



SWEDISH  
COLLEGIUM  
for ADVANCED STUDY

## **PLENARY SESSION # 1**

**Thursday, 16 February. 13:00 – 14:30. Room: IHC – Stein Auditorium**

**Session:** Reconfigurations of Social Theory (Presidential session)

**Chair:** Björn Wittrock, International Institute of Sociology (IIS), and Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS), Uppsala

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Introduction:

Björn Wittrock, International Institute of Sociology (IIS), and Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS), Uppsala

*TBA*

Rajeev Bhargava, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi

*Social Theory and the Challenge of Contingency*

Wolfgang Knöbl, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

## ABSTRACTS

*TBA*

Rajeev Bhargava, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi

Abstract TBA

*Social Theory and the Challenge of Contingency*

Wolfgang Knöbl, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

The phenomenon of contingency has recently gained a lot of attention and not only within, for example, poststructuralist philosophy. The social sciences in general and sociology in particular had to learn that assumptions concerning the robustness and stability of social processes and structures cannot be held as self-evident any longer: Not only micro-sociologists, but also political economists and macro-sociologists realized that the outcomes of social actions are far more unpredictable than is usually assumed and that events and their surprising occurrence have to be taken into account in making sense of social reality. To say it with the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, it seems to be one of the features of human life to continuously produce counter-examples to supposedly fixed trends and laws. If this is so, then social theory has to rethink some of its basic methodological and theoretical assumptions.

The paper will first ask the question of which theory of action do we need in order to come to terms with the contingent features of social life and – secondly and equally important – which types of accounts can we as social scientists give in order to grasp this very reality. Can we still speak self-confidently of laws and/or general social mechanisms or must we rather rely on narrative methods? The answer given to this question will be that social theory indeed will have to take on the problem of ‘narrativity’ which at the same time also means that social theory will necessarily have to thoroughly historicize all its categories.