

New York University
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication
**Special Topics in Critical Theory:
Marx**

Course number MCC-GE.3013

SPRING 2014

Assoc. Prof. Alexander R. Galloway
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Time: Wednesdays 2:00-4:50pm
Location: East Building, Room 712
Office hrs: Tue 3:30-5pm; Th 9-10:45am

Course Description

Much of critical theory finds its origin in the work of Karl Marx. The purpose of this doctoral seminar is to read key works by Marx, supplemented by some contemporary texts in western Marxist political theory, with the ultimate goal of understanding the various political and philosophical debates with which these texts engage. The course emphasizes Marxism as a political theory, but will also address Marxism as a scholarly methodology for critique applicable to disciplines beyond political theory. Themes include: the commodity, alienation and reification, surplus value, ideology, consumerism, spectacle, empire, feminism, postfordism, community, and communism.

Required Books

Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2012).

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 2006).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration* (New York: Argo, 2012).

Karl Marx, *Capital, volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976).

———, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin, 1992).

———, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963).

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 2002).

Karl Marx and V. I. Lenin, *The Civil War in France: The Paris Commune* (New York: International Publishers, 1988).

Tiqqun, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, trans. Ariana Reines (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012).

McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

Course Assignments

Reading -- All students are expected to read the assigned texts in advance of class.

Discussion Leaders -- All students will be required to act as a discussion leader for two different weeks during the semester.

Writing -- Each student should write a total of 20 pages for the semester, preferably split into two shorter papers of 10 pages each, but other combinations are also possible.

Suggested paper topics will be provided, but students are also encouraged to create their own topics. All papers should be on par with doctoral level work and should demonstrate a close reading of the required materials and exhibit a methodology of critical analysis.

Grading Requirements

Each student will be evaluated based on the course assignments. All students will be expected to do the course reading, and to write papers of approximately 20 pages total.

Grades will be determined according to the following formula: 80% paper(s); 20% in-class participation.

Laptop Policy

I discourage the use of electronic devices in class. This includes all laptops, iPads, PDAs, phones, and other devices. There is mounting evidence that such devices impede learning and place an undo strain on the pedagogical experience of both students and teachers.

While an outright ban poses its own difficulties, please note that I discourage the use of such devices and consider them to be detrimental to the social and pedagogical climate of the classroom. (Exceptions can be made for readings that have been distributed in electronic form, and for students with special learning needs.)

Part I: Historical and Political Analyses

January 29--Course Introduction

February 5--Young Marx

Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" in *Early Writings*, 279-309, 322-334, 345-358, and 375-379.

Karl Marx, "Letter to Ruge," "Concerning Feurbach," and "Preface" in *Early Writings*, 206-209, and 421-428.

William Morris, "How I Became A Socialist" in *News from Nowhere and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1993), 379-383 (PDF).

Karl Korsch, "Why I Am a Marxist" in *Three Essays on Marxism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 60-71 (PDF).

February 12--Communism

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*.

Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" and "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" in *Early Writings*, 211-257.

February 19--Case Studies in Historical and Political Analysis

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

Karl Marx and V. I. Lenin, *The Civil War in France*.

(Optional: Alain Badiou, "The Paris Commune: A Political Declaration on Politics" in *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. David Macey and Steve Corcoran [New York: Verso, 2010], 168-228. [PDF.]

February 26--Communism Reconsidered

Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon*.

March 5--No class

Part II: Critique of Political Economy

March 12--Primitive Accumulation

Midterm paper topics distributed.

Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol 1., pp. 873-940.

March 19--Spring break

March 26--Commodities and Reification

Midterm papers due.

Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 89-103, 125-244.

April 2--Surplus Value and the Working Day

Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 247-257, 270-329, 340-416.

April 9--Surplus Value and Reproduction

Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 429-454, 544-564, 675-682, 709-724.

Karl Marx, "Fragment on machines," in *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973), 690-712 (PDF).

Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Domestic Labour and the Feminist Movement in Italy since the 1970s," *International Sociology* 3, no. 1 (March 1988): 23-34 (PDF).

Part III: Postmodernity & Empire

April 16

Final paper topics distributed.

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*.

(Optional: Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster [New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001], 85-126 [PDF].)

April 23

Tiqun, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*.

Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History," *New Left Review* 56 (March-April 2009): 97-117 (PDF).

April 30

McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*.

(Optional: Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Red Plenty Platforms," *Culture Machine* 14 [2013]: 1-27 [PDF].)

May 7

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 3-66 (PDF).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration*.

Monday, May 12--All papers due.

Additional Background Texts (Optional)

While there exist innumerable books on Marx, here are some additional texts that might help--particularly when it comes to *Capital*. They address some of the most canonical interpretations of Marx that have influenced contemporary theoretical debates.

Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1997).

- One of the most influential interventions into marxist theory during the post World War II period; advocates the “scientific” Marx and a new structuralist marxism rooted in symptomatic readings.

Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2007).

- A clear overview of Marx and his ideas.

David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London: Verso, 2010).

- Quite possibly the clearest, best book on understanding what Marx actually means page by page in *Capital*. There are also online videos that follow Harvey's seminar, which served as the basis for this book.

Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (New York: Verso, 2011).

- A recent text that also provides a gloss of *Capital*, although different from the more detailed, close reading provided by Harvey. Suggests that *Capital* should be interpreted as a dialectical event in and of itself.