This latest mutation in space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. This alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment – which is to the initial bewilderment of the older modernism as the velocities of space craft are to those of the automobile – can itself stand as the symbol and analogue of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.

– Frederic Jameson, “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” (1984)

It is difficult for people to make sense of the historical changes they are experiencing. As we move into a new century and millennium, Jameson’s 1984 description of our situation continues to ring true. We remain in need of new cognitive maps to help us understand the relations among the revolution in information technology, the emergence of a new risk environment, the explosion of consumerism and the hegemony of the market, the unprecedented extension of legally-sanctioned individualism, the rise of the politics of identity, the processes of globalization and the decline of the power of the nation-state, the diminishing power of normative regulation and the rise of religious fundamentalism, and the search for bases of social organization beyond the market and the state. This course will be an exercise in getting our macro-sociological bearings.

The bulk of this course will be devoted to reading and discussing the works of three of the most important sociological analysts of the historical transition we’re currently experiencing. The British theorist Anthony Giddens (now the Director of the London School of Economics) argues that we are moving into a period which he variously calls radicalized, high, or late modernity. We’ll read his book The Consequences of Modernity (1990) in which he explores the sources of the dynamism of modernity and its basic institutional dimensions and suggests that modernity generates complex new environments of trust and risk.

In his pathbreaking three-volume work The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture the Spanish sociologist – now teaching at UC Berkeley – Manuel Castells attempts to make sense of the confluence of three recent developments: the revolution in information technology, the processes of political-economic restructuring in both capitalist and formerly state-socialist societies, and the development of an anti-authoritarian counterculture. He claims in the two volumes we’ll read in their entirety – The Rise of the Network Society and The Power of Identity – that these developments are leading us through a series of changes even more radical than those that accompanied the modern democratic and industrial revolutions.

The Polish emigre Zygmunt Bauman – now a professor emeritus at the University of Leeds in England as well as at the University of Warsaw – has become the social theorist of
postmodernity. He argues in a wide range of works that the modernist project of “legislative reason” – in which an alliance of political rulers and intellectuals sought to legislate uniform codes of conduct and taste based on universal standards of truth, beauty, and justice – has run its course. Domination no longer requires the normative legitimation of political rule, but rather is based on the seductions of consumerism and the repression of the poor. Postmodernity is the product of the collapse of this modernist project, and – as we’ll read in Bauman’s Intimations of Postmodernity – the ethical implications of this postmodern condition are ambiguous.

I hope you’ll find this block challenging, but not overwhelming. There will be a number of short overnight writing assignments designed to encourage you to think seriously about the readings and to stimulate discussion in class. In addition, there will be a take-home final exam. Of course, I expect regular attendance and – especially in a class of this size – very active participation in class discussions.

The readings on the syllabus followed by a (W) can be found on the course Web site. I recommend that you immediately print all the reading assignments on this site, since system problems could prevent you from getting access to them when you actually need them.

Zygmunt Bauman, Intimations of Postmodernity (1992)

Monday, January 19: Introduction

Tuesday, January 20: The Institutional Dimensions of Modernity

Anthony Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity, 1-78.

Wednesday, January 21: The Nation-State and the Market

David Held, “The Development of the Modern State” in Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies (Stuart Hall et al., eds.), 56-87. (W)


Thursday, January 22: Trust, Risk, and Radicalized Modernity


Friday, January 23: Sequestration, Emancipation, and Life Politics

Giddens, “Intimacy as Democracy” in *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, 184-204. (W)

Monday, January 26: **The Crisis of Modernity**


Tuesday, January 27: **The Rise of Postmodernity**


Wednesday, January 28: **No Class**

Thursday, January 29: **Information Technology and Globalization**


Friday, January 30: **The Network Enterprise and the Transformation of Work**


Monday, February 2: **Electronic Communication and New Forms of Space and Time**


Tuesday, February 3: **Identity and Resistance to the Network Society**


Wednesday, February 4: **No Class**

Thursday, February 5: **Social Movements: Environmentalism and Feminism**


Friday, February 6: **The Crises of the State and Democracy**


Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, 1-26 and 55-76. (W)

Monday, February 9: **The New Poverty and the Fourth World**


Tuesday, February 10: Ambivalence and Contemporary Ethical and Political Challenges

Bauman, “Private morality, immoral world” in *The Individualized Society*, 175-200. (W)

Bauman, “Emancipation” in *Liquid Modernity*, 16-41 and 48-52. (W)

Wednesday, February 11: Final Exam Due