Aims and objectives
This course offers students the opportunity to pursue their interests in contemporary social theory at an advanced level. The course encourages students to use social theory in order to think creatively, constructively and critically about the ways in which the social and political world is changing today. The course takes for granted an intermediate level of knowledge of classical and contemporary social theory; students are expected to develop and extend their knowledge of key thinkers by reading their work in greater depth. However, the course itself is organized around problems and issues, not around thinkers and texts. The emphasis is on encouraging students to practice social theory by thinking theoretically about particular problems and issues. The course seeks to bring social theory alive by getting students to draw on the resources of social theory in order to understand the world of the 21st century and how it is changing.

Course aims:
• To enable students to pursue their interests in social theory at an advanced level.
• To enable students to read a selection of theoretical texts in detail.
• To encourage students to use social theory to analyse particular aspects or characteristics of contemporary societies.
• To encourage students to think creatively, constructively and critically about how the social and political world is changing today.

Course organization
The course is organized in terms of discrete modules – i.e., clusters of lectures or seminars. Each module consists of around four hours of lectures or seminar-based teaching, often scheduled as two two-hour sessions. The modules are focused on particular problems or themes and are taught by leading practitioners of social theory today. The content of the modules will vary from year to year, depending on the availability of members of staff. In 2019-20 the following modules will be offered:

Michaelmas 2019
Dr Jennifer Gabrys, Introduction to Advanced Social Theory (18 October—Friday)
Dr Michiel van Oudheusden and Prof Jennifer Gabrys ‘Citizens and Collectives’ (23 and 30 October)
Dr Filipe Carreira da Silva, ‘Rethinking Populism’ (6 and 13 November)
Prof Jennifer Gabrys, ‘The Social Life of Truth, Facts and Evidence’ (20 and 27 November)
Dr Jana Bacevic ‘Knowing Differently: Feminist, Indigenous, and Decolonial Theory’ (4 December)

Lent 2020
Dr Ali Meghji, ‘Black Logic, Black Methods, #BlackLivesMatter’ (22 January)
Dr Mónica Moreno-Figueroa, ‘Internalised Racism’ (29 January and 5 February)
Dr Lucy van de Wiel, ‘Remaking Life’ (12 and 19 February)
Dr Michiel van Oudheusden and Prof Jennifer Gabrys ‘Sociology of Futures’ (26 February and 4 March)
Prof Jennifer Gabrys, ‘From Social Theory to Social Practice’ (11 March)
Supervision
Supervision will be provided either by the individuals teaching the modules or by other supervisors who have agreed to supervise for this paper. One or two contacts are given for each module and they will either do the supervision or help arrange it. If students or Directors of Studies encounter difficulties they should contact the Course Organizer.

Revision
A one-hour revision class is scheduled at the beginning of Easter Term.

Assessment
The course will be assessed by means of a three-hour examination paper.

Brief description of modules and reading lists

MICHAELMAS TERM 2019

1. Citizens and Collectives – Dr Michiel van Oudheusden and Prof Jennifer Gabrys
This module will consist of two sessions that investigate theories and practices of citizens and collectives. The first session, ‘Making Citizens and “doing” Citizenship,’ taught by Dr van Oudheusden, will engage with citizenship in a broad theoretical and empirical sense. The session views citizenship as a set of varied practices through which citizens set the terms of civic membership and define civic rights and duties – often through political contestation and struggle. In this way, it seeks to avoid a too static, legal or juridical definition of citizenship as a set of (individual) rights and obligations; instead drawing attention to its social construction in various cultures, its rich histories, and inviting inquiry into possible citizenship futures.

The second session, ‘Technologies of Citizenship,’ taught by Prof Gabrys, will continue to explore how citizenship is articulated in practice, while also investigating how citizenship is increasingly mediated and articulated through technological infrastructures. The lecture will investigate how different effects and affects of citizenship materialize along with technologies of citizenship. If citizenship always includes fellow citizens, as articulated by Balibar, then who are the fellow citizens and communities that emerge along with technologies?

