Course Title: Becoming a Social Theorist: Where Micro Meets Macro in the Landscapes of *Dune*

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Graduate Course in Contemporary Theory

Course Overview

Sociological theory has many uses: it describes, explains, and predicts social phenomena; illuminates and debates meanings; orients and empowers action; and resists and challenges existing social configurations. Yet what we think theory is—and how we use it—depends on where we stand. Our theoretical orientations are shaped by biography, history, and situation, as well as by our position in intellectual and institutional fields. This class treats social theory as an ongoing, contested field, where competing perspectives shape how we understand the social world. Emphasis is placed on understanding the position of prominent social theorists and how they engage with different approaches to conceptualizing the social.

This course examines the long-standing divide between micro and macro sociology, emphasizing how scholars have attempted to synthesize these levels of analysis. Drawing on Denis Villeneuve's *Dune* (2021, 2024) movies as a theoretical touchstone[1], we explore how sociological concepts operate in both real and imagined societies. The rich and intricate social landscape of the *Dune* universe serves as an accessible yet analytically rich heuristic that allows us to interrogate core sociological concerns—power, agency, resistance, meaning-making, social networks, cognition, and institutions.

In this course we focus on bridging two levels of analysis. Microsociology examines everyday interactions, identity formation, and meaning-making at the individual level, while macro-sociology focuses on large-scale structures, institutions, and systemic forces shaping society. While micro-sociologists explore how people construct social reality through symbols and relationships, macro-sociologists analyze patterns of inequality, power, and historical change. *Dune* (2021, 2024) provides a compelling lens for exploring these dynamics— the protagonist, Paul Atreides, makes personal choices (micro) that within the larger political, economic, and ecological struggles of the planet Arrakis (macro), illustrating how individual actions both shape and are shaped by structural forces.

Through our analysis of Dune, students will cultivate their approaches to theorizing society by engaging with an imagined society that mirrors real-world dynamics such as colonialism, power, and social change. Much like in Georg Simmel's notion of the "outsider within," *Dune* provides a space for students to develop sociological insight in a controlled setting before transposing these analytical tools to their own empirical cases. By grounding discussions in a shared reference point, students share a common lens for navigating complex theoretical debates while honing their ability to apply sociological thinking beyond the classroom. This course will use the imagined world(s) of Frank Herbert (the original author) to develop our own sociological thinking for the real world

[1] Ideally I would have students read the books but that alone would probably take up much of the syllabus

around us. The core class assignment, the final paper, will focus on you transposing these ideas to real-world social concerns.

Course Requirements

First and foremost, you have to watch the *Dune Movies (2021; 2024).* Dune (2021) and Dune: Part Two (2024), directed by Denis Villeneuve. These movies have been widely acclaimed for their stunning visuals, immersive world-building, and faithful adaptation of Frank Herbert's novel. The first film won six Academy Awards, including Best Cinematography and Best Visual Effects, while the sequel has been praised as an epic continuation, solidifying the series as a landmark in modern sci-fi cinema. It is vital to watch attentively, and we may revisit some specific plot-points/scenes that help elucidate core sociological concepts. I will arrange a shared viewing of the two movies during the semester; these are optional in terms of attendance but serve to ensure that everyone has access to the films.

A. Dune: Movie Content Quizzes

There will be two short quiz/comprehension checks on movie details to ensure we are all on the same page the week after the movies are scheduled on the syllabus. Each week, we will engage with core sociological texts that explore micro- and macro-level theories.

B. Readings and Weekly Discussion Posts

- You are required to write at least ten weekly discussion posts on our Canvas page over the semester.
- Posts must be submitted on Monday by 5 PM so they can inform class discussion on Thursday.
- These posts should include:
    1. Evidence of engagement with all assigned readings for that week, including a basic grasp of core arguments.
    2. Connections between the week's readings and prior discussions, particularly in relation to the micro-macro divide.
    3. Critical engagement with theoretical problems, noting both contributions and limitations.
    4. Application of theoretical concepts to *Dune* AND a real-world example that you are familiar with and passionate about (e.g., how the Fremen's survival strategies illustrate Durkheimian solidarity versus American Appalachian coal mining towns community cohesion work such as church gathering and bluegrass music).

Because readings are challenging, you are encouraged to start reading a week in advance to allow for proper synthesis and reflection before writing your post. A shallow reading of the material will impede class discussion and our overall class dynamic.

C. Dialogists and Class Discussions[2]

[2] Citing Ann Mische's Contemporary Theory Class as inspiration for this approach

Each week, two class members will serve as dialogists responsible for co-convening the discussion.

Your responsibilities as a dialogist:

- Prepare a 10-15 minute presentation (at least 6 slides) addressing:

    1. Context and positionality of the theorists—where and when they are speaking from and why it matters.
    2. Two core concepts or arguments from the week's readings that are particularly memorable.
    3. Two points of connection with other theorists or previous weeks' discussions.
    4. Two major tensions or blind spots in the readings.
        - Explain these tensions
    5. Two extended quotes for the class to unpack—either thought-provoking or problematic.
        - Formulate 1-2 discussion questions for deep reflection on the selected quotes.
    6. Two examples of how we see the week's theorists as being applicable to 1) The fictional world of *Dune* and 2) The real world, giving an example of a potential research project/idea.
    7. After the presentation, you and your partner will serve as discussion facilitators for the first half of class. You will use your presentation to guide the discussion.
        - Strongly encouraged: Use diagrams, maps, tables, illustrations, and other heuristics to distill complex theoretical arguments into accessible visual formats.
        - As a disciplining device, you must limit yourself to two main concepts, two connections, and two critiques to encourage precise and engaging discussion.

You will serve as a dialogist three times during the semester. You do not have to submit a discussion post on the weeks you serve as a dialogist. This leaves one additional "off" week, during which you must still do the readings but do not have to submit a post on Canvas.

3. Final Paper/Project

The final assignment is an 18-20 page paper applying sociological theories to a real-world case. No additional theoretical research is required for this final paper. Students will be expected to do enough research on the empirical case they are interested in to cover the basics of the phenomenon they are interested in researching.

Your paper must include:

- A comparative discussion of at least four theorists (or schools of thought) from the course. Theorists cannot all be micro or macro theorists but must be a mix.
- An empirical application—how each theorist would interpret a real-world event or social phenomenon
- A critical discussion of limitations—what each theorist overlooks or fails to address.

- A synthetic argument—how you might combine, modify, or extend these theories to gain deeper insights.
- How these theorists help to connect micro and macro levels of analysis.

Example Topics with fictional cases (your case must be based on real world):

- Power & Resistance in *Dune*: How Foucault, Bourdieu, and Gramsci, would interpret the Fremen's subversive strategies.
- Cultural Capital and Prophecy: Using Bourdieu, Weber, Durkheim, and Goffman to examine Paul Atreides' transformation from noble heir to messianic figure.

