

Carolyn Lesjak
Spring 2023

ENGLISH 811
STUDIES IN THEORY II
The Marxist Legacy and Contemporary Theory

This course has a dual focus on the critical writings of Marx and other, later Marxists and contemporary critical writing that engages with key Marxist texts and concepts. It aims to emphasize both the enduring legacy of Marx and Marxism and its new variants. Of particular concern will be the different visions of the political that emerge and new articulations of what constitutes or might constitute political engagement today.

Organized as a reading course, the seminar will be structured by close and intensive reading of selected texts, with an eye toward depth rather than breadth. Seminar participants will be responsible for presenting short sections of the texts, helping the seminar as whole to read key passages and understand the concepts and questions that emerge from them. We will divide our readings loosely into three sections: 1) readings by Marx, in order to identify and understand concepts such as alienation, historical materialism, labour power and surplus value, base and superstructure, ideology; 2) readings from what Perry Anderson identifies as Western Marxism—in which we will investigate Anderson's claim that Western Marxism moves from a focus on economic relations to a concern with cultural politics; and 3) contemporary Marxist and post-Marxist readings that in various ways test classical Marxism's ability to explain our world today. Of particular concern here will be new work on neoliberalism; the commons; race and mass incarceration, and the call to imagine decolonial futures.

A more fitting time for such an investigation is hard to imagine, given recent developments in the global economy, the climate crisis and the pandemic and David Harvey's, along with other Marxist theorists', diagnosis of these developments as the inevitable outcome of the policies of neoliberalism and its drive to financialize everything. In the midst of this global crisis, we will interrogate theories for their ability both to assess the current state of affairs and the possibilities for a leftist, alternative politics and perhaps, if we're lucky, to point toward new ways forward that could continue to further social justice.

READINGS will include:

Robert C. Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*
Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

Additional readings by Fredric Jameson, Silvia Federici, David Harvey, Nancy Fraser, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, Christina Sharpe, Glen Coulthard, Michelle Alexander, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Rob Nixon, among others.