Session 1 (Dr van Oudheusden): Making and Doing Citizenship

Required Reading
**Recommended Reading**


**Session 2 (Prof Gabrys): Technologies of Citizenship**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


Isin, Engin. 2009. “Citizenship in Flux: The Figure of the Activist Citizen.” *Subjectivity* 29, no. 1, 367-388.


**Essay questions**
1. What is a sociological approach to citizenship and why should it matter?
2. How does citizenship feel?
3. In what ways does citizenship change through technologies and technological practices?

**Supervision**
Contact Dr M van Oudheusden at mpv28@cam.ac.uk

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2. **Rethinking Populism – Dr Filipe Carreira da Silva**

Especially after the 2008 financial crisis, the term ‘populism’ has become one of the buzzwords of our time. Journalists, politicians, pundits and scholars alike have come to apply the term to a vast array of phenomena across the political spectrum: from anti-establishment political movements on both left and right (Greece’s Syriza, Spain’s Podemos, Italy’s Five Stars, the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements in the United States), through political leaders (e.g., Erdogan in Turkey, and Orban in Hungary) and candidates (e.g., Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the US), to parties and currents within parties challenging the traditional political mainstream from the inside (e.g., the National Front in France). Yet, amongst socio-political concepts, populism has pride of place as one of the most contentious, being variously characterized as ideology, logic, discursive frame, strategy/organization, a mode of political practice, or, for those privileging its performative aspects, political style.

In this module, I take one step back, and call this labelling into question. What unites and disunites the above mentioned phenomena? Does the ‘populist’ theoretical/conceptual framework help us make sense and explain these phenomena, or, on the contrary, does such a framework inhibit our understanding of what these phenomena are and what they are about? Do the different understandings of populism itself, both conceptually and methodologically, allow for significantly different levels of understanding and scientific analysis of the phenomena in question? In the first session, I discuss the rise of ‘populist politics’ in Europe and in the United States and examine different conceptualizations of ‘populism’ and their operationalization for the purpose of analysis. In the second session, I consider how populism has characteristics of utopian thinking: populist leaders use highly moralized images of the past to castigate the present and promise the eminent advent of a new future.

**Session 1:**

*Required Reading*
Recommended Reading

Session 2:
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Essay questions
1. What factors led to the rise of populism in recent years?
2. Is populism an ideology?
3. “The utopia of the Populists was in the past, not the future.” (Hofstadter) Discuss.

Supervision
Contact Dr FC Silva at fcs23@cam.ac.uk

3. The Social Life of Truth, Facts and Evidence – Prof Jennifer Gabryś
Truth, evidence and facts are phenomena that are increasingly scrutinized and discussed for their apparent instability and decline. From elections to referendums, news reporting and social media, as well as environmental and social crises, numerous concerns are arising about the veracity and integrity of these social events. This module will investigate the shifting terrain of truth, facts and evidence by engaging with theoretical and empirical research that addresses the social standing of facts and “reality.” We will especially consider social events including climate change denial and “fake news,” as well as civic epistemologies and citizen data, as instances where facts and evidence are put into question. We will attend to the different epistemological and ontological conditions in which social facts take hold, and we will consider the possible consequences of different formations of truth and evidence.
Session 1: Post-Truth, Denial, Disagreement and Doubt

Required Reading


Recommended Reading


Session 2: Social Facts and Citizen Data

Required Reading


Recommended Reading


**Essay questions**

1. In what ways do the social conditions of facts challenge the category of “post-truth”
2. Can the co-production of knowledge lead to more robust forms of evidence?
3. If knowledge is situated and partial, then how do collective realities and truths occur?

**Supervision**

Contact Prof Jennifer Gabrys at jg899@cam.ac.uk

**4. Knowing differently: feminist, indigenous, and decolonial theory – Dr Jana Bacevic**

This session will present some of the distinctive challenges to the Eurocentrism of social theory that have emerged in the course of the 20th and at the beginning of the 21st century. Some of these challenges have come from feminist theory and epistemology; some from Black, Latinx, and minority ethnic scholarship; some from queer studies; some from decolonial and postcolonial theory. Without aspiring to do full justice to any of these (and many other) perspectives, the session focuses on the implications of their ontological and epistemological critique for how we think about our research subjects (those we do research with), our research ‘objects’ (concepts we use in researching society), and ourselves as researchers or knowers. What does it mean to do, know, and practice theory differently? What are the implications of these critiques for academic knowledge production?

