### **Theories of Action in Contemporary Sociology**

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### Description

This course aims to present and discuss some new developments in the theory of action at the cutting edge of social theory. In order to situate the current preoccupation with action, the course will open with a return to the new theoretical movement of the 1980´s (Bourdieu, Giddens and Habermas). Against the background, the course will then proceed to a systematic reconstruction of the pragmatic sociology of critique (Boltanski and Thévenot), dispositional sociological psychology (Lahire), the transformational model of social action (Bhaskar), the sociology of internal conversations (Archer), the theory of interaction ritual chains (Collins), the anti-utilitarian paradigm of the gift (Caillé), the sociology of experience (Dubet) and the dialectical sociology of the Montreal School (Freitag). The theories will not be analyzed in isolation. Rather it is hoped that through dialogue and comparison some of their limitations will be uncovered and a common framework for a complex social theory of action will eventually emerge.

Requirements

Reading: This an advanced *intensive* course with lots of reading materials (100 pages on average per day). Students who want to take this course are strongly advised to reserve the whole week for studying purposes.

Participation: Students are asked to present the reading materials and initiate the discussion.

Essay: Students have to write an essay of 10 to 30 pages on theories of action covered in the syllabus, theories not covered in the syllabus, or relate their own research to any of those theories.

# Syllabus

**Day 1: The New Theoretical Movement: Twenty Years Later**

Alexander, J. (1988): “The New Theoretical Movement”, pp. 77-101 in Neil Smelser (ed.): *Handbook of Sociology*. London: Sage.

Bourdieu, P. (1980): “Structures, habitus, pratiques”, pp. 87-110 in *Le sens pratique*. Paris : Minuit.

Giddens, A. (1982): “Hermeneutics and Social Theory”, pp. 1-17 and “Action, Structure, Power”, pp. 28-39 in *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory*. London: Macmillan.

Habermas, J. (1985): “Remarks on the Concept of Communicative Action”, in Seebass, G. e Tuomela, R. (eds.): *Social Action*, pp. 151-177. Boston; D. Reidel.

**Day 2: Dispositions and Situations of Action**

Boltanski, L. and Thévenot, L. (1999): “The Sociology of Critical Capacity”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2, 3, pp. 359-377.

Thévenot, L. (2006) : “Introduction”, pp. 5-21 et “Les régimes d’une action qui convient : du familier au public”, pp. pp. 93-110 in *L´action au pluriel. Sociologie des régimes d´engagement*. Paris : La Découverte.

Lahire, B. (1999): “Esquissedu programme scientifique d'une sociologie psychologique”, *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, vol. CVI, pp. 29-59.

**Day 3: Reflexivity and Agency**

Bhaskar, R. (1998): “Societies’, pp. 206-233 in Archer, M. (ed.): *Critical Realism. Essential Readings*

Archer, M. (2003): “Introduction”, pp. 1-16 in *Structure, Agency and The Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. (2007): Internal Conversations and their Outwards”, pp. 269-313 in *Making Our Way though the World.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Day 4: Rituals and Reciprocity**

Caillé, A. (2009): “Vers une théorie anti-utilitariste de l´action”, pp. 11-74 in *Théorie anti-utilitariste de l’action. Fragments d´une sociologie générale.* Paris : La Découverte.

Collins, R.: “The Program of Interaction Ritual Theory”, pp. pp. 3-46, notes, pp. 375-379.

*Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

**Day 5: Agency and Society**

Dubet, F. : “Les mutations du modèle”, pp. 51-89 et “L’expérience sociale et l´action”, pp. 91-134 in *Sociologie de l´expérience*. Paris : Seuil.

Freitag, M.: “Pour un dépassement de l'opposition entre ‘holisme’ et ‘individualisme’ en sociologie”, *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, vol. XXXII, no. 99, pp. 169-219.