Relational Sociology: Course Plan

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As a broad orientation towards sociological theory and research, relational sociology has been gaining adherents in the last forty years or so. Perhaps this growth has taken place in American academia more than in other settings, but European academia has in fact barely lacked behind. Many of the lineages of the relational orientation, after all, go back to Europe. From Marx and his notion of relations of production to Georg Simmel and his notion of formal sociology, to Pierre Bourdieu and his notion of field, to Bruno Latour and his notion of Actor-Network – to mention only some of the most outstanding scholars – we find a rich tradition in relational sociological scholarship in Europe. In the US, the relationalists include Mustafa Emirbayer, Charles Tilly, and the many scholars falling under the rubrics American Structuralism and Network Analysis, Harrison White foremost among them.

This course aims at distinguishing, comparing and discussing some key conceptualizations of relations and their corresponding enveloping theories. It aims to cover both general theories and theories of more specialized intend. Among the latter, particular attention will be given to works in the fields of organizational sociology, political sociology, and the sociology of identity/social boundaries.

Assessment of the Course Participants

The course is designed around six two-hour-long lectures, excluding the introductory lecture, and six corresponding two-hour-long seminars. The seminars are discussion sessions in which the course participants have the opportunity to take the discussion to directions of their concern. Course assessment, on a pass/fail basis, is built on this scheme.

Specifically, the assignments for the course are reflection papers which the course participants write in response to the weekly readings, hence a reflection paper per weekly readings is possible. The reflection papers must be no longer than two single spaced pages. There will be no additional assignments, such as a final essay. In order to receive a “pass,” any course participant must get a “pass” on five reflection papers. Should a reflection paper receive a “fail,” the paper’s author has the option to rewrite/develop it. The reflection papers are due in hard copy print at the start of the lecture on any given week. The idea is that the participants, first, reflect on the readings independently of the lecture and, secondly, become ready through their prior reflection to participate in the seminar discussion that follows the lecture.

Given that the participants can write five papers out of six possible, no late reflection papers will be accepted. Should a participant be unable to write five papers by the end of the course, adjudicating her predicament will be at the discretion of the course convener.
Schedule of Meeting and Readings

January 21 (Monday)
10:00-11:00: Introductory Lecture

January 24 (Thursday)
10:00-12:00: Lecture: Overview
14:00-16:00: Seminar


January 31 (Thursday)
10:00-12:00: Lecture: American Structuralism and Network Theory
14:00-16:00: Seminar


February 7 (Thursday)
10:00-12:00: Lecture 7: *Tilly and Social Boundaries*
14:00-16:00: Seminar

February 14 (Thursday)
10:00-12:00: Lecture: *Bourdieu, Capital, and the State*
14:00-16:00: Seminar

February 21 (Thursday)
10:00-12:00: Lecture: *Fields and Organizations*
14:00-16:00: Seminar

February 28 (Thursday)
10:00-12:00: Lecture: *Latour and Actor-Network-Theory*
14:00-16:00