- Real World Case examples: Climate Protests and Movements; The War in Ukraine, Technology and Politics, China's Social Credit System, Mental Health and Identity

4. Grading Breakdown

- 10% Dune Content Quiz (2x5%)
- 30% Weekly Discussion Posts
- 30% Class Participation (including Dialogist Role)
- 30% Final Paper/Project

5. Class Culture & Expectations

This is a collaborative and intellectually open space. You are expected to:

- Engage with each other respectfully, even in disagreement.
- Ask questions—no one is expected to master every theorist immediately.
- Make connections across ideas—the best sociological work emerges from synthesis and creative thinking.
- Come prepared—having done the readings and reflected on them in advance.

6. AI Guidelines

You may use AI tools in this class only as a minor aid, similar to using a thesaurus, encyclopedia, or search engine. AI should support your thinking, not replace it. Work that substitutes AI for your own analysis, writing, or synthesis will be treated as academic dishonesty under the Honor Code.

Allowable AI use (tool, not crutch):

- Finding synonyms, definitions, or search terms.
- You can use AI to help you identify ways to improve your writing, but do not blindly edit/copy/paste.
- Identifying relevant theorists or journals for your research.

Not allowable AI use (things that rob your development as a theorist):

- Copying and pasting full sentences with AI to "improve" your writing.

- Building arguments or drafting work through AI.
- Reframing your writing to sound "more scholarly."
- AI should never be working in place of your own thinking, analysis, or voice.

Your ideas must be your own. Because AI misuse can be hard to detect, I will place extra weight on your in-class participation as a check on performance. Your ability to synthesize readings, think critically, and engage in discussion will be a major factor in evaluating your mastery of the course material. If I doubt the integrity of your work, you are subject to an oral evaluation of the theorists you include in your final paper. If in doubt about AI use, ask me first. When in doubt, do the thinking yourself.

Course Schedule & Readings

Week 1: Introduction – The Micro-Macro Divide as a Sociological Puzzle

Readings:

- C. Wright Mills, *The Structure of Power in American Society* (1958)
    - Mills, C. Wright (1958). "The Structure of Power in American Society." The British Journal of Sociology 9(1): 29-41.
- Mustafa Emirbayer, *Manifesto for a Relational Sociology* (1997)
    - Emirbayer, Mustafa (1997), “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology” American Journal of Sociology 103: 281-317
- Christian Smith, *Personal Sources of Social Structures* (2010)
    - Christian Smith, "Personal Sources of Social Structures," What is a Person? pp. 317-38
- Erika Summers-Effler, *The Micro Potential for Social Change* (2002)
    - Summers-Effler, Erika.“The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness and Social Movement Formation.” (2002) *Sociological Theory* 20: 41-60).

Annotated Summary

This week introduces the central theoretical tension of the course: how do micro-level actions and macro-level structures relate to one another in shaping social life? Rather than treating this divide as fixed, these readings offer competing models that challenge, rework, or bridge the binary.

C. Wright Mills offers a foundational macro-structural account of power, arguing that elites dominate society not just through institutions but through personal networks and shared social milieus. His concept of the “power elite” captures how social structure is enacted and sustained through both institutional design and interpersonal ties—suggesting a mediated link between micro and macro.

Christian Smith flips the emphasis, centering the individual as the source of social structure. Drawing from realist personalism, he argues that people shape the institutional world through

intentional action, moral deliberation, and relational embeddedness. Where Mills focuses on structural constraint, Smith highlights reflexivity and agency as constitutive forces.

Mustafa Emirbayer complicates both positions by calling for a relational sociology. Rejecting static notions of "actors" and "structures," he frames social life as composed of dynamic, processual relations. Reality, in his account, is not made *by* individuals or structures but *in* and *through* unfolding relational fields—rendering the micro–macro distinction itself suspect.

Erika Summers-Effler offers a bridge between levels by emphasizing the emotional and interactive foundations of social transformation. Her theory of the "micro potential for social change" highlights how emotional energy, role strain, and shared consciousness within small groups can crystallize into collective action and broader institutional challenge. Summers-Effler reminds us that even macro shifts begin in micro ruptures—interactions where emotion, awareness, and solidarity converge.

Together, these readings provide students with a toolkit for interrogating one of sociology's most enduring problems. How is society structured? Who has the power to change it? And where, precisely, is "the social" located—in persons, in systems, or in relations?

Key Themes

- Macro-level domination and elite networks (Mills)
- Agency, reflexivity, and institutional emergence (Smith)
- Relational constitution of structure and action (Emirbayer)
- Emotion, disruption, and the micro-foundations of change (Summers-Effler)

Film Connections & Real-World Links

Although students will not yet have watched *Dune*, this week sets the foundation for interpreting its sociological dimensions. Mills's "power elite" can be foreshadowed in the Imperium's ruling class, where political, military, and economic control is centralized in a few powerful houses. Smith offers a lens to interpret how individual actors—like Paul—may shape the social world through reflexive action and moral positioning.

Emirbayer's relational lens suggests that no one in the *Dune* universe acts in isolation: power flows through shifting alliances, dependencies, and symbolic ties. Summers-Effler helps us anticipate how small-scale interactions—acts of resistance, rituals of solidarity—might generate the emotional energy needed for large-scale upheaval.

Real-world parallels include elite institutional capture (e.g., finance, military), grassroots mobilizations, and the emotional drivers of protest. In class, we'll preview the films and introduce the heuristic use of *Dune* to explore sociological theory through shared visual metaphors and narrative arcs.

Mini-lecture:

End-Class with Introduction to the Dune Films and Key elements to focus on while watching the movie.

Reminder: First dialogists and discussion posts are due for the coming week.

Week 2: Civilizing Processes, Class, and the Social Construction of Reality

Readings

- Karl Marx, selections from *The German Ideology* (1845), in Calhoun et al. reader, pp. 24–32 *(9 pages)*
    - [Focus: materialism, consciousness, historical development]
- Max Weber, "Class, Status, Party," from *Economy and Society*, in Calhoun et al. reader, pp. 180–195 *(15 pages)*
- Norbert Elias, via Andrew Linklater & Stephen Mennell, "Retrospective: Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*," *History and Theory* 49 (2010): 384–411 *(27 pages)*
- Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), in Calhoun et al. reader:
    - Introduction, pp. 101–107 *(6 pages)*
    - "The Dualism of Human Nature," pp. 108–115 *(7 pages)*
    - "Totemism as an Elementary Religion," pp. 116–130 *(14 pages)*

- Peter Berger & Thomas Luckmann, "Society as a Human Product," from *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), in Lemert reader, pp. 418–423 *(5 pages)*
- Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis* (1997), pp. 17–29 *(12 pages)*

Annotated Summary

This week provides a panoramic view of how societies are constructed, classified, and regulated across time, with a particular focus on class, culture, and symbolic order. Students are invited to think across levels and traditions—linking historical materialism, interpretive sociology, social construction, and long-term civilizational shifts.

We begin with **Karl Marx**, whose *German Ideology* establishes the foundational principle that material production structures human consciousness. Marx's theory of history reveals how dominant ideas are always the "ideas of the ruling class," providing a powerful account of how social orders reproduce themselves through both material and ideological means.

Max Weber complements and complicates Marx's economic determinism. In "Class, Status, Party," Weber introduces a multidimensional model of stratification, emphasizing how symbolic and cultural distinctions (status) can operate independently of economic class. His framework bridges the economic and the social, allowing for a broader analysis of how power is distributed and justified.