The readings provide an overview of the historical origins of these discussions in sociology and other disciplines, as well as some of the most recent debates concerning the practices of ‘knowing otherwise’ in the context of decolonizing the curriculum. They connect and overlap, in particular, with Topics 3, 5, 6 and 9, but also to the broader issues of identity and social justice, ‘truth’ and epistemic authority, and scientific knowledge practices.

**Session 1:**

*Required reading:*


**Recommended reading:**

Connell, R. (2007). *Southern Theory*. Cambridge: Polity. In particular Chapter 1, ‘Empire and the creation of a social science’ (pp. 3-26), and Chapter 2, ‘Modern social theory and its hidden assumptions’ (pp. 27-47).


**Essay questions:**

1. How do you understand the relationship between the historical constitution of sociology as a ‘metropolitan’ science and knowledge from ‘the periphery’?
2. Is epistemic pluralism irreconcilable with the concept of ‘truth’?
3. What does it mean to know ‘differently’ in the context of Western academia?

**Supervision:**

Contact Dr Jana Bacevic at jb906@cam.ac.uk

**LENT TERM 2020**

**5. Black Logic, Black Methods, #BlackLivesMatter – Dr Ali Meghji**

This session will use the work of Du Bois as a springboard for discussing the problem of liberation within the Black sociological tradition. In particular, we will investigate how the Black sociological tradition developed a very particular view on the relationship between theory and data in sociological research. In doing so, we will highlight how Black sociology puts forward a specific argument about what theory ought to be used for, and how theory can be used as a means for liberation and uplift. We will approach Black sociology through focusing on the critical social theory of Du Bois and Hill Collins, and reflect on the central tenets of Black sociology through the case study of #BlackLivesMatter.
Session 1:
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Essay questions
1. How can classical Black sociology help us to understand contemporary liberation movements?
2. How can we use Black sociology to reflect on the central aims of #BlackLivesMatter?
3. What role does social theory play in the struggles for freedom?

Supervision
Contact Dr Ali Meghji at am2059@cam.ac.uk
6. Domination, Resistance and Internalized Racism—Dr Mónica Moreno-Figueroa

The aim of this module is to explore the applicability of notions of ‘internal’, subjective, emotive, commonsensical, habitual on the one hand, and resistance, confrontation and opposition on the other, to social problems and notions of change. We will focus on the topic of racism (although many of the ideas may apply to interlocking oppressions such as classism, sexism, ageism, ableism) to guide a discussion on how sociology, cultural studies, critical race studies, feminist theory and related social sciences deal with the complexity of domination. By exploring the notion of internalized racism, we will consider what it takes to live through experiences of exclusion and privilege and also how those experiences develop logics to keep the systems of oppression in place.

Key questions will be: how can we think about social transformation at a point where the figure of protest and resistance has become predictable? How can we then grapple with the moments of compliance, habit, difficulty and at times inability to resist? How can we make it possible for a renewed sense of unity to develop between radicals and people who just tag along and do not engage in critiques of oppression? What do we lose when we romanticize resistance and do not consider how the contention of dominance operates? What do we gain when we keep the possibility of social transformation as a guiding force in our investigations? We will consider the concepts of domination, hegemony, ideology, common sense, habit, internalized oppression and resistance in relation to racism. We will look at how racism continues to renew its systematic and structural power, forms and pervasiveness and what the challenges are when exploring the roles people play in this.

Session 1: The internalised side of racism

Required Reading


Recommended Reading


Session 2. Domination, Ideology, Habit and Resistance

Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Essay questions
1. To what extent do the dominated play a role in their own oppression?
2. In challenging racism how can we think critically about the relation between ideology and habit?

