

## **Seminar          Sociological Field Theory and Theories of Social Fields**

Instructor: Jacob Habinek, Ph.D.

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Meetings: t.b.d.

Website: t.b.d.

### **Course description**

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Field theory is a more or less coherent approach in the social sciences, which explains regularities in individual behavior through recourse to the positions of other actors. The influence of the structuralist field theory of Pierre Bourdieu along with neoinstitutionalist theories of social and organizational fields has led to a growing interest in field-theoretic approaches. The goal of this seminar is to provide an overview of (i) the foundations of the field-theoretic perspective, (ii) the relationship of field theory to other „relational“ theories, and (iii) contemporary field-theoretic perspectives.

### **Course requirements**

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The course involves the following activities:

*Regular attendance and active participation (20% of your final grade):* Students are expected to attend all classes and participate in discussion. This is not a secondary part of the class. You should be prepared to comment in a scholarly fashion on the readings. This means being in a position to comment on the overall argument of a work, and on the specific steps in that argument (including methods of reasoning and use of evidence).

*Three response papers (20% each):* Students are required to complete response papers on the readings for three of course meetings of their choice. The response papers should clearly and concisely identify the central argument of reading, the strategy of analysis, and main evidence used, and end with a few discussion questions for the seminar meeting. The papers are due on the Monday prior to the class meeting.

*One presentation (20%):* In addition to completing a response paper, students are required to present the readings to the class once during the course. The presentation should be no more than 20 minutes long. Although the presentation should cover the same points as the response papers, it should not merely review the argument of the reading. This is your week to lead to the class, to pose the issues that you see as crucial. Ideally, two students will be assigned to each course meeting, one acting as an advocate for the author's position and the other as a critic.

### **Course materials**

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The required texts will be made available electronically through the course website. The recommended texts are available through the library.

## Schedule of classes

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### 1. Introduction

### 2. What is field theory?

Martin, John Levi (2003): What is field theory? *American Journal of Sociology*, 109 (1), pp. 1-49.

### 3. Was is not field theory?

Weber, Max (1958): Religious rejections of the world and their directions. In Gerth, Hans, and C. Wright Mills (eds.): *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 323-359.

### 4. Psychological foundations: gestalt theory

Koffka, Kurt (1935): Behavior and its field: the task of psychology. In Koffka, Kurt: *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*. New York: Harcourt Brace, pp. 24-68.

### 5. Psychological foundations: pragmatism

Mead, George Herbert (1934): *Selections from Mind, Self, & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. t.b.d.

### 6. Structures and processes: symbolic interactionism

Becker, Howard (1982): Art worlds and collective activity. In Becker, Howard: *Art Worlds*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 1-39.

Abbott, Andrew (1995): Things of boundaries. *Social Research*, 62 (4), pp. 857-882.

### 7. Structures and processes: network theory

White, Harrison (2008): Notes on the constituents of social structure. *Soc. Rel.* 10 – Spring 1965. *Sociologica* 1/2008, pp. 1-14.

Breiger, Ronald (1974): The duality of persons and groups. *Social Forces*, 53(2), pp. 181-190.

### 8. Structures and processes: figuration theory

Elias, Norbert (1994): Towards a theory of the civilizing process. In Elias, Norbert: *The Civilizing Process*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 365-387.

### 9. Structuralist field theory

Bourdieu, Pierre (1991): Genesis and structure of the religious field. *Comparative Social Research* 33 (1), pp. 1-44.

### 10. Structuralist field theory

Bourdieu, Pierre (1988): Types of capital and forms of power. In Bourdieu, Pierre: *Homo Academicus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 73-127.

### 11. Structuralist field theory

Bourdieu, Pierre (1988): The defence of the corps and the break in equilibrium. In Bourdieu, Pierre: *Homo Academicus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 128-158.

## **12. Neoinstitutional theories of social fields**

DiMaggio, Paul and Walter Powell (1983): The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48 (2), pp. 147-160.

## **13. Neoinstitutional theories of social fields**

Fligstein, Neil (2001): The theory of fields and the problem of market formation. In Fligstein, Neil: *The Architecture of Markets*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 67-98.

## **14. Neoinstitutional theories of social fields**

Fligstein, Neil (2001): Social skill and the theory of fields. *Sociological Theory*, 19 (2), pp. 105-125.

Beckert, Jens (2010): How Do Fields Change? The interrelations of institutions, networks, and cognition in the dynamics of markets. *Organization Studies*, 31 (5), pp. 605-627.

## **Recommended additional literature**

### General

Emirbayer, Mustafa (1997): Manifesto for a Relational Sociology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(2), S. 281-317.

Cassirer, Ernst (1923): The concept of thing and the concept of relation. In Cassirer, Ernst: *Substance and Function*. Chicago: Open Court.

Hesse, Mary (1961): *Forces and Fields: The Concept of Action at a Distance in the History of Physics*. London: Nelson.

Köhler, Wolfgang (1920): *Die physischen Gestalten in Ruhe und stationären Zustand: eine naturphilosophische Untersuchung*. Braunschweig: Vieweg (sorry, no translation available!).

### Psychological foundations

Dewey, John (1929): *Experience and Nature*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Lewin, Kurt (1936): *Principles of Topological Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1963): *The Structure of Behavior*. New York: Beacon.

### Symbolic interactionism

Blumer, Herbert (1969): *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Goffman, Erving (1967): *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face to Face Behavior*. Garden City: Doubleday.

Abbott, Andrew (2016). *Processual Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

### Network theory

White, Harrison (1992): *Identity and Control: A Structural Theory of Social Action*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Granovetter, Mark (1985): Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness. *American Journal of Sociology*, 91 (3), pp. 481-510.

Martin, John Levi (2009): *Social Structures*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Figurational sociology

Elias, Norbert (1978): *What is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press.

Bourdieu

Bourdieu, Pierre (1984): *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1990): *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (2000): *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Neoinstitutionalism

DiMaggio, Paul, and Walter Powell (1991): *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Snow, David (2004): *Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields*. In Snow, David, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Fligstein, Neil, and Douglas McAdam (2012): *A Theory of Fields*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.