Norbert Elias zooms out to a civilizational time horizon. His theory of the "civilizing process" traces how emotional self-control, shame, and manners evolved with the expansion of state power

and social interdependence. He shows how moral codes are not static but change with long-term shifts in social complexity.

Émile Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms*, provides the symbolic infrastructure for Elias's insights. He argues that society expresses itself through religion—that the sacred/profane distinction is the foundation of moral life. The selected readings focus on totemism, ritual, and the dualism of human nature, revealing how symbolic systems encode and stabilize social order.

Berger and Luckmann offer a micro-sociological theory of institution-building. All social order, they argue, originates in human action, becomes objectified, and is finally internalized. Their framework highlights how durable institutions (e.g., law, religion, class) are made real through typification, repetition, and recognition.

Erik Olin Wright brings us back to economic analysis, but with nuance. His concept of *contradictory class locations* helps students navigate between Marx's structural clarity and Weber's complexity. Wright shows that many people occupy ambiguous roles within capitalist systems—managers, professionals, subcontractors—making class analysis more dynamic and relational.

Together, these theorists help us understand how society sustains itself—not through one force, but through interlocking systems of economic relations, moral regulation, cultural symbolism, and institutional memory.

Key Themes

- Historical materialism and the reproduction of ideology (Marx)
- Multidimensional stratification: class, status, party (Weber)
- Civilizing processes and emotional regulation (Elias)
- Religion and the symbolic structure of society (Durkheim)
- Institutionalization of typifications and knowledge (Berger & Luckmann)
- Relational and ambiguous class locations (Wright)

Film Connections & Real-World Links

In *Dune*, Marx's theory of ideology is everywhere—imperial narratives naturalize economic exploitation, from the control of spice to the subjugation of the Fremen. Weber's tripartite stratification helps us parse the status codes of the nobility, the religious elite (Bene Gesserit), and the formal power of the Landsraad and CHOAM.

Elias explains how civility operates in *Dune*: who is disciplined, who is ruled by ritual and shame, and how codes of self-regulation become political technologies. Paul, trained in elite bodily discipline, becomes a perfect carrier of civilization and its discontents.

Durkheim makes sense of Fremen religion—not as superstition, but as a moral architecture that binds individuals to collective identity. Prophecy, sacrifice, and water rituals are not irrational—they are constitutive of Fremen social order.

Berger & Luckmann show how these religious and political myths become sedimented—how repeated interactions build belief systems. And Wright gives us a final critical lens: class is not just about who owns spice, but about who controls labor, knowledge, and legitimacy.

This week equips students to think sociologically across scale: from deep historical processes to embodied symbols, from class conflict to sacred ritual, and from power to performance.

Week 3: Structure and Agency – Dialectics and Dualisms

Readings

- Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (1979), pp. 49–95
  Selections: "Agency, Structure" and "Change, Reproduction, and Social Transformation"
- Margaret Archer, *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation* (2003), pp. 1–10
  "How Does Structure Influence Agency?"
- James S. Coleman, "Social Theory, Social Research, and a Theory of Action" (1986).
  American Journal of Sociology 91(6):1309–1335
- Peter Blau, "The Structure of Social Associations" (1964), in Farganis reader, pp. 253–266
- *Optional:* Mustafa Emirbayer & Ann Mische, "What is Agency?" (1998).
  American Journal of Sociology 103(4):962–1023
  → (for advanced/secondary reading or Week 5 preview)

Annotated Summary

This week engages one of the foundational dilemmas in sociological theory: the relationship between individual agency and social structure. Each theorist proposes a distinct framework for understanding how actions are shaped, constrained, or enabled by broader systems of meaning, power, and interaction.

Anthony Giddens challenges the classical divide by offering the theory of structuration, which treats structure and agency not as opposites but as a recursive duality. Social structures exist only insofar as they are instantiated through repeated, knowledgeable practices—what Giddens calls "rules and resources" reproduced through time.

Margaret Archer rejects Giddens's conflation, insisting on the analytical separation of structure and agency in order to preserve the irreducibility of reflexivity. Her theory of morphogenesis highlights how internal dialogues mediate social change, allowing agents to deliberate, resist, or transform the conditions they inhabit.

James Coleman introduces a rationalist framework to explain how macro-phenomena emerge from micro-level action. His famous "Coleman Boat" connects individual choices to system-level outcomes through clear, causal steps—ideal for examining social movements, institutional emergence, or norm cascades.

Peter Blau offers a complementary perspective rooted in social exchange theory. He theorizes how social differentiation and hierarchy emerge from patterns of association and asymmetries in power,

attraction, and resource value. Blau's work bridges micro-interaction and macro-structure by showing how individual-level exchanges generate durable patterns of stratification and group formation.

Together, these texts illuminate the structure–agency relationship from multiple vantage points—strategic, recursive, reflexive, and interactional—and raise key questions: How much freedom do actors really have? Can macro structures be explained from below? Is agency always rational, reflexive, or relational?

Key Themes

- Structure as dualism (Archer) vs. duality (Giddens)
- Rational action and macro emergence (Coleman)
- Social exchange and emergent stratification (Blau)
- Reflexivity and internal conversation (Archer)
- Macro–micro linkages in social explanation

Film Connections & Real-World Links

In *Dune*, Paul Atreides' development illustrates the complexity of agency under structural constraint. Giddens's theory helps frame Paul's actions as recursive responses to inherited structures—dynastic, political, ecological—that he partially reproduces and partially transforms. Archer's morphogenesis is visible in Paul's inner conflict and reflexivity: his prophetic visions and family expectations generate a layered internal conversation.

Coleman's schema applies to the macro-level transformation of the Fremen—from scattered insurgents to coordinated resistance—and the decision-making processes that stabilize movement dynamics.

Blau deepens our view of emergent structure: the Fremen social order evolves through exchanges—of knowledge, loyalty, and protection—that generate informal hierarchies and group boundaries. Paul's ability to gain influence relies on navigating and reconfiguring these associations, turning asymmetrical exchanges into new forms of solidarity and legitimacy.

Real-world parallels include how revolutionary leaders harness social ties, trust, and symbolic exchange to build collective identity and institutional authority—especially in grassroots or decentralized movements.

Week 4: Meaning-Making, the Self, and Social Interaction

Readings

- Cooley, "The Looking Glass Self"
- George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), Chapters 19 and 20; "A Behavioristic Account of the Significant Symbol." *The Journal of Philosophy* 19(6):157-63

- Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Chapter 1: "Performances," pp. 17–76 (60 pages)
- Alfred Schutz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences" (1962), in *Collected Papers I*, pp. 48–66 (18 pages)
- **Optional**: Herbert Blumer, "Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method" (1969), pp. 1–21

Annotated Summary

This week focuses on how social meanings, identities, and understandings are constructed through interaction. Rejecting determinist or structuralist views of the social world, these thinkers emphasize how society is continually recreated through performance, interpretation, and shared definitions.

George Herbert Mead lays the foundation for symbolic interactionism by theorizing the self as a dialogical process. George Herbert Mead theorizes the self as a dynamic process formed through social interaction, where the spontaneous "I" responds to the organized "Me"—the internalized expectations of others—and both are shaped by the generalized other, the broader perspective of society that enables self-awareness and coordination.

