

French Social Theory  
Columbia University  
Shamus Khan

## Introduction

This course outlines three major challenges to positivist American Social Science: those of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Bruno Latour. These men share little except nationality and arguments that they offer a “different way” of knowing the social world. The aim of the course is *not* to provide a clean narrative of French critiques (a synthetic or convergence thesis). Instead, for each author we will ask two questions:

1. What is the model of (*producing*) knowledge? What is the different way?
2. How do we do research in this way?

In the first nine weeks we will get a sense of the thought of each thinker. During these weeks we will primarily (but not exclusively) address the first question. For the remainder of the course we will read contemporary applications, interrogations, and reworkings of these “different ways.” Through the work of Richard Sennett, Michele Lamont, and Joan Fujimura we will explore our second question: what does it mean to actually deploy these or related ideas within a research project? Each of these scholars has graciously agreed to join our class on the day we discuss their work.

Through this class you will develop a preliminary working knowledge of the thought of three major thinkers in the social sciences. But rather than teaching these ideas on the strict level of theory, close attention is paid to what it means to deploy ideas in the practice of research.

## Assignments

Option A (strongly preferred): No seminar paper. Each week you must turn in an “interrogation” of the reading (500-1000 words). This can take any form. It can puzzle out an idea in the text you find particularly intriguing. It can provide a summary of the argument. It can provide a brief answer to one of the two questions that frame this course. It can explore how the readings relate to your own research. I will not grade any of your interrogations (A, A-, etc.). Instead, I will mark them as satisfactory or not. If you hand in all your interrogations, you will receive an A-.

Option B: If you wish to take this course for R-credit (or audit in some way) I ask that you write four interrogations: one on Foucault, one on Bourdieu, one on Latour, and one on either Sennett, Lamont, or Fujimura.

Option C: A classic seminar paper where you integrate these readings into your work. You may only exercise this option if you have other work to integrate the readings into - it really does have to exist as more than just a thought. If you chose this option I will ask that you send me a draft of this work by the second week of the semester, and that we talk about how the integration will work. I will likely suggest further readings for you.

Any instance of academic dishonesty will result in failure of this course and my recommendation that you be removed from your graduate program.

## Course Outline

### Introduction: September 9

- Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”
- Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”
- Jurgen Habermas, “Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present”

### Foucault

September 16: *History of Madness* (pp. 3-108, 132-159, 208-339, 343-352, 419-510)

September 23: *The Order of Things*

September 30: *Discipline and Punish*

### Bourdieu

October 7: *Pascalian Meditations*

October 14: *Homo Academicus*

### Extending & Interrogating Foucault

October 21: Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone*

### Bourdieu, continued:

October 28: *The Rules of Art*

### Latour

November 4: *Science in Action*

November 11: *The Pasteurization of France*

November 18: *We have Never Been Modern* (1-40; 130-145) and *Reassembling the Social* (entire)

### Extending & Interrogating Bourdieu

December 2: Michele Lamont, *How Professors Think*

### Extending & Interrogating Latour

December 9: Joan Fujimura, *Crafting Science*