

POLS 327, Autumn 2007

Hope Against Hope, Marx After Marx

Room 9, Tuesdays 2:00-4:45pm

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This course is devoted to close readings of Karl Marx and two Marxists, Georg Lukacs and Walter Benjamin. Stepping away from neat mechanistic readings of Marx, we will engage with the messy nature and substance of possibility and hope in marxist thought. Appreciating the intriguing relation of Marx to modernity and modernism, we will delve into what it might have meant for Marx to subvert dominant philosophers for whom matter had no weight, to unsettle modernity's conceits of progress and happiness, and to then postulate revolution, communism and hope on the basis, and not to the exclusion, of very heavy, often very wounded, human bodies. Marx stands as a significant diagnostician of alienation and the decrepitude of a world whose ethical, political, material, spiritual reality tends to slip through the fingers of precisely those hands that create it. Marxist thinkers such as Georg Lukacs and Walter Benjamin worked on the costs and conditions of possibility, enchantment and hope within capitalism, rethinking categories of dialectics, relation, history, culture, class, art, faith, experience, matter, spirit, time, space, etc., to lend Marx currency in times that had far from borne out his hope. Other folks, besides Marx, Lukacs and Benjamin will make an appearance as necessary.

Core Texts

Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (1861) [any edition; Penguin is preferred]

Georg Lukacs, *Soul and Form* (1910) [any edition]

Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, (1928)

Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, (1927-1948, 1982)

Access to www.marxists.org (Marx/ian texts in public domain)

Other required selections are accessible through electronic reserves (password abb-327)

Supplementary and Reference Texts (entire or selections)

Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno et. al, *Aesthetics and Politics* (reprint 2007)

Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (2002)

Fredrick Engels, *Anti-Dubring* (1877)

Andrew Feenberg, *Lukacs, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory* (1986)

Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin and Derrida* (2006)

Lucien Goldman, *Cultural Creation* (1971)

Lucien Goldmann, *Lukacs and Heidegger* (1992)

Msx Horheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947, 2002)

Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality* (1986)

Thomas Kemple, *Reading Marx Writing* (1995)

Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (1996)

Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination* (1996)

Jason Read, *The Micropolitics of Capital* (2003)

Morton Schoolman, *Reason and Horror* (2001)

Some supplementary selections may be accessed through electronic reserves (password abb-327)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Every class will feature a mandatory student presentation on the recommended supplementary text for the week. This presentation will comprise of almost half a class session—in other words, the appointed student will approach it as if s/he were teaching the text to the rest of us. This necessitates reading the text at least a week in advance and having a required meeting with me at least once during the week before the class to go over a plan. This presentation alone amounts to 20% of the grade and will be very meticulously graded. Presenter's absence on the day of the his/her presentation OR missing the required planning meeting amount to an automatic F on this assignment, and you will unfortunately not have a chance to do a makeup presentation. You should approach this as almost a test.

Active class participation is expected and required. You must have done the reading assignments in advance of the class, and all assigned text must be read by everyone. Everyone will not, however, be required to read the supplementary text for the week, unless the student presenter communicates a short reading assignment to the rest of the class in preparation of her/his presentation.

This is a class devoted to close, grounded reading of texts, and requires full attention to the text at hand. As a matter of courtesy to other students, please refrain from too many random references to authors that others may not necessarily be familiar with, or which are not relevant to the text being approached, unless of course your invocation expands our understanding of the said text, and/or you are sufficiently prepared to be put on the spot and give the rest of us a primer. I trust your judgement on this.

You will write a short (3-4 page) exegetical paper each on Marx, Lukacs, and Benjamin, for a total of 3 short papers and 45 percent of the grade. A longer final paper or project will be more thematic rather than centred on any one thinker. Proposals for these must be discussed with the instructor and approved accordingly. Imaginative proposals are encouraged. Along the way, there may be in-class and out-of-class assignments that will require group work.

Supplementary Text presentation	20%
Three Exegetical Papers	45%
Final Paper/Project	25%
Participation/Auxiliary Projects	10%

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week One—28 August

Introductions

MARX

Francis Wheen, "Karl Marx: A Life" (excerpt)

Francis Wheen, "Poet of Dialectics," excerpted from *Karl Marx's Das Kapital: A Biography*

Marx, *Scorpion and Felix* (selections)

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1837-pre/verse/verse41.htm>

Marx, *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature* (selections)

Dedication, Foreword, "The Subject of the Treatise"

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1841/dr-theses/ch01.htm>

Week Two—4 September

Marx, *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature* (selections)

Part One: Ch. 1, II, III, IV

Part Two: Chs. 1-5 (refer to notebooks, if you wish)

Access these at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1841/dr-theses/index.htm>

Supplementary Text:

Engels, Fredrick, *Anti-Dubring*

Week Three—11 September

Marx, *Grundrisse*

pp. 7-63, 69-80, 83-111

Supplementary Text:

Kemple, Thomas. *Reading Marx Writing*

Week Four—18 September

Marx, *Grundrisse*

pp. 201-289

Supplementary Text:

Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*

Week Five—25 September

Marx, *Grundrisse*

pp. 459-521

Supplementary Text:

Read, *The Micropolitics of Capital*

LUKACS

Week Six—2 October

Lukacs, *Soul and Form*

(selections TBA)

Supplementary Text:

Feenberg, Andrew. *Lukacs, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory*

BREAK

Week Seven—16 October

Lukacs, *Soul and Form* (selections TBA)

*Lukacs, selection from *History and Class Consciousness*

Supplementary Text:

Goldmann. *Lukacs and Heidegger or Cultural Creation*

Week Eight—23 October

*Lukacs, *The Destruction of Reason* (selections TBA, from Intro, Ch III, Ch VII, Epilogue)

Supplementary Text:

Horkheimer and Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment, or*
Schoolman, *Reason and Horror*

Week Nine—30 October

Adorno, et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*

BENJAMIN

Week Ten—6 November

Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*
pp. 27-158

Supplementary Text:

Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: Idea of the Tragic*

Week Eleven—13 November

Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*
pp.159-235

Supplementary Text:

Jay. *Marxism and Totality*

BREAK

Week Twelve—27 November

Benjamin, *Arcades Project*
(selections TBA)

Supplementary Text:

Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*

Week Thirteen—4 December

Benjamin, *Arcades Project*
(selections TBA)

Supplementary Text:

Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin and Derrida*

Week Fourteen—11 December

Benjamin, *Arcades Project*
(selections TBA)

Review and Final Presentations