Erving Goffman extends these ideas by presenting everyday life as dramaturgy. People manage impressions and stage performances for specific audiences. Identity is not a fixed core but a set of roles calibrated to situational cues and social scripts. Through Goffman, we gain insight into how individuals maintain coherence, dignity, and order through strategic interaction.

Alfred Schutz provides a phenomenological bridge, focusing on how actors interpret the world using typifications, relevances, and taken-for-granted knowledge. He reminds us that action is embedded in a "stock of knowledge at hand," often invisible yet essential for understanding how individuals navigate complex social settings.

Herbert Blumer (optional) grounds the symbolic interactionist tradition in three premises: meaning arises through interaction, is shaped through interpretive processes, and becomes the basis of action. He systematizes the theoretical stakes of interactionism while also defending its methodological implications.

Together, these readings provide a framework for analyzing how social order is not imposed from above but negotiated through shared meanings, embodied expectations, and the creative practices of everyday life.

Key Themes

- The self as socially emergent and dialogical (Mead)
- Performance, impression management, and social staging (Goffman)
- Typifications, intersubjectivity, and the life-world (Schutz)
- Meaning-making as foundational to action and order

Film Connections & Real-World Links

In *Dune*, Paul Atreides is thrust into multiple roles as son, heir, prophet, warrior, and must perform these identities differently depending on the audience. Goffman's dramaturgical theory helps unpack how Paul navigates conflicting expectations, projects confidence, and strategically performs competence across social settings—from House Atreides to the Fremen.

Mead's theory reveals the layered nature of Paul's selfhood: he constantly negotiates between the "I" (spontaneous reaction) and the "Me" (socially informed self), especially as his prophetic visions and Fremen projections shape his identity. Schutz's typifications emerge in how different groups read and interpret Paul's behavior—through their own histories, rituals, and symbolic codes.

This week encourages students to explore the micro-foundations of identity construction in high-stakes and ambiguous situations—and to reflect on how meaning, recognition, and performance shape selfhood in their own lives.

Week 5: Power, Domination, and the Reproduction of Inequality

Readings

- Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures and the Habitus" (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pp. 419–426; "Social Space and Symbolic Space" (1991). *Poetics Today* 12(4): 627–638; "The Logic of Fields" (1992). *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, pp. 94–115; "Symbolic Violence" (1992). *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, pp. 167–174.
- Antonio Gramsci, "Culture and Ideological Hegemony," in Alexander & Seidman, *Culture and Society*, pp. 47–54 (7 pages)
- Michael Burawoy, "The Roots of Domination: Beyond Bourdieu and Gramsci" (2012), *Sociological Quarterly* 53(4): 526–548 (22 pages)
- Patricia Hill Collins, "Black Feminist Thought and the Matrix of Domination," in Calhoun et al. reader, pp. 613–625 (13 pages)

Annotated Summary

This week interrogates how power is exercised, normalized, and reproduced across institutional, cultural, and embodied domains. Rather than viewing domination solely as force or coercion, these theorists analyze how inequality becomes durable—naturalized through culture, habitus, ideology, and everyday practices.

Pierre Bourdieu introduces the concept of symbolic power—the capacity to define reality, legitimate hierarchies, and naturalize privilege. He theorizes fields as arenas of struggle where various forms of capital (economic, cultural, social) are converted and contested. Crucially, power operates not only through structures but also through *habitus*—internalized dispositions that align actors with the logic of the field.

Michael Burawoy extends and critiques both Bourdieu and Gramsci, proposing a synthesis that emphasizes the dialectic of consent and coercion in the reproduction of capitalism. Drawing on

ethnographic insights, he explores how workers actively participate in their own domination—not through false consciousness but through partial empowerment, compromise, and moral control.

Antonio Gramsci foregrounds cultural hegemony—how dominant groups maintain power not through force alone but through leadership in the realm of ideas, values, and common sense. His concept of counter-hegemony becomes central for theorizing resistance and the creation of oppositional consciousness.

Patricia Hill Collins introduces an intersectional framework grounded in Black feminist thought. Her "matrix of domination" expands theories of power by showing how race, class, gender, and sexuality interlock in shaping both structure and experience. Unlike Bourdieu's relatively class-focused framework, Collins insists on standpoint, lived experience, and epistemic resistance.

Together, these readings equip students to analyze how inequality is reproduced across domains—discursively, materially, and emotionally—while also offering tools to critique and intervene in dominant orders.

Key Themes

- Symbolic power and misrecognition (Bourdieu)
- Consent and the dialectic of domination (Burawoy)
- Cultural hegemony and counter-hegemonic potential (Gramsci)
- Intersectionality and standpoint theory (Collins)

Film Connections & Real-World Links

In *Dune*, symbolic power is central: Paul's emergence as Muad'Dib hinges on his ability to inhabit and activate preexisting myths, align with religious prophecy, and accumulate charismatic legitimacy. Bourdieu's theory helps unpack how Paul converts cultural, social, and symbolic capital to reorder political hierarchies.

Burawoy and Gramsci offer insights into the Bene Gesserit and imperial governance. These institutions maintain dominance not just through control, but by shaping the symbolic universe—the expectations, myths, and "common sense"—through which actors interpret their world. The Fremen, while dominated, are not merely passive: their traditions can be read as potential sites of counter-hegemonic formation.

Collins invites a more critical lens: how are race, gender, and class structured into the galactic order? What voices are silenced in Paul's ascent? Wright's earlier analysis of class contradiction is visible in House Atreides' position—elite but vulnerable; powerful yet dependent on extractive systems that are ultimately unstable.

This week encourages students to think critically about how domination is maintained—and how sociological theory can help reveal both its mechanisms and its cracks.

Week 6: Social Networks, Embeddedness, and the Dynamics of Agency

Readings

- Mark Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness" (1985), *American Journal of Sociology* 91(3): 481–510 (30 pages)
- Harrison C. White, *Identity and Control* (2008), selections: pp. xvii–xxii, 1–16, 24–26, 36–38, 66–69, 128–130 (~40 pages)
- Mustafa Emirbayer & Ann Mische, "What is Agency?" (1998), *American Journal of Sociology* 103(4): 962–1023 (62 pages)
- Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004), Ch. 1: "The Microfoundations of Macrosociology," pp. 1–20 (20 pages)

Annotated Summary

This week investigates the relational foundations of action, identity, and meaning, focusing on the networks and interaction rituals that shape social life. It pushes beyond individualistic or normative models of agency by highlighting the embeddedness, temporality, and performative structure of action within patterned systems.

Mark Granovetter challenges both economic rationalism and overly deterministic structuralism by introducing the concept of embeddedness—the idea that economic and social behavior are always situated within interpersonal networks. He shows how social ties mediate trust, information, and opportunity.

Harrison White reconceives identity as a network effect—a provisional outcome of role expectations and communicative control systems. Rather than a fixed self, White sees actors as pattern recognizers and signalers embedded in overlapping, shifting social domains.

Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische propose a temporal-relational theory of agency, identifying three dimensions: iteration (past routines and schemas), projectivity (future-oriented imagination), and practical evaluation (present responsiveness). They offer a way to analyze agency as a process shaped by structure but not reducible to it.

Randall Collins contributes a theory of interaction ritual chains, where successful interaction produces emotional energy, group solidarity, and shared symbols. His micro-foundational framework bridges interpersonal encounters and larger institutional dynamics, suggesting that macro structures emerge from and depend upon recurring patterns of ritualized social coordination.

Together, these thinkers reorient sociological theory around the relational and interactional production of social structure, identity, and agency—bridging the micro-macro divide through attention to network dynamics, ritual processes, and temporal complexity.

Key Themes

- Action and meaning as embedded in concrete social networks (Granovetter)
- Identity as emergent from control systems and social signaling (White)

- Agency as temporal, strategic, and relational (Emirbayer & Mische)
  Emotional energy and the microfoundations of structure (Collins)

Film Connections & Real-World Links

In *Dune*, Paul Atreides's rise depends not only on strategy but on the relational web in which he is embedded: from House Atreides to the Fremen, to imperial and religious elites. Granovetter helps explain the alliances and trust dependencies that make resistance possible. White allows us to analyze Paul's identity transformation across changing network positions.

Emirbayer and Mische's theory of agency help us understand Paul's internal struggle—his prophetic visions (projectivity), cultural inheritance (iteration), and improvisation under threat (evaluation). Collins's interaction ritual theory can be used to unpack Fremen rites, leadership charisma, and battlefield cohesion—ritual chains that produce loyalty, meaning, and collective resolve.

In real-world terms, this week equips students to analyze everything from insurgent movements and political charisma to organizational behavior and protest dynamics—highlighting how agency and power are forged within, not outside, relational structures

Week 7: Systems Theory, Functionalism, and Structural Reproduction

Readings

- Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (1951), Ch. 1: "The Action Frame of Reference" and Ch. 5: "Pattern Variables and Role Structures" (pp. 3–30, 76–96) (47 pages)
- Merton, Robert K. 1936. "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action." *American Sociological Review* 1(6):894–904.
- Merton, Robert K. 1938. "Social Structure and Anomie." Pp. 229–241 in *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*, edited by C. Lemert.*
- Merton, Robert K. 1949. "Manifest and Latent Functions." Pp. 304–310 in *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*, edited by C. Lemert.
- William H. Sewell Jr., "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation" (1992), *American Journal of Sociology* 98(1): 1–29 (29 pages)
- ***Optional:*** Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (1984), "The Autopoiesis of Social Systems," pp. 319–325 (7 pages)

Annotated Summary

This week explores how macro-level sociological theories conceptualize social order, institutional reproduction, and systemic coherence. The emphasis is on how systems and structures endure over time, sometimes invisibly shaping action and interaction.

Talcott Parsons introduces his functionalist framework, where society is understood as a system of interdependent parts governed by shared norms and values. Through concepts like the action system

and pattern variables, Parsons theorizes how institutions like family, education, and religion maintain equilibrium, socialization, and normative stability.

Robert Merton extends and critiques Parsons by distinguishing between manifest functions (intended outcomes) and latent functions (unintended consequences). Merton opens space for complexity and contradiction within systems theory—such as dysfunctions, strain, and innovation—while preserving the core goal of systemic explanation.

William Sewell Jr. provides a late-modern rethinking of structure, blending elements of practice theory and systems thinking. His concept of dual structures emphasizes that schemas (cultural rules) and resources (material and symbolic) operate recursively. Structure both constrains and enables agency—but also contains the seeds of transformation through uneven reproduction.

Optional: Niklas Luhmann's systems theory reframes society as composed of autopoietic communication systems—self-reproducing, operationally closed, and differentiated by function (e.g., law, politics, economy). Luhmann helps us think about society without reference to actors, focusing instead on how communication recursively produces social reality.

Together, these readings offer complementary views on how order is maintained, reproduced, or disrupted at the macro level—through rules, roles, codes, and recursive practices.

Key Themes

- Social systems and normative stability (Parsons)
- Manifest vs. latent functions; dysfunction and complexity (Merton)
- Structure as schemas and resources with generative potential (Sewell)
- Optional: System self-reproduction and functional differentiation (Luhmann)

Film Connections & Real-World Links

Dune offers a vivid image of a highly differentiated imperial system—religious, economic, political, and military institutions all operate according to distinct logics and rules. Parsons helps us think about how these domains cohere into a stable galactic order, while Merton reveals their latent dysfunctions (e.g., the unintended rise of a messianic rebellion).

Sewell's model of structure helps us interpret how transformation emerges from within the system—Paul's rise is not wholly external, but arises through repurposing existing resources (the Bene Gesserit prophecy, Fremen rituals, Atreides legitimacy). His theory explains how domination and resistance may operate within the same symbolic system.

In real-world parallels, students can apply these theories to modern institutions: how universities reproduce inequality (Merton), how bureaucracies sustain authority (Parsons), and how new cultural forms emerge within and against dominant structures (Sewell). Luhmann, for those who engage the optional reading, provides tools for analyzing self-enclosed logics in law, media, or politics.

Week 8: Enlightenment, Power, and Governance

Readings

- Max Weber, "Bureaucracy" from *Economy and Society*, in Calhoun et al. reader, pp. 196–244 (48 pages)
- Michel Foucault, "Governmentality" (1978), in Calhoun et al. reader, pp. 229–245 (16 pages)
- Michel Foucault, "Panopticism" from *Discipline and Punish* (1977), in Lemert reader, pp. 343–347 (4 pages)
- Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Concept of Enlightenment" from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), in Calhoun et al. reader, pp. 58–65 (7 pages)
- Michael Hechter, "The Emergence of Cooperative Social Institutions" (1990), in Kivisto reader, pp. 324–332 (8 pages)
- ***Optional:*** Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), selections TBD (~30 pages)

Annotated Summary

This week interrogates the rise of modern governance and the paradox of reason: how ideals of order and rationality may simultaneously advance domination.

Max Weber presents bureaucracy as the cornerstone of modern rational-legal authority. He analyzes how efficiency, formal rules, and hierarchical specialization make bureaucracy an indispensable mode of administration—yet one that also threatens individual freedom. His metaphor of the "iron cage" captures the increasing impersonality and constraint of modern institutions.

Michel Foucault, writing decades later, shifts attention from institutions to *techniques of power*. In "Panopticism," he describes how modern power operates through surveillance, normalization, and internalized discipline—producing self-regulating subjects. "Governmentality" broadens this argument, theorizing a new form of power focused on managing populations through policy, statistics, and biopolitical regulation. Foucault emphasizes that modern governance does not simply repress but **produces** subjects through knowledge and discipline.

Horkheimer and Adorno, from the Frankfurt School, critique the Enlightenment project itself. They argue that instrumental rationality—divorced from ethics—undermines the liberatory potential of reason, culminating in mass deception, cultural domination, and totalitarianism. Their dark account of modernity asks whether the pursuit of order and control ultimately destroys the possibility of freedom.

Michael Hechter offers a rational-choice counterpoint, suggesting that formal institutions can emerge to enable cooperation. By aligning incentives, governance can reduce uncertainty and promote group stability. His perspective balances the more dystopian views of power with attention to organizational design and incentive structures.

Optional: Hannah Arendt's work provides a political-philosophical angle, tracing how bureaucratic rationality and ideological absolutism paved the way for 20th-century totalitarian regimes. Her analysis complements Weber and Foucault, raising questions about the conditions under which reason turns violent.

Together, these readings offer competing visions of modern governance—as a vehicle of order, control, or emancipation—and introduce students to major traditions in political sociology and critical theory.

Key Themes

- Bureaucracy, rational-legal authority, and the "iron cage" (Weber)
- Governmentality and the biopolitics of the population (Foucault)
- Surveillance, normalization, and internalized discipline
- Instrumental reason and the domination of culture (Horkheimer & Adorno)
- Rational choice and institutional cooperation (Hechter)
- ***Optional:*** Totalitarianism and bureaucratic violence (Arendt)

Film Connections & Real-World Links

In *Dune*, the Imperium exemplifies Weberian bureaucracy: highly structured, hierarchically administered, and increasingly detached from the lifeworlds it governs. The Spacing Guild, CHOAM, and the Landsraad each function as rationalized institutions whose legitimacy lies in procedural authority.

Foucault's panopticism is reflected in the Bene Gesserit's cultivation of self-surveillance and bodily discipline, as well as in the imperial structures that maintain order not just through violence but through observation, training, and knowledge production. Paul's visions and destiny unfold within a governmentality that seeks to anticipate and manage risk through prophecy, eugenics, and interstellar trade.

Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of Enlightenment resonates in the technocratic logic of the Empire—where reason is stripped of ethical content and serves domination rather than liberation. Even Paul's revolution risks becoming a new rationalized tyranny clothed in prophecy.

In contemporary parallels, students can draw on these readings to examine surveillance capitalism, bureaucratic governance, and debates over algorithmic control. We ask: What kinds of subjects do modern institutions produce? What is the cost of order?

Week 9: Gender, Agency, and the Critique of Sociological Knowledge

Readings

- Dorothy E. Smith, "Women's Experience as a Radical Critique of Sociology" (1987), in Farganis reader, pp. 366–374 (8 pages)

- Nancy Hartsock, “Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?” (1987). Pp. 497-504 in Lemert.
- Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005), Ch. 1: “The Subject of Freedom,” pp. 1–39 (39 pages)
- Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), Ch. 4: “The Trajectory of the Self,” pp. 70–103 (33 pages)
- ***Optional:*** Judith Butler, “Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire” from *Gender Trouble* (1990), pp. 1–17

Annotated Summary

This week’s texts interrogate the gendered, racialized, and colonial assumptions embedded in sociological theory, pushing students to rethink who is centered in theoretical models and how agency is defined.

Dorothy Smith issues a foundational feminist epistemological critique, arguing that sociology has historically been built from a standpoint that renders women’s lived experiences invisible. Her call for a “sociology for women” insists that everyday life—and embodied knowledge—must form the basis of social analysis. This reframes objectivity not as neutrality, but as standpointed and situated.

Nancy Hartsock challenges the applicability of Foucault’s theory of power to feminist concerns, arguing that his account erases the material and embodied dimensions of women’s oppression. While Foucault sees power as diffuse, relational, and productive, Hartsock contends that this framework risks obscuring the asymmetries of domination rooted in gendered experiences. Drawing on feminist standpoint theory, she insists that theorizing power must begin from the lived realities of the oppressed, not abstract circulations. Her critique reframes power as something that must be *analyzed from below*—attending to how it is differentially experienced, especially through the lens of embodied vulnerability, labor, and care.

Saba Mahmood complicates dominant liberal-feminist narratives of agency. Studying women in Egypt’s Islamic piety movement, she challenges the idea that freedom must involve resistance to norms. Instead, she theorizes agency as ethical self-formation—practices of submission, discipline, and piety that are neither passivity nor conformity. Her work reframes how power operates through and not only against subjectivity.

Anthony Giddens, revisited this week, adds a late-modern frame: the self as a reflexive project under conditions of global risk, disembedding, and constant reinvention. While Giddens centers autonomy, his emphasis on continuous self-monitoring provides a useful contrast to Mahmood’s ethics of selfhood.

Optional: Judith Butler provides a performative theory of gender, arguing that subjects are constituted through norm-governed repetition. Her challenge to essentialism aligns with the week’s broader questioning of stable categories of identity, freedom, and agency.

Together, these theorists rethink the subject of sociology—who counts, who speaks, and how knowledge is produced and legitimized.

Key Themes

- Standpoint epistemology and situated knowledge (Smith)
- Power, gender, and ethical agency (Smith, Mahmood, Hartsock)
- Reflexivity and identity in late modernity (Giddens)
- ***Optional:*** Performativity and gender as iteration (Butler)

Film Connections & Real-World Links

Dune opens rich terrain for feminist critique, particularly around agency, knowledge, and the gendered organization of power. The Bene Gesserit sisterhood exemplifies Mahmood's notion of ethical self-formation: their strength comes not from overt resistance but from disciplined bodily practice, submission to tradition, and strategic navigation of male-dominated structures. Rather than simplistic empowerment, we see agency as cultivated through norm-following, silence, and affective control.

Dorothy Smith's standpoint epistemology invites students to ask: whose perceptions, experiences, and knowledge structures define the Dune universe? The story centers Paul's worldview, with limited insight into the lifeworlds of Chani, Jessica, or the everyday Fremen. Smith would push us to rethink whose realities are rendered visible, and how sociological knowledge (or prophecy) is constructed from partial perspectives.

Nancy Hartsock's critique of Foucault sharpens our view of how power operates materially and differentially. While the Empire is clearly a system of distributed control, Hartsock reminds us not to lose sight of how domination is lived—through bodies, labor, and care. The pain and precarity borne disproportionately by women and colonized peoples is largely aestheticized in *Dune*, raising questions about whose suffering counts.

Giddens's theory of the reflexive self finds expression in Paul's interior monologues and visions. His identity becomes a continuous project under conditions of uncertainty and global (or interplanetary) risk. But where Giddens emphasizes personal narrative and choice, *Dune* also shows the limits of reflexivity under prophecy, cultural expectation, and existential dread.

Real-world parallels include debates over women's agency in religious and patriarchal contexts, epistemic injustice in science and policy, and the politics of care work. This week challenges students to reconsider agency not as freedom from structure but as the capacity to inhabit, navigate, or reconfigure structures from within.

Week 10: The Public Sphere and Its Discontents

Readings

- Jürgen Habermas, "Civil Society and the Political Public Sphere," in Calhoun et al. reader, pp. 351–376 (includes editors' intro) *(25 pages)*

- Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" (1992), in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, MIT Press, pp. 109–142 *(33 pages)*
- Jeffrey Alexander, *The Civil Sphere* (2006), selections:
    - PART 1: Civil Society in Social Theory pp. 3-64; 1 Part 2: 93-205

Annotated Summary

This week examines how public discourse, civil society, and moral boundaries shape democratic life—and how these ideals are challenged by exclusion, inequality, and competing symbolic orders.

