CSOn4002 INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY
Room U43, Tuesdays 14:00-15:40

B. Nadya Jaworsky (jaworsky@fss.muni.cz) Room 3.66, Wednesdays 11:00 to 12:00 or by appointment
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Course Description:

Arguably, signs, symbols and meanings have always been the province of sociologists but not always their primary concern. Many believe we have finally taken or are in the midst of taking a "cultural turn" in contemporary sociology. Problems of meaning, discourse, aesthetics, value, textuality, and narrativity, topics traditionally within the purview of humanists, have come to the fore as sociologists increasingly emphasize the role of meanings, symbols, cultural frames, and cognitive schema in their theorization of social processes and institutions. This course will chart such a move, providing a wide-ranging overview of the ways in which culture has been conceived and utilized in the evolution of contemporary cultural sociological thought.

To achieve these goals, the classroom experience is structured around weekly simulations. Students take on the roles of a "real-world" experience related to the assigned topic and readings. The aim is to make classical and contemporary cultural sociology come to life, while developing critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills. Above all, the simulations are intended as a form of interactive and experiential knowledge production, making students active agents in their own learning process.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:
- Join classroom discussions more actively

- Acquire the ability to connect abstract social theories to real life situations

- Improve their understanding of social institutions and policy-making processes

- Compare and contrast different sociological approaches to the study of culture

- Review and analyze patterns of historical change in the meanings of culture as a theoretical concept

- Critically reflect about their own cultural experiences in light of sociological and historical data

- Cultivate research proficiency and expertise by undertaking a semester-long research project that involves primary sociological texts, the incorporation of a strong thesis and the use of AI technology.

Assessment methods

Conditions for passing the course:

1. **Regular Attendance and active participation in seminar simulations and discussions**

2. **Written responses to the readings and/or in-class simulations** (You will reflect upon and assess the week's reading and the relevant sessions' simulation, synthesizing and developing theories, hypotheses, or frameworks of explanation that they then test for "real-world" applicability.)

3. **Final research project** (topic of your choice in consultation with instructor; you will create a 2000-word essay in ChatGPT on your topic, and write a 1500-word critique of the essay. The critique should contain an introduction, thesis statement, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.)

4. **Final exam;** to be scheduled during the exam period, computerized, multiple choice format

Particular activities of students will be evaluated as follows:

44% - participation in class and reflection on the simulations (4 pts. each)
41% - research project
15% - final exam

Academic Honesty
The Faculty of Social Studies at MU expects students to know the study rules and maintain academic honesty by refraining from plagiarism and from cheating during exams. Plagiarism means that one presents other peoples' ideas as one's own and does not credit the author. Plagiarism is one of the most serious breaches of ethical standards in the academic environment, for it denies the mission of the university and the meaning of studying. From a legal perspective, plagiarism is the stealing of intellectual property. In addition, the use of AI tools should be judicious and under the direction of the teacher. The official FSS policy on academic honesty and on the use of AI technology are available in the course's interactive syllabus in IS. Academic dishonesty is not tolerated under any circumstances at FSS. **The minimum penalty for academic dishonesty is expulsion from the course, a grade of F for the semester, and referral to the Faculty disciplinary committee.**

All assignments submitted in this course must be your own work. Any use of generative AI in working on assignments is prohibited. The assignments assigned in this course are designed to motivate you to develop creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The use of AI technology will limit your ability to develop these skills and achieve the learning objectives of this course.

PLEASE NOTE:
All assignments may require an oral defence. Students will have to prove that their paper does not contain parts that can be classified as plagiarized or contain academic fraudulence. Students have to demonstrate that they used all the references enlisted in the paper and show beyond doubt that they wrote the paper by being able to defend it in a discussion.

Do not use AI chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT) to generate content, though you may use them to brainstorm or improve your style; we reserve the right to schedule an oral examination covering all the readings of the class.

(**IMPORTANT:** See online Interactive Syllabus for specific simulation preparation readings for each week!)

Week	Date	Seminar topic	Required reading
1	Sept 16	Introduction to course (NJ)	No reading – Announce David Inglis
2	Sept 23	Introduction to the field Cultural turn in the social sciences & Constitution of cultural sociology (NJ)	1. Spillman – Introduction, pp. 1-15. (14 pp.) 2. Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2021. "Recovering the primitive in the modern: The cultural turn and the origins of cultural sociology." *Thesis Eleven* 165(1): 10-19. (8 pages) 3. Bauman, Zygmunt. 2010. "Culture: Liquid-Modern Adventures of an Idea." Pp. 326-334 in *Handbook of Cultural Sociology*, edited by J. R. Hall, L. Grindstaff, and M. Lo. New York: Routledge. (8 pp.) 4. Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2020. "The Double Whammy Trauma: Narrative and Counter-Narrative during Covid-Floyd," *Thesis Eleven,* Online Special: Living and Thinking Crisis. https://thesiseleven.com/2020/07/09/the-double-whammy-trauma-narrative-and-counter-narrative-during-covid-floyd/ (4 pp.) 5. Simulation Preparation Readings
			SIMULATION: Exercise in urban planning, simulation of how a municipality can "use" culture to market itself
3	Sept 30	Culture in "Classical" Social Theory – Part I (WB)	1. Durkheim, Emile. 1915. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Book 2, Ch. 6 & 7, pp .188-234. (*46 pp.) 2. Inglis, Chapter 2, pp. 27-52. (25 pp.) 3. Simulation Preparation Readings
			SIMULATION: Exercise in designing collective effervescence to foster political participation
4	Oct 7	Culture in "Classical" Social Theory – Part II (NJ)	1. Du Bois, W.E.B. 2007 [1903]. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. READ: Chapter I "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," and Chapter II "Of the Dawn of Freedom." (27 pp.) 2. Du Bois, W.E.B. 2007 [1903]. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. READ: Introduction (17 pp.) 3. Simulation Preparation Readings