Supervision
Contact Dr Monica Moreno Figueroa at mm2051@cam.ac.uk
7. Remaking Life – Dr Lucy van de Wiel

This module will review recent debates in the social study of bioscience and biomedicine addressed to the changing status of the ‘biological’ as it becomes increasingly subject to technological intervention – sometimes referred to as the ‘remaking of life’. In the first two-hour session we examine Paul Rabinow’s contention that ‘nature will be remade as technique’ and that new forms of ‘biosociality’ will emerge in response to projects such as the Human Genome initiative. We will further develop this concern with readings by Sarah Franklin and Michelle Murphy in order to explore what, exactly, is meant by ‘biology’ in the context of reproductive technologies. If biology is becoming more ‘technologised’, does this also suggest a more biological model of technology? In what way might we reconceptualise both biology and technology, now that they appear to be increasingly merged? How can we situate these concerns in relation to the urgent and ongoing environmental crises of the 21st century? What are the (bio-)political dimensions of these questions?

In the second session we explore these questions with two contemporary case studies. Firstly, we will consider the 21st-century introduction of egg freezing as a means for having children later in life alongside Hannah Landecker’s ‘Living Differently in Time: Plasticity, Temporality and Cellular Biotechnologies.’ Landecker demonstrates how a sociology and cultural critique of biotechnology can offer a rethinking of what it means to ‘be biological’ and to live in time. The question of time is also central in the second case study: a new, visual reproductive technology for embryo selection called time-lapse embryo imaging. With Fox Keller’s concept of the ‘biological gaze’ and Sarah Franklin’s Biological Relatives we will critically examine the technoscientific knowledge practices that shape contemporary understandings of the biological.

Session 1:
Required Reading

Recommended Reading
Session 2:

Required Readings


Recommended Reading:


Essay questions
1. Is biology socially constructed?
2. Has human reproduction been changed by technology?

Supervision
Contact Dr Lucy van de Wiel at lvdw2@cam.ac.uk

8. Sociology of Futures -- Dr Michiel van Oudheusden and Prof Jennifer Gabrys
In this module we build on recent and emerging socio-technical, economic and environmental developments and challenges related to futures. The first session will address events such as the ‘nanotechnology revolution’ and climate change, to better apprehend the relationships between future making and policymaking, science fact and science fiction, and speculative and normative ethics. In doing so, we will consider the history and development of future studies and related fields with their own distinct aims, theories, methods, accomplishments and limitations. The second session will investigate the multiple ways in which futures are not just anticipated, but are also lived as the experience of ongoing and already experienced catastrophes and injustices. We will consider how futures are socially and politically inflected, and how a singular future collides with plural futures and contestations over trajectories of hope, imagination and pessimism. We will look at different narrations and analyses of endings of worlds as they relate to climate change and other future-present events.
Session 1 (Dr van Oudheusden): Imagining, Anticipating, Governing

Required Reading

Recommended Reading:

Session 2 (Prof Gabrys): Ends of Worlds and Futuring Otherwise

Required Reading
Recommended Reading:

Essay questions
1. Critically consider the data and methods of future(-oriented) studies.
2. Do future studies create better futures?
3. What is, and should be, the role of social scientists in ‘anticipation’?

Supervision
Contact Dr M van Oudheusden at mpv28@cam.ac.uk

9. From Social Theory to Social Practice -- Prof Jennifer Gabrys
Social theory is often presented as an undertaking that is distinct from social practice. However, numerous studies of the social now work across these approaches and categories, and in so doing generate alternative and inventive engagements with social life. This final lecture will reflect on the overall structure of this paper that has put problems at the centre of theoretical inquiry. It will address how this approach raises the question of the role of practices both in the study of and engagement with sociality. We will analyse diverse approaches to practices within the social sciences, and we will consider how different configurations of theory and practice emerge within these works.

Session 1:
Required Reading
Recommended Reading:

Essay questions
1. How is theory as it is applied to practice different than practice-based theorizations?
2. Compare two different approaches to practice: what versions of sociality do they mobilize and/or assume?

Supervision
Contact Prof Jennifer Gabrys at jg899@cam.ac.uk