

Sociological Diagnoses of Our Times

Course description	<p>Sociological literature, especially in the writings of the classics, often contains a (more or less explicit) diagnosis of the present time of the author (for example, Weber's characterization of modern capitalism as "iron cage"). In the 20th century, "time diagnosis" emerged as a specific sociological genre, exemplified by works such as Beck's "Risk Society", Bauman's "Liquid Modernity" or Castell's "Network Society". Time diagnoses offer a sociological interpretation of contemporary society, often with a critical edge and the potential to reach broader educated audiences beyond the confines of the discipline. This course focuses on recently published diagnoses of our times, which we will read and discuss in their entirety, limiting ourselves to a couple of shorter monographs per semester.</p> <p>This year, two recently published books will be at the center of our attention, <i>End of Illusions</i> (2021) by the German sociologist Andreas Reckwitz and <i>Cannibal Capitalism</i> (2022) by the American social philosopher Nancy Fraser. In the first half of the class, we will read <i>End of Illusions</i>, where Reckwitz, arguably the most influential sociologist in contemporary Germany, elaborates on the themes of his <i>Society of Singularities</i> (2020), in which he argues that cultural processes of "singularization" characterize all fields of contemporary society, from economy and work to culture, life-style and politics. <i>End of Illusions</i> focusses on the social consequences and political challenges, which are the result of cultural processes of singularization. In the second part of the class, we will discuss Nancy Fraser's <i>Cannibal Capitalism</i>, where she develops a contemporary critique of capitalism on social, political and environmental grounds.</p> <p>We will have to cover both books in eight weeks due to scheduling conflicts but there will be a double-block after the official end of the semester, where we will have the opportunity to discuss a third and very short book, <i>The Uncontrollability of the World</i> (2020) by Hartmut Rosa, arguably Germany's leading critical theorist. Rosa argues that our modern desire to control the world impedes on our capacity to experience "resonance", which he deems essential for a good life. Participation in the double-block is not required for those who have attended all previous seminars and met all the assignments satisfactorily, but will allow for everyone else to make up for missed classes and assignments.</p>
Course requirements	Regular attendance and participation, eight short response papers, presentation in class or final essay
ECTS points	5
I (18.2)	Organizational Meeting
II (25.2)	End of Illusions I – Introduction & Cultural Conflicts as a Struggle over Culture
Required Reading	Reckwitz, Andreas (2021): <i>The End of Illusions. Politics, Economy, and Culture in Late Modernity</i> . Cambridge; Medford: Polity. 1-32.
Presentations	Introduction to the author; Reckwitz, Andreas (2002): "Toward a Theory of Social Practices. A Development in Culturalist Theorizing". In: <i>European Journal of Social Theory</i> 5(2), 243-265. Reckwitz, Andreas (2020/2017): <i>The Society of Singularities</i> . Cambridge; Medford: Polity. 1-78.
III (4.3)	Conference Break – No Class

IV (11.3.)	End of Illusions II – From the Leveled Middle-Class Society to the Three-Class Society
Required Reading	Reckwitz, Andreas (2021): <i>The End of Illusions. Politics, Economy, and Culture in Late Modernity</i> . Cambridge; Medford: Polity. 33-72.
Presentation	Beck, Ulrich (1992): <i>Risk Society</i> . London; Thousand Oaks: Sage.
V (18.3.)	End of Illusions III – Beyond Industrial Society and The Weariness of Self-Actualization
Required Reading	Reckwitz, Andreas (2021): <i>The End of Illusions. Politics, Economy, and Culture in Late Modernity</i> . Cambridge; Medford: Polity. 73-110; 111-130.
Presentations	Reckwitz, Andreas (2020/2017): <i>The Society of Singularities</i> . Cambridge: Polity; Medford. 81-195. Reckwitz, Andreas (2020/2017): <i>The Society of Singularities</i> . Cambridge; Medford: Polity. 199-266
VI (25.3)	End of Illusions IV – The Crisis of Liberalism and the Search for the New Political Paradigm
Required Reading	Reckwitz, Andreas (2021): <i>The End of Illusions. Politics, Economy, and Culture in Late Modernity</i> . Cambridge; Medford: Polity. 131-169.
Presentation	Reckwitz, Andreas (2020/2017): <i>The Society of Singularities</i> . Cambridge: Polity. 268-319; Criticisms of <i>Society of Singularities</i> and <i>End of Illusions</i>
VII (1.4)	Reading Week – No Class
VIII (8.4)	Dean’s Day – No Class
IX (15.4)	Fraser: Cannibal Capitalism I – Capitalism
Required Reading	Fraser, Nancy (2022): <i>Cannibal Capitalism. How Our System Is Devouring Democracy, Care and the Planet—and What We Can Do about It</i> . London; New York: Verso, xiii-26.
Presentations	Introduction of the author and her work Appelrouth, Scott A. & Laura Desfor Edles (2012): “Karl Marx (1818-1883)” In: <i>Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory</i> . Thousand Oaks: Sage, 20-76.
X (22.4)	Fraser: Cannibal Capitalism III – Racism and Care
Required Reading	Fraser, Nancy (2022): <i>Cannibal Capitalism. How Our System Is Devouring Democracy, Care and the Planet—and What We Can Do about It</i> . London; New York: Verso, 27-52; 53-74.
Presentation	Arruzza, Cinzia, Tithi Bhattacharya & Nancy Fraser (2019): <i>Feminism for the 99%. A Manifesto</i> . London: Verso.
XI (29.4)	Fraser: Cannibal Capitalism IV – Nature
Required Reading	Fraser, Nancy (2022): <i>Cannibal Capitalism. How Our System Is Devouring Democracy, Care and the Planet—and What We Can Do about It</i> . London; New York: Verso, 75-113.
Presentation	Pendergrass, Drew & Troy Vettese (2022): <i>Half-Earth Socialism: A Plan to Save the World from Environmental Catastrophe</i> . London: Verso.
XII (6.5)	Conference Break – No Class

XIII (13.5)	Fraser: Cannibal Capitalism IV – Democracy and Socialism
Required Reading	Fraser, Nancy (2002): <i>Cannibal Capitalism. How Our System Is Devouring Democracy, Care and the Planet—and What We Can Do about It</i> . London; New York: Verso, , 115-139; 141-157.
Presentations	Fraser, Nancy (2019): <i>The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born. From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump and Beyond</i> . London: Verso. Reviews and criticisms of <i>Cannibal Capitalism</i>
Make-Up Class (no date yet)	Rosa: The Uncontrollability of the World
Required Reading	Rosa, Hartmut (2020): <i>The Uncontrollability of the World</i> . Cambridge; New York: Polity
Presentations	Introduction of the author; Rosa, Hartmut (2019/2016): <i>Resonance. A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World</i> . Cambridge; Medford: Polity. Introduction + Part I Rosa, Hartmut (2019/2016): <i>Resonance. A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World</i> . Cambridge; Medford: Polity. Part II-IV Reviews and criticisms of <i>Resonance</i> and <i>Uncontrollability of the World</i>
Requirements for Passing the Course	1. Participation in class – 10% 2. Six response papers – 60% (three in the first half of the semester) 3. Presentation or Final Essay – 30%