			<mark>**SIMULATION:**</mark> A school board meeting about teaching Critical Race Theory in secondary schools
5	Oct 14	Structuralism and the Semiotic Analysis of Culture (CS)	1. Barthes, Roland. 1990[1972] "The World of Wrestling." Pp. 87-93 in *Culture and Society*. (6 pp.) 2. Sahlins, Marshall. 1990[1976]. "Food as Symbolic Code." Pp. 94-104 in *Culture and Society*. (10 pp.) 3. Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1955. "The Structural Study of Myth." *The Journal of American Folklore* 68(270):428-444. (*16 pp.) 4. Simulation Preparation Readings
			<mark>**SIMULATION:**</mark> Meeting of a left-wing political party on how to create more effective, structured stories that promote its agenda.
6	Oct 21	The Poststructural Turn (WB)	1. Decoteau, Claire Laurier. 2017. "Poststructuralism Today." Pp. 251–77 in *Social theory now*, edited by C. E. Benzecry, M. Krause, and I. Reed. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press. (26 pp.) Simulation Preparation Readings <mark>**SIMULATION:**</mark> Meeting of authors for a new history textbook for secondary school students, influenced by post-structuralist ideas
7	Oct 28	**NO CLASS**	**READING WEEK**
8	Nov 4	Culture as Text (CS)	1. Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." Pp. 415-451 in *Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books. (*36 pp.) 2. Smith, Philip. 2011. "Narrating Global Warming." Pp. 745-762 in J. Alexander, R. Jacobs, and P. Smith, *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (17 pp.) 3. Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," Pp. 3-30 in *Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books. (*27 pp.) Simulation Preparation Readings
			<mark>**SIMULATION**</mark>: Meeting of scientists planning to issue a press release on climate change
9	Nov11	The Civil Sphere (CS)	1. Kivisto, Peter, and Giuseppe Sciortino. 2025. *The Civil Sphere: A Concise Introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Books. chapters 3,4,5 (86 pp.) 2. Simulation Preparation Readings

			SIMULATION: Meeting of journalists to select semiotic codes to comment on technocratic authoritarianism.
10	Nov 18	Culture in "Classical" Social Theory – Part III (NJ)	1. Martineau, Harriet. 1838. *How to Observe Morals and Manners.* London: Samuel Bentley. READ: Introduction (3 pp.), "What to Observe" (4 pp.). Part II, Chapter II, General Moral Notions (13 pp.), and Part III, Chapter VI, "Discourse" (5 pp.) (total = 25 pp.) https://www.gutenberg.org/files/33944/33944-h/33944-h.htm#si 2. Martineau, Harriet. 1838. *How to Observe Morals and Manners.* London: Samuel Bentley. READ: Part I, Chapter 1, 2, and 3 (25 pp.) 3. Simulation Preparation Readings
			SIMULATION: Meeting of survey designers for the next national census in the United States
11	Nov. 25	Pressing Issues: Gender and the Body (NJ)	1. Inglis – Chapter 1, pp. 15-26 (11 pp.) 2. Gamson, Joshua and Laura Grindstaff. 2010. "Gender Performance: Cheerleaders, Drag Kings, and the Rest of Us." Pp. 252-262 in *Handbook of Cultural Sociology*, edited by J. R. Hall, L. Grindstaff, and M. Lo. New York: Routledge. (10 pp.) 3. Simulation Preparation Readings
			SIMULATION: Meeting of the United Nations entity UN Women to create new guidelines for Gender Equality
12	Dec 2	"Strong" vs. "Weak" Programs? (NJ)	1. Alexander – *Meanings of Social Life*, Introduction & Ch. 1, pp. 3-26. (23 pp) 2. Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51:273-286. (*13 pp) 3. Pierre Bourdieu, "Artistic Taste and Cultural Capital" (1968) pp. 205-216 in *Culture and Society*. (11 pp.) 4. Simulation Preparation Readings
			SIMULATION: Planning meeting to write a museum guide for secondary students

| 13 | Dec 9 | Looking Forward: The Cultural Sociology of Artificial Intelligence (WB) | 1. Alexander, Jeffrey C. (2003/1992): "The Sacred and Profane Information Machine". In: *The Meanings of Social Life. A Cultural Sociology*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 179-192. (14 pp.)
2. Airoldi, Massimo. 2021. *Machine habitus: Toward a sociology of algorithms*. John Wiley & Sons. Chapter 1, pp. 1-31. (31 pp.)
3. Simulation Preparation Readings |
| | | | ==SIMULATION==: Working with AI programs online to create sociological essays on current affairs |