Contemporary Social Theory

Sławomir Kapralski
kapral@css.edu.pl

Main textbook:

Hans Joas, Wolfgang Knöbl, Social Theory. Twenty Introductory Lectures.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

1. Theorizing theory.

Social theory as a conceptualization of ‘the social.’ Social theory and modernity: four paradigms (Alexander). Historical character of theory: when does contemporary social theory begin? 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 functionalism. ‘Four paradigms’ revisited: the matrix for contemporary social theory.

Readings:

Hans Joas, Wolfgang Knöbl, Social Theory. Twenty Introductory Lectures.


2. The “social” is what people think it is?

Symbolic Interactionism and dramaturgical perspective in sociology.
Phenomenological inspiration and Ethnomethodology

daily life: ‘account-ability’ of activities. Ethnomethodology as a foundational challenge for sociology.

Readings:


3. The “social” is not what people think it is? Transformations of the revolutionary spirit: in search of the lost utopia? Jürgen Habermas and Critical Theory.


Readings:


Readings:


5. The “social” is what it is? From Functionalism to Neofunctionalism. Jeffrey Alexander, Paul Colomy. The “German Branch”: Niklas Luhmann, Richard Munch.

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

Readings:


6. There is no “social”? 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. Postmodern deconstruction of “society”: the end of agency, the end of resistance, the end of history.

Readings:


7. The return of history in social theory.


Readings:


8. The return of the “social.”


Readings:


Readings:


Plus a selection from:


