Postgraduate Seminar  
Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University  
Friday, 15 May 2015 – 10am to 5pm - Central Meeting Room 15

Organizer: Elizabeth B Silva

About the Thinker

The social theorist and philosopher **Roy Bhaskar** is best known for developing a theory of ‘critical realism’ (CR). CR offers a powerful defence of the idea that the social world exists. Realism of some sort is commonplace in everyday life, of course. But Bhaskar is unusual, and potentially very helpful for social science researchers, in building a sophisticated, critical account of reality. Along the way he challenges several orthodoxies, including the ‘fact-value’ distinction, empiricism (only that which can be observed exists) and relativism (all perspectives are equally valid). CR shines light on a number of social science perspectives, especially those which pose the need for social change.

About the Presenter

**Jason Toynbee** works in the Sociology Department at The Open University. He helped to produce and now teaches on the undergraduate module, DD206 ‘The Uses of Social Science’. His research interests are in music, social theory and social change. Jason’s most recent books are *Bob Marley: Herald of a Postcolonial World?* (Polity, 2007), and as co-editor, *The Media and Social Theory* (Routledge, 2008 with David Hesmondhalgh), *Migrating Music* (Routledge, 2011 with Byron Dueck) and *Black British Jazz* (Ashgate, 2014, with Catherine Tackley and Mark Doffman).

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About the Thinker

**Pierre Bourdieu** (1930-2002) was probably the most eminent sociologist, of the final quarter of the twentieth century, in the world. He was also probably the most controversial. In France, his country of origin, he had many followers, but his work also received increasing international recognition since the 1990s. Four areas of study were particularly affected by his ideas: education, cultural policy, stratification and feminist theory. Bourdieu’s conception of sociological theory is pragmatic, in the sense of being a ‘toolbox’ developed to help understanding of social life. His general epistemology places central notions like habitus, capital and field within empirical explorations to frame theoretical conclusions.

About the Presenter

**Elizabeth B Silva** is professor of sociology at the Open University. Her publications related to Bourdieu’s work include: *Special Issue of Cultural Sociology* on ‘Fields,
boundaries and social inequalities’ (co-edited, June 2013), Poetics on Cultural Capital: Histories, Limits and Prospects (co-edited, Dec 2011), Technology, Family, Culture: influences on home life (sole authored, Palgrave 2010), Cultural Analysis and Bourdieu’s Legacy (co-edited, Routledge 2010) and Culture, Class, Distinction (co-authored, Routledge 2009). Her recent research focuses on matters of distinction, taste and class, and also on how objects are implicated in social relations.

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About the Thinker

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was one of the great existentialist philosophers of the twentieth century, although sadly – and ironically – her work is often not included on philosophy or existential courses, on in the philosophy sections of bookshops, unlike those of her male contemporaries. She wrote both philosophical texts and fictional and biographical books, which beautifully illustrated her theories. De Beauvoir is perhaps best known for the feminist text The Second Sex in which she wrote that ‘one is not born, but rather one becomes, a woman’. In addition to providing the vital foundation for much more recent thinking in feminist and queer theory, de Beauvoir’s theories of the self and relationships were highly important, although not as well-known as those of her partner Jean-Paul Sartre. De Beauvoir’s theories cover similar territory and it seems like that these thinkers actually developed these ideas between them. (see more on http://rewritingtherules.wordpress.com/2012/03/08/international-womens-day)

About the Presenter

Meg John Barker is a writer, academic, therapist and activist specialising in the same areas that fascinated Simone de Beauvoir: sex, gender, and relationships. Meg John is a senior lecturer in psychology at the Open University and has published many academic books and papers on topics including non-monogamous relationships, sadomasochism, counselling, and mindfulness, as well as co-editing the journal Psychology & Sexuality. They were the lead author of The Bisexuality Report and are involved in running many public events on sex, gender, and relationships, including Sense about Sex, Critical Sexology, and Gender & Sexuality Talks. Meg John has particularly written on Simone de Beauvoir’s thinking in the context of therapeutic work with young women, on gender more widely, on non-monogamies, and on relationship ethics and relationship conflict. Meg John is also passionate about bringing the kind of philosophically informed, interdisciplinary approaches to these areas that were exemplified by de Beauvoir during her life, and about combining academic and activist work, and scholarly and public-facing writing, as she did. You can see this approach in the Rewriting the Rules book and blog (www.rewriting-the-rules.com). Twitter: megbarkerpsych

About the Thinker
Cynthia Enloe is one of the most influential feminist thinkers in international relations. Through the lives women live, she shows most persuasively that global politics is not simply where it is supposed to be. Well-known for coining the international variation of a key feminist slogan – the personal is international, the international is personal – she bring global politics to live in situations that are mostly kept off radar by power political analyses. Her ‘feminist curiosity’ is an influential methodological device for disrupting our understanding of familiar subjects and sites of politics. Her work covers in particular militarisation, global economics and labour relations, war, diplomacy and cultural relations.

About the Presenter

Jef Huysmans is Professor of Security Studies in the Department of Politics and International Studies (POLIS) and Director of the Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance at the Open University. He is also Co-Editor in Chief of the journal International Political Sociology, sponsored by the International Studies Association. His work is known for developing conceptual and methodological innovations in the study of the politics of insecurity and the securitization of migration. Currently he is working on assembling suspicion, security and democracy, the political significance of everyday practices, and acts of citizenship. After reading Bananas, Beaches and Bases as a Ph.D. student, international relations have never been the same again.

About the Thinker

Bruno Latour is a philosopher, anthropologist, and sociologist best known for his work in the field of Science and Technology Studies. He is currently Professor at the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), with the work on actor-network theory that first brought him international recognition taking place whilst he worked for many years at the Centre for the Sociology of Innovation at ParisTech. Latour’s work encourages us to consider the possibility that ‘We have never been Modern’ (to use the title of one of his most well-known books), and thus that the organising binaries of Modernity including Nature and Culture, Technology and Society, Nonhuman and Human and so on should be considered not as starting points for analysis of action but at best as outcomes and, at worst, political shortcuts which serve to bypass the due democratic consideration which our collective ‘matter of concerns’ deserve. In an attempt to discuss all the components of the Modern settlement of purification and critique, Latour’s extensive body of work spans studies of science, technology, art, religion, law, politics and more, culminating in the publication of his synthetic magnum opus An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns in 2013. Latour’s most recent work engages in various ways with the notion of the Anthropocene.
About the Presenter

Nick Bingham is Senior Lecturer in the Geography Department at the Open University and has been working with the ideas of Latour (and others) since his PhD to explore the challenging geographies that emerge once we don't take for granted that we are Modern. This has involved thinking through a series of empirical matters of concern including early work on internet socialities (with an interest in displacing then prevailing technological deterministic accounts), contests around genetically modified crops (developing notions of 'nonhuman friendship' and the 'cosmopolitics of coexistence'), and the regulation of food-borne disease (seeking to understand how the tensions of food safety are 'tended'). He is currently completing a monograph titled Pathological Lives with his co-investigators on the ESRC-funded Biosecurity Borderlands research project, and developing work on beekeeping practices (and what studying them might tell us about what care might be in the age of the Anthropocene).

About the thinker

Erving Goffman was considered to be one of the most influential American sociologists of the twentieth century. His work was extensive but two very important aspects of it focused on sociology of everyday life and the framing of experience. In his essay on The Organization of Experience he explains how conceptual frames of reference influence and structure individuals’ perception of society. In Goffman’s work the frame constitutes the set of beliefs, assumptions and knowledge that influence how an individual perceives the world. Frame analysis has been adopted by many media researchers to investigate how the media frame their stories in order to appeal to their readership.

About the Presenter

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About the Thinker
Karen Barad is an American feminist theorist best known for her theory of Agential Realism. According to Barad, the world is made up of phenomena, which do not precede but are made by and in their relationality. Things or objects do not precede their interaction, rather, 'objects' emerge through particular intra-actions. Barad trained as a physicist before moving to an interdisciplinary field. She is currently Professor of Feminist Studies, Philosophy, and History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is the author of *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Her work is informed by Niels Bohr one of the founders of quantum physics and also by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Her work is relevant to present day critiques of scientific knowledge, to formulations of relational socio-material co-construction and for conceptions of gender and cultural politics.

**About the Presenter**

George Revill works in the Geography Department at the Open University. His work concerns cultural-historical geographies of landscape, environment and mobility. He has a long standing interest in geographies of music and sound, see for example 'El Tren Fantasma: arcs of sound and the acoustic spaces of landscape', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (2014) and 'How does sound makes space? sonic mediation, critical phenomenology and the political agency of sound', *Progress in Human Geography* (2015). He is currently working on a book titled *Sounding modernities: an acoustic geography* (Bloomsbury Academic).