thomas Docherty, Postmodernism: An Introduction, in: Thomas Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.

David Hoy, Jacques Derrida, in: Quentin Skinner (ed.), *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?, in: Thomas Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.

Pauline Marie Roseneau, *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences. Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992. Chapter 5: *A Theory of Theory and the Terrorism of Truth*; Chapter 9: *Elements for an Assessment*.

10. What after Postmodernism: The problem of history in contemporary social thought.

Various conceptualizations of social change and history in postmodern thought. The problem of technology and the new world order: Derrida, Fukuyama, Jameson. Deconstruction of 'the social' and the return of the deconstructed. Towards reflexive modernization?

Seminar readings:

Gerard Delanty, *Social Theory in a Changing World*. Cambridge: Polity Press 1999. Chapters 4 and 6.

Recommended readings:

Ross Abbinnett, *Culture and Identity. Critical Theories*. London—Thousand Oaks—New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2003. Part 3: Postmodernism and the End of History.

Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Modern, Anti, Post, and Neo: How Intellectuals Have Coded, Narrated, and Explained the 'New World of Our Time,'* in: J.F.Alexander, *Fin de Siecle Social Theory: Relativism, Reduction, and the Problem of Reason*, London, New York: Verso, 1995.

Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory*, Oxford, UK, Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1995: Chapter 4: *Postmodernism as Pseudohistory: The Trivialization of Epochal Change*.

Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism*, in: *The Polity Reader in Social Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.