The New Marx Reading

Neue Marx-Lektüre (New Marx Reading) refers to a “new” way to interpret the economic theory of Marx that emerged in the late 1960s in West Germany. Also known as value-form theory, this interpretation of Marx usually explores the “estoretic” content of his critique of political economy and analysis of society as both subject and object, and was (and still is) a specific response to and critique of the then dominant interpretations of Marx, the so-called “comprehensive worldview Marxism” (Weltanschauungs Marxismus) of Engels, Kautsky and the Second International, and the orthodoxy of Western Marxism (Marxism-Leninism). Neue Marx-Lektüre can be understood as a heterodox-orthodox exegesis of Marx; heterodox because of its critique of existing dominant interpretations of Marx, but orthodox due to staying faithful to Marx’s texts. Rejecting Althusser’s argument that there is an epistemic break between the young and old Marx, Neue Marx-Lektüre seeks to understand the whole of Marx, using texts by the mature Marx as an interpretive framework for earlier works.

This new reading of Marx was first articulated by the Adorno students Hans-Georg Backhaus and Helmut Reichelt after their discovery of the very first German edition of Das Kapital and its radically different presentation of the value-form. It draws its lineage back to the early (1920-30s) heterodox Marxists Isaak Illich Rubin and Evgeny B. Pashukanis and the Frankfurt School. Initially an “underground Marxism” developed by isolated thinkers outside of institutional research programs, Neue Marx-Lektüre has left its subterranean existence, has become better known in Anglo-American world as value-form theory, and been popularized in particular by Michael Heinrich and his An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx’s Capital.

This course is focused on how Neue Marx-Lektüre interprets Marx's critique of political economy and how it differs from Weltanschauungs Marxismus, Western Marxism, and labour-movement centric analyses of Capital, such as autonomist Marxism. Central topics of the new Marx reading will be covered, including the decoding and critiquing the social forms of capital, form-determination, the dialectical development and presentation of the form of value (against historising and empirical interpretation of Marx' analysis of economic forms), and how capitalist domination is conceived as impersonal objectively mediated and having a life of its own (society as subject and object). In addition, following Heinrich’s argument for making Marx relevant for the twenty-first century, the course will apply Neue Marx-Lektüre to select contemporary phenomena (e.g. AI, smart technology, logistics, immaterial labour).
Assignments:

Research paper 50%
20-30 page research paper that (1) discusses, explores or critiques value form theory (e.g. interpretation of value, class, form-determination) and/or (2) applies value form to a contemporary phenomena (e.g. high-frequency trading, infrastructure, universal basic income).

Presentation 30%
Each student will pick a week to present; for this week the student will assign additional readings.

Participation 20%
Grade will be based on weekly in-class contribution and discussions with the instructor during office hours.

Provisional schedule and literature
NB! Schedule and texts are subject to change.

Week 1: Introduction to NML and course logistics

Week 2: Worldview Marxism and Western Marxism

Engels (1877). Anti-Duhring. Pp tbd


Kautsky, Karl (1887) The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx. pp tbd
Week 3: Genealogy of NML: Russian Heterodox Marxist and the Frankfurt School

Adorno tbd


Week 4: The value form and form-determination


Week 5: Value: substantial vs. social interpretation


**Week 6: Historical vs. logical interpretation of Capital**


Kautsky, Karl (1887) *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*. pp tbd


**Week 7: Dialectics**


Engels (1877). *Anti-Duhring*. Pp tbd


**Week 8: The critique of political economy**


Lange, Elena L (2017). The Proof is in the Pudding: on the Necessity of Presupposition in Marx’s Critical Method


Texts on the logistics concept of waste TBD.

**Week 9: The inverted world of capital: society as object and subject**

Adorno TBD.


Week 10: State-derivation debate


Engels (1884) *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.


Week 11: An apolitical, academic Marxism?


Additional text on NML lack of crisis TBD.

Week 12: Applications: the Platform and the plat-form/ the supply chain

Cowen, Deborah (2014). *The Deadly Life of Logistics*.


**Week 13: Artificial intelligence**


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NB! The topics of week 12 and 13 may change or may be incorporated in an earlier week.