

St. Francis Xavier University
Department of Sociology

Sociology 302.10
Fall 2019

Dr. David Lynes
NT Rm 617

Topics in Contemporary Theory

Sociology came into existence just as the industrial revolution was gaining steam, spurred on by a portentous mix of capitalism, rationality, bureaucracy, and colonialism. In responding to the massive human toll that these pervasive transformations were exacting on their societies, the early sociologists were guided by ideas of justice, truth, honour, and morality in their life-long attempts to articulate and embody a balance between collective responsibility and individual human fulfillment.

One prominent feature of the contemporary social theorists that followed, is that while the commitment to collective responsibility and individual fulfillment can still be found, faith in the traditional guiding ideas of justice, honour, and even “truth”, begins to wane. Faced with the shifting grounds of the earlier perspectives, this course examines how a selection of contemporary social and sociological theorists respond these changes, and in the process, re-imagine social theory in ways which endeavour to do justice to the contemporary social zeitgeist.

Texts and Readings

Required readings will include selections for the following works:

Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*

Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*

Edward Said, *Orientalism*

Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations”

Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*

Peter McHugh, et al. *On The Beginning of Social Inquiry*

This list may be altered depending on the progress and interests of the class. Many of these readings are available on line, in which case the relevant links or the readings themselves will be posted to the course Moodle site. Some may also be distributed in class.

Evaluation

The course work will consist of a series of written assignments aimed at systematically developing a theoretically critical approach to the material covered in the course. The assignments will be worth an increasing amount as the course progresses, as indicated below. There will also be an assessment for class participation. Note that the final exam in this course is a take-home exam.

Mid-Term Assignment.....	25%
Essay.....	30%
Final Examination.....	35%
Participation/Class Exercises.....	10%

Important Dates: Mid-term assignment will be due Wednesday, October 9th 2019. The Essay will be due Friday, November 8th 2019. The final exam will be a “take-home” and be distributed on the last day of classes, and will be due Wednesday, December 11th 2019.

Class Format

The class format and the speed at which the material is covered will be open for revision as the course develops, depending on the class' progress and facility with the material. However, the aim will always be to pursue the work within the context of open class discussions and exercises, in addition to films, lectures, and presentations.

Please Note: Attendance is very important for this course, as the in-class discussions facilitate an enhanced appreciation of the material and is essential to your ability to grasp and demonstrate the spirit of the course objectives. As a consequence, unexplained absences and the failure to submit any of the course assignments could result in failure of the course. Attendance is considered a prerequisite for, and not the substance of, the class participation mark indicated above.

Office Hours

My office is in the Annex, Rm 9-C (the lower floor, towards Lane Hall). Office hours are as follows:

Wednesday	2:30 to 4:30
Thursday	1:00 to 3:30

There will be times when I am unable to be in the office during the posted office hours due to committee and department meetings or other unforeseen circumstances. If this happens, please leave a message and I will get back to you as soon as possible. Other times can be arranged by appointment if you are unable to make those listed. Contact me through e-mail to arrange a meeting or to ask any questions.

E-mail: <dlynes@stfx.ca>
Phone: 867-3802

Finally, feel free to drop in to discuss any aspect of the course or of the Sociology program more generally at any time during the term.

Schedule of Readings and assignments:

January 5: Introduction

January 10th – 12th : Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*,
Introduction; “Conspicuous Leisure”

January 17th – 19th : Thorstein Veblen, “Conspicuous Consumption”
Class Exercise

January 24th – 26th : Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*
“Introduction”; Chapter 1; *Assignment 1 Distributed

January 31st – February 2nd : Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*
Introduction to Critical Theory;
“The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”
*** Assignment 1 Due**

February 7th – February 9th : Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer,
“The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”
continued

February 14th – February 16th : Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*
Introduction; Chapter 1, “Torture”
*Assignment 2 distributed

Reading Week

February 28th – March 2nd : Michel Foucault, “Means of Correct Training”;
“Panopticism”
*** Assignment 2 Due**

March 7th – March 9th : Edward Said, *Orientalism*
Introduction to Colonialism and Imperialism and Postcolonialism;
Documentary: “The British in India”

March 14th – March 16th : Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Chapter 1, “Introduction”
* Assignment 3 distributed

March 21st – March 23rd : Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*
Part 1 ; Part 2;
***Assignment 3 Due**

March 28th – March 30th : Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations”
Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*

April 4th – April 6th : Peter McHugh, et al. *On The Beginning of Social Inquiry*;
“Introduction”

Course overview and Conclusion;
Take-Home Final Exam Distributed