Jürgen Habermas presents the public sphere as a domain of rational-critical debate among private individuals, where democratic legitimacy is forged through communicative action. He identifies civil society as a space distinct from state and economy, one that ideally fosters inclusive dialogue and norm formation. However, Habermas also acknowledges that this space is historically fragile and prone to domination.

Nancy Fraser offers a feminist and critical race critique of Habermas's model. She argues that the public sphere as originally theorized excluded women, racialized groups, and the working class. Fraser introduces the idea of subaltern counterpublics—alternative spaces where marginalized groups construct oppositional interpretations and develop collective identities. Her work reframes the public sphere not as a singular democratic ideal, but as a contested terrain of communicative inequality.

Jeffrey Alexander reinterprets the public sphere through the lens of cultural sociology. He proposes a "civil sphere" structured by binary codes (e.g., civil/uncivil, pure/impure) and enacted through symbolic performance. Alexander shows how civil repair becomes necessary when democratic institutions are threatened—often through ritualized acts of apology, mourning, or public reaffirmation. His work draws attention to how meaning, performance, and emotion shape who belongs in the democratic "we."

Together, these readings interrogate the ideals and failures of public discourse, emphasizing how power, culture, and exclusion shape participation, voice, and legitimacy in democratic societies.

Key Themes

- The ideal of rational-critical debate and its exclusions (Habermas)
- Subaltern counterpublics and communicative inequality (Fraser)
- Symbolic codes and moral boundaries of the civil sphere (Alexander)
- Civil repair, democratic fragility, and public emotion

Film Connections & Real-World Links

In *Dune*, multiple competing publics emerge: the imperial court, the Fremen's oral traditions, the Bene Gesserit's secretive networks, and Paul's prophetic performances. Habermas helps us read the formal diplomacy and speeches of the Empire as elite rational discourse, while Fraser reveals how

these exclude Fremen voices and spiritual cosmologies. The Fremen, through Fraser's lens, operate as a counterpublic—producing their own moral narratives, mythologies, and epistemologies of resistance.

Alexander's civil sphere theory casts Paul's rise as a complex performance of civil repair after the collapse of Atreides authority. Yet his legitimacy is not merely strategic—it is symbolic, grounded in emotional resonance and ritual enactment. This week encourages students to ask: Who gets to speak in the public sphere? What counts as a legitimate voice? And how do symbols and emotions structure collective life?

Week 11: Social Movements, Action, and Collective Resistance

Readings

- James Coleman, "Social Theory, Social Research and a Theory of Action" (1986). *American Journal of Sociology* 91(6): 1309–1335 *(26 pages)*
- Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965), in Calhoun et al. reader, pp. 126–130 *(5 pages)*
  Jürgen Habermas, "Emancipatory Knowledge" and "Social Analysis and Communicative Competence" (1970), in *Lemert reader*, pp. 380–383 *(3 pages)*
- Georg Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations* (1955), Free Press edition, pp. 87–106 *(19 pages)*
- Jeffrey Alexander, *The Civil Sphere* (2006), Part III Social Movements and Civil Translations pp. 213-229

Annotated Summary

This week focuses on how social movements emerge, mobilize, and reshape society through action, conflict, and symbolic performance.

James Coleman builds a rationalist model of social theory grounded in individual action. His "Coleman Boat" offers a powerful visual for linking micro-level choices to macro-level change. Applied to social movements, his work helps students understand how large-scale transformations result from many small, structure-conditioned decisions.

Mancur Olson provides a foundational critique of spontaneous collective action. He identifies the *free-rider problem*, arguing that individuals will not join collective efforts unless given material or selective incentives. His theory underscores the importance of formal organization, leadership, and strategic design in sustaining collective resistance.

Jürgen Habermas adds a normative dimension by proposing that *emancipatory knowledge* arises when social analysis exposes domination and fosters communicative competence. For Habermas, social movements are not just interest-driven but vehicles for realizing undistorted communication and collective self-understanding.

Georg Simmel reorients our view of conflict from a destructive to a constructive force. In his analysis, struggle clarifies group boundaries, produces solidarity, and forges new social bonds. This perspective offers a nuanced framework for interpreting intra-group cohesion and inter-group opposition.

Jeffrey Alexander frames social movements as symbolic performances that mobilize civil solidarity. Drawing on cultural sociology, he argues that movements succeed when they resonate with deep civil codes—democracy, justice, inclusion—through persuasive narrative and ritual enactment. Resistance here is not only strategic but performative and moral.

Together, these thinkers present an integrative account of how movements link micro and macro forces, material and symbolic struggles, and strategic and communicative dimensions.

Key Themes

- Rational action and the micro-macro link in social change (Coleman)
- Incentives and organizational dilemmas in collective action (Olson)
- Emancipatory knowledge and communicative competence (Habermas)
- Conflict as a generative process of group formation (Simmel)
- Moral performance and symbolic legitimacy in movements (Alexander)

Film Connections & Real-World Links

The Fremen rebellion in *Dune* offers rich material for this week's frameworks. Coleman's theory models how Paul catalyzes large-scale transformation through relational chains of trust and decision. Olson prompts critical questions: What incentivizes the Fremen to risk revolt—resources, prophecy, honor?

Habermas allows us to interpret the movement not just through material interests but as a *search for an undistorted voice*. His focus on communicative competence helps evaluate whether Paul's leadership genuinely fosters shared understanding—or imposes a new narrative.

Simmel's conflict theory illuminates how the Fremen identity is forged through protracted struggle. Conflict not only defines who belongs, but also strengthens emotional ties and collective resolve.

Alexander's perspective brings it all together. Paul's rise as Muad'Dib is not just political—it's ritualized performance, drawing on prophecy, sacrifice, and cosmic justice to construct a moral order. This week equips students to see movements not only as reactive but world-making—blending strategy, meaning, and myth.

Week 12: Science, Technology, and Global Modernity

Readings

- Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990)
    - Introduction & Chapter 1: "Modernity, Time, and Space" (pp. 1–34)

    - Chapter 4: “Trust and Risk” (pp. 100–131) *(Total: 65 pages)*
- Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System” (1974), in Calhoun et al. reader, pp. 89–105 *(16 pages)*
- Bruno Latour, “On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications” (1996), *Soziale Welt* 47(4): 369–381 *(12 pages)*
- *Optional*: Peter Berger & Thomas Luckmann, “Society as a Human Product” (1966), in Lemert reader, pp. 418–423 *(5 pages)*

Annotated Summary

This week interrogates the organization of modern society through technological systems, epistemic authority, and global economic structures.

Anthony Giddens provides a synthetic account of late modernity characterized by disembedding mechanisms (e.g., abstract systems), reflexivity, and heightened risk awareness. His emphasis on *trust* in expert systems—such as scientific knowledge, technical infrastructure, and financial networks—foregrounds how social order is maintained in the face of increasing complexity and uncertainty. The modern self, Giddens argues, is constantly called upon to engage in *reflexive self-narration* within an unstable world.

Immanuel Wallerstein grounds this reflexivity in global structures. His *world-systems theory* rejects state-centered accounts of development, arguing that modernity has always been shaped by capitalist expansion and unequal exchange between core, semi-periphery, and periphery regions. This reading links macroeconomic stratification with the historical roots of globalization, colonialism, and dependency.

Bruno Latour challenges the separation of science and society through *Actor-Network Theory (ANT)*. He argues that both human and non-human actors (e.g., machines, documents, microbes) co-constitute social life. Latour’s approach radically reorients agency: power is not imposed from above, but generated through *networks of association* that include both people and things. ANT provides a fresh model for theorizing technological agency, environmental interdependence, and epistemological complexity.

Berger and Luckmann (optional) offer a phenomenological foundation for thinking about how knowledge systems become taken-for-granted “reality.” Their theory of *institutionalization through typification* bridges the subjective experience of modernity with its objective systems.

Together, these readings enable a multifaceted analysis of modernity, technology, and global structure—balancing questions of *macro-order, epistemic trust, and distributed agency*.

Key Themes

- Disembedding and reflexive selfhood in late modernity (Giddens)
- Global capitalism and core–periphery dynamics (Wallerstein)
- Actor-Network Theory and nonhuman agency (Latour)
- Knowledge, risk, and institutional stability

- Optional: Social construction of reality and typification (Berger & Luckmann)

Film Connections & Real-World Links

In *Dune*, modernity does not appear in the form of liberal democracy or industrial capitalism—but *its structural logics persist*. Giddens's "expert systems" are mirrored in the Navigators' monopoly over space travel, the Mentats' computational function, and the Bene Gesserit's religious engineering. Paul's existential uncertainty—his visions, choices, and self-doubt—echo Giddens's "reflexive project of the self."

Wallerstein's world-systems lens clarifies Arrakis as a peripheral resource colony—exploited by the core powers (Imperium, Guild, Great Houses). The asymmetrical flow of wealth and risk maps neatly onto contemporary global inequalities in extractive industries, environmental degradation, and supply chain vulnerability.

Latour's ANT invites us to see spice, stillsuits, or sandworms not just as objects but as *actors* in the social system. The stillsuit mediates survival, the spice alters time and perception, and the ecology of Arrakis shapes political alliances. These nonhuman entities are not passive—they *make things happen*.

This week encourages students to ask: What counts as an "actor" in a sociological theory? Can systems of knowledge be disentangled from systems of domination? And how does modernity—whether on Earth or Arrakis—depend on trust, infrastructure, and invisible interdependencies?

Week 13: Identity, Reflexivity, and Racial Formation

Readings

- W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in Lemert reader, pp. 163–168 ("On Double Consciousness") (5 pages)
- Michael Omi & Howard Winant, "Racial Formation" (1986), in Calhoun et al. reader, pp. 57–69 (12 pages)
- Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), Ch. 2: "The Self: Ontological Security and Existential Anxiety," and Ch. 3: "The Reflexive Project of the Self," pp. 70–103 (33 pages)
- Rogers Brubaker & Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29(1): 1–21 and Conclusion pp. 34–36 (24 pages)
- Julian Go, "Race, Empire, and Epistemic Exclusion: Or the Structures of Sociological Thought" (2020), *Sociological Theory* 38(2): 67–91

Annotated Summary

This week investigates the concept of identity as a site of power, reflexivity, and contestation—especially under conditions of racialization, modernity, and imperial domination.

W.E.B. Du Bois introduces the foundational concept of *double consciousness*—a divided self-perception experienced by African Americans navigating a society that negates their full humanity. His writing offers a vivid account of how subjectivity is shaped through both internal conflict and external misrecognition.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant build on this by theorizing *racial formation* as an ongoing socio-political process. Race, they argue, is not fixed or purely ideological—it is continuously produced through institutional practices, state policies, and cultural meaning-making.

Anthony Giddens contributes a late-modernist perspective, framing identity as a reflexive project shaped by disembedding, surveillance, and existential anxiety. Individuals must constantly construct a coherent self in an unstable world, negotiating between tradition and modernity.

Brubaker and Cooper push back against the reification of "identity" in both academic and political discourse. Rather than treat identity as a stable essence, they advocate for analytic clarity: focusing on processes of categorization, identification, and self-understanding.

Julian Go offers more of a meta-theoretical intervention: exposing how dominant frameworks in sociology have been shaped by imperial and racialized knowledge structures. His concept of *epistemic exclusion* describes how colonized perspectives are systematically excluded from the formation of sociological theory—not simply as an oversight, but as a structural condition. Go doesn't just call for inclusion; he challenges the very foundations of the sociological canon.

Together, these thinkers equip students to interrogate how identity is constructed, politicized, and theorized—asking not only who is being identified, but who gets to theorize identification in the first place.

Key Themes

- Double consciousness and racialized selfhood (Du Bois)
- Racial formation as sociopolitical process (Omi & Winant)
- The reflexive project of the self in late modernity (Giddens)
- Identity as process, not substance (Brubaker & Cooper)
- Epistemic exclusion and imperial knowledge structures (Go)

Film Connections & Real-World Links

Dune offers a compelling lens to examine identity under empire. Paul Atreides straddles multiple subject positions—noble heir, foreign occupier, prophesied liberator—mirroring Du Bois's double consciousness. His fractured identity reflects a tension between external ascription and internal uncertainty.

Omi and Winant help unpack the racial logics at play in the imperial system: who gets counted, controlled, or mythologized. The Fremen are not a monolith—they are racialized, exoticized, and simultaneously feared and fetishized within the imperial order. Prophecy, lineage, and aesthetic coding all serve to stabilize these hierarchies.

Giddens illuminates Paul's inner turmoil. His reflexive self is stretched across past traditions, future visions, and present risks. His decisions are not expressions of sovereign will, but negotiated responses to uncertainty and moral anxiety.

Brubaker and Cooper sharpen our analytical tools: when we say Paul "becomes Fremen," what are we actually describing? Is it identification, recognition, strategic alignment, or symbolic incorporation? Their framework helps unpack how identity claims are made and by whom.

Julian Go is essential for reframing the entire narrative structure. *Dune* is not just a story about identity—it's a story *told from within imperial epistemology*. Paul is able to "rise" in part because he inherits the symbolic and organizational tools of the Empire, including religious mythologies engineered for planetary domination. The Fremen's knowledge is legible only insofar as it serves imperial futures. Go urges us to interrogate what kinds of knowledge are seen as theory, and what gets relegated to myth or custom. This week's discussion invites students to rethink *who* theorizes, *what* counts as knowledge, and how race and empire structure the production of both identity and truth.

Week 14: Final Presentations and Theoretical Synthesis

This week is for student presentations, connecting themes, and reflecting on what we've learned. After thirteen weeks of exploring micro and macro sociology through key texts, scenes from *Dune*, and real-world examples, students will now bring everything together.

Student Presentations

Each student will present a 7–10 minute summary of their final paper or project. Presentations should:

- Introduce the real-world case and sociological question being explored.
- Identify at least four theorists or schools of thought drawn from the course, spanning both micro and macro perspectives.
- Explain how each theorist would interpret or illuminate the case.
- Reflect critically on the tensions, blind spots, or contradictions between these frameworks.
- Offer a synthetic argument that combines or contrasts these approaches to generate new insight.
  Suggested Visuals: Diagrams, theoretical maps, concept bridges, or narrative timelines are encouraged to support presentations and clarify complex linkages.