SOAN 217: Capitalism, Consumption and Culture

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Carleton College
Winter 2015

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Office hours: MW 3:15-4:30pm; T 1-3pm, or by appointment

Class meets MWF, 5a (1:50pm-3pm MW; 2:20pm-3:20pm F) in Weitz 132

Course description
With the recent financial crises, the occupy movement, and the increasing discussions of climate change and “sustainability”, our economic system has been coming under renewed scrutiny. This is indeed fitting, as the powerful and complex capitalist system fundamentally shapes our individual and collective lives—a fact which belies the notion that “the economy” is a system that is somehow independent of the spheres of society, politics, and culture.

Understanding our capitalist society requires an historical and sociological approach. In this seminar we’ll build a foundation for comprehension by examining the nature and logic of capitalism. Our perspective will be grounded in Marx, a founding “classical” sociologist, and the most important analyst and critic of capitalism. This basis will then allow us to engage with more contemporary accounts which seek to comprehend and critique new developments in capitalism and explore its alternatives.

This syllabus is necessarily tentative; I may choose to make changes based upon the interests and needs of course participants.

Course objectives
Upon completion of this course, students should:

- have a good understanding of critical sociological theories of the capitalist system
- have a greatly expanded vocabulary of relevant sociological concepts
- be capable of understanding and interpreting aspects of their social world through various theoretical perspectives
- have improved their skills of critical reading, thinking, and communication

Student learning outcomes
Learning outcomes are specified at the department level. The relevant outcomes for this course are the following:
• Connect information about historical and contemporary socio-cultural phenomena.
• Formulate appropriate sociological and/or anthropological research questions about socio-cultural phenomena.
• Apply sociological and anthropological theory to analyze socio-cultural phenomena.
• Draw upon your understanding of historical and contemporary socio-cultural phenomena to engage the world.

Course Materials
There are six required books for the course, which are available at the Carleton bookstore. In addition to these texts, there will occasionally be required readings available on the course website.


Approach, expectations, suggestions
The course will be conducted as a discussion-based seminar, although I may lecture from time to time. I view my professorial role to be one of facilitation, rather than knowledge dissemination. My goal is to create a context and structure to help you develop your critical intellectual skills and your knowledge of sociological theoretical approaches. The success of the course will depend upon the continued preparation, engagement and participation of all members.

Reading
In many ways, this is a seminar in reading. The reading load will vary, but will often be substantial, and the texts will require significant attention and active engagement. This means annotating the text, making notes, and furthering your understanding by summarizing and questioning the text. You should expect to spend a considerable amount of time reading critically, in preparation for our class meetings. You are not expected to have mastered them on your own before coming to class; we’ll collectively make sense of them in class.

You should always bring the relevant texts to class with you, along with your notes. I strongly discourage using ereaders, as they (in my opinion), make active engagement with the text more difficult. Readings available on Moodle should be printed out and brought to class.

Technology
My approach to teaching and learning is centered around discussion, engagement, community and collaboration. I have found that this approach is best facilitated by keeping technology, for the most part, out of the classroom. I expect all phones and laptops to be turned off and put away before coming into the classroom. If you have a
circumstance which merits an exception to this policy, please see me about it.

Attendance
Class attendance is mandatory. If you need to be absent for a legitimate reason, please talk to me ahead of time. You may have one unexcused absence during the term. Any additional unexcused absences will result in deductions from your final grade for the course.

Communication and office hours
I am available for discussion and/or assistance outside of class, and I welcome student feedback, discussion, and questions. If you have any questions or concerns throughout the term, we can chat about them. If you find yourself struggling with the course or some aspect of it, come and see me before it gets too stressful or too late to remedy.

Late work
I don’t accept any late work that I have not authorized prior to its deadline.

Course requirements
Your course grade will be calculated according to the following breakdown:

- Participation 15%
- Critical reading questions 20%
- Discussion leadership assignment 10%
- Analytical paper 15%
- Final paper (in stages) 40%

**Participation** Your success in the course (as well as the overall success of the course) will depend upon your active and sustained engagement. I expect everyone to participate at a high level; however, we all don't have the same aptitudes and learning styles, so you should think about participation flexibly. While it includes asking questions and participating in discussions, it also includes active listening, having your text open (and reading along), annotating and notetaking, and participation in small-group work.

Active participation also involves making comments that show how you have substantially engaged with the text on your own time, and are making connections between different texts and themes that we’ve covered, as well as connections to other courses or everyday life.

**Critical reading questions** You will be responsible for posting a critical reading response and question to the appropriate discussion board on Moodle before each class. This requirement is designed to help you practice focusing and articulating your engagement with the text, as well as to develop critical questioning skills.

**Discussion leadership assignment** You will have the opportunity to lead the class discussion on a day and topic of your choosing.

**Analytical paper** This will be a short (5-6 page) exegetical paper on some aspect of Marx’s *Capital*.

**Final paper** In the final paper, you will explore a topic which you will develop in consultation with me. The paper will develop in stages.

Grades
The following grading scale will be used for assignments and for the course overall:

- A 94-100%
- A- 90-93%
B+  87-89%
B   84-86%
B-  80-83%
C+  77-79%
C   74-76%
C-  70-73%
D+  67-69%
D   60-66%
E   below 60%

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Carleton College is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Disability Services, Andy Christensen, at 222-4464 or anchrist@carleton.edu, to begin the process. Carleton faculty are strongly encouraged to wait for official notification of accommodations before modifying course requirements for students.

**Academic support**

Carleton has a wealth of resources for students who want to improve their academic skills. Take advantage of them!

**Library research**

Ask a librarian for help with your research in this class. You can drop by the library’s Research/IT desk to ask any question you have, at any point in your process. Librarians help students find and evaluate articles, books, websites, statistics, data, government documents, and more. For more information on hours and librarians, visit the library’s website: http://go.carleton.edu/library.

**Public Speaking and Class Presentations**

The Speakeasy is a student-staffed resource designed to assist you with class presentations, comps talks, and other speech-related events. Groups and individuals are welcome at our location in the Libe (room 314). A Speakeasy coach, Chad Stevenson or Diana Fraser, can also meet you at other mutually convenient times. Just email them at stevensonc@carleton.edu or fraserd@carleton.edu. For days and times when the Speakeasy is open, visit go.carleton.edu/speakeasy.

**Time Management, Study Skills, and Test-Prep Strategies**

Chavonna Savage (csavage@carleton.edu), a Hall Director who also works in the Academic Support Center, can work with you to improve your time management and academic skills. Her goals are to heighten your awareness of your personal strengths and skills, and to offer different ways you can approach your academic work so you're more efficient and effective. Chavonna meets students during her regular drop-in office hours, which are listed on the Academic Skills Coaching website. You can also email her to set up a meeting outside her office hours.

**The Writing Center**

The Writing Center, located in 420 4th Libe, has peer writing consultants who can work with you during any stage of the writing process (brainstorming to final proofreading). Hours are listed here: https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/asc/writingcenter/. You can reserve specific times for conferences in 420 4th Libe by using their online appointment system: https://writingcenter.carleton.edu/. Walk-ins are welcome in 420 4th Libe, though writers with appointments have priority.
**Writing Assistance for Students Whose First Language Is Not English**

If you are a second language writer and believe you might benefit from working individually with a writing consultant on a regular basis this term, email Renata Fitzpatrick, Second-Language Writing Coordinator, call her at x5998, or stop by her office in 420D 4th Libe. She can arrange once- or twice-a-week meetings