

**BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY**  
**Department of Sociology**

SOC 201  
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**Office Hrs: Mon.Wed 1:30-2:30**  
**and by appointment.**

**Classical and Modern Critical Social Theory**

Social reality is presently undergoing tremendous changes both quantitatively and qualitatively. It is, therefore, becoming increasingly problematic to rely exclusively on the classical theorist for articulating and interpreting our modern experience. On the other hand, it may prove equally unwholesome to venture into the myriad of contemporary critical social thought without attention paid to its historical roots and connective dialectics. An emerging tendency today is to study the one in light of the other. We will attempt, therefore, to get a grasp of the historical landmarks in the development of sociological thought, along with its contemporary revisions and supplements, all the while addressing the major issues of social and cultural research and the debates of today. *Our inquiry will be one of critical socio-historical methodology, with the following goals in mind.*

- a.* Command essential conceptual framework of analysis that are indispensable to social-cultural inquiry
- b.* Gain working knowledge of ideas and paradigms that are integral to qualitative and empirical research
- c.* Introduce the use of *Modeling* as the methodology and primary tool for interdisciplinary teaching, co-learning and research.

The essential writings of the classics revolve around the concept of modernity as a socio-cultural, economic, political and psychological medium for understanding both world and self (Weber, Marx, Durkheim, Gramsci and others). Modern Critical Theory, including post-structural, global, feminist, risk and phenomenological analysis, revises the scope as well as some key premises of the classics, all the while addressing new issues and new developments, and employing different styles and temperament. We tackle the new positions as they take us on a journey into a new and complex 'modernity' and challenges. Habermas, in particular, posits a hopeful phase, situated around the concept of "*communicative ethics*" and the recovery of an eroding ethical social life. The work by Sitton, in this regard, addresses new contested topics in critical theory ranging from culture, politics, the *lifeworld*, gender, aesthetics etc., of the Twenty First Century. Others, such as Castelles and Durrschmidt pose for us new debates, especially in reference to the rising realities of the Network Society and Globalization. **We will cover the essential positions of this *Classical-Modern Critical Continuum*.**

In another vein, the hard-nosed structural theories of the classics (Saussure, Marx, Durkheim) are challenged by Foucault's new modalities of subtle modes of repression, surveillance and power. We will analyze the topic in reference to revised notions of subjectivity and domination, and follow up with the timely contributions by feminist thought, notably in the work of Nancy Fraser, Butler who subjects theory to gender critique in relation to self and society. Several other authors, both classical and contemporary, will be read through selected articles in the form of class handouts. The articles both respond to classical theory as well as open up new horizons in theory and research today.

I have also provided for you 2 secondary texts. The slim book by Hadden (Sociological Theory) is a wonderful entry to the classical theorists. The text by Seidman (Contested Knowledge) is an intelligent and engaging reading on most of the topics we cover. I urge you to get both. Other key articles on these classical founders will be handed out separately.

With Castells work on The Network Society and its culture, Mary Caldor and David Held on the transition from nation to Globe and the newly published research edited by Durrschmidt and Taylor on Globalization and Social Change, we will try to sum up the issues of the historical and socio-cultural inquiry of this course and identify present and probable future tendencies in theory and practice.

Please contact me for any disability needs.

## READING MATERIAL

**The following are the required readings that will engage us throughout the course:** Representative selections of primary works by classical and critical theorists will be handed out periodically. Several of the required books are small in size but compact and rich, and quite efficient for our purposes.

### **Required**

Richard Hadden *Sociological Theory-Introduction to Classical Theory*. 1999

S Seidman *Contested Knowledge* Blackwell, Fourth edition, 2008

John Sitton : *Habermas and Contemporary Society*. Palgrave 2003

H. Marcuse *One Dimensional Man*. Beacon (A classic- any edition is fine)

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish* (Translated by Alan Sheridan) Vintage books.

Brown: On Foucault

Weber: *Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism*

Fraser, Nancy. *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse on Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. (U of Minnesota Press)

J Durrschmidt and G. Taylor: *Globalization, Modernity and Social Change: Hot Spots of Transition-* Palgrave 2007

**The following are recommended:**

Held, David. **Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas.** (U of California Press)

**NOTE:**

**To lessen your expenses, most of the primary texts and relevant articles will be handed out free of charge. I suggest you keep them organized in a separate file. They will help you in your future teaching and research engagements**

At the end of every session there will be short class presentations by 2-3 students on sections from Durrschmidt's edited research on Globalization and Social Change. Students always enjoyed such presentations which, they felt, hone both their power of articulation and the management of short presentations in the framework of a team work. We start doing this on a voluntary basis, all the while remembering that your classmates and my self are right there to support you.

The Syllabus contain five major areas of inquiry that are thematically sequenced and ~~constituted~~ thematic inquiry for the course.

**SYLLABUS**

**I. THE CULTURE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF MODERNITY  
—CLASSICAL CONTRIBUTIONS.**

**First exercise in Interdisciplinary Modeling ( Human Interests and modes of Knowledge)**

Readings:

Kant: What is Enlightenment? Handout

Hadden - Social Theory. Chapter 1. The Enlightenment pp. 14-35

Seidman- Contested Knowledge, Part 1, Introduction and Chapter 1: The idea of Science of Society, the Enlightenment...

Weber: Generic Social Orders: Traditional, Modern and Charismatic.

Class and Status (Handouts)

Three Types of Legitimation -- Domination and Legitimacy (Handout)

The Protestant Ethics and the spirit of Capitalism (Book)

On Weber:

Hadden: Max Weber- Chapter 4

Seidman: Weber –Chapter 4

**Next class presentation (from the book by Durrschmidt on Globalization and Social ~~Introduction~~: Theorizing Undefined Society**

## **Chapter 4 : The Workplace in Transition: Labor, Time and Space**

### **2. Classical CRITICAL THEORY: THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY AND ALTERNATIVES**

#### Readings:

Marx: Selections from Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts and other readings  
(handout)

Seidman Contested knowledge- The revolutionary Theory of Marx -chapter 2

Hadden Marx- Chapter 2

Marcuse: One Dimensional Man : Chapters 1,2 ,3, 4, 9

Held: Intro. to Critical Theory (Section on Marcuse)

Rationalization: The rise of Instrumental Reason (pp65-76)

**Next Class Presentation: Durrschmidt Chapter 5, Consumption: Money and Identity....**

### **3. Modern Critical Theory**

Habermas : On System and Lifeworld, Legitimation Crisis, Communicative  
Ethics.. (handouts)

Sitton: Habermas and Contemporary Society

connect Chapter 1,2,3( short, highly readable and connective chapters- they  
Weber, Marx and Habermas. Do not miss.

Sitton Society as Lifeworld and System Chapter 4,

Contested terrains Language Art and Gender chapter 6

Habermas and the Politics of the Twenty-First Century. Chapter 8

Seidman Contested Knowledge: Rethinking the Classical Tradition  
Chapter 8. The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas

Coming Presentations (from Seidman)

**From Nation to Globe:** David Held and Mary Kaldor, in Seidman section 18

**Global Capitalism:** Wallerstein and Castells, in Seidman section 19

### **4. STRUCTURALISM, POSTSTRUCTURALISM: THE CASE OF DURKHEIM AND FOUCAULT ( and the Contribution of Z. Bauman)**

#### Readings:

Durkheim: *Rules of Sociological Method* and other selections- Handouts

Hadden chapter 3, Emile Durkheim

Seidman Chapter3, The promise of Sociology

Seidman: Contested knowledge: Michel Foucault's Disciplinary Society

chapter 12

Foucault:

Discipline and Punish:

Part I.

Part III 1. Docile Bodies 2. The means of Correct Training

3. Panopticism,

Part IV The Carceral

Secondary material

Brown : On Foucault.( a small expository pamphlet) Short sections on:  
Truth, power, self, Epistemology, The politics of Power,  
The withering away of the self, Care of the self.

**Coming Presentations:**

**Chapters 6 Politics Beyond the State**

**Chapter 7 Life in Risk Society- Globe and Body**

**5. FEMINIST CRITIQUE IN SOCIAL THEORY**

Readings:

Nancy Fraser:

*Unruly Practices*

Part 3, "Gender and the Politics of Need Interpretation"

Chapter 7, "Women, Welfare and Need Interpretation"

Chapter 8, "Struggle Over Needs"

Chris Weedon: Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory

Chapter 5 Discourse, Power and Resistance

Judy Butler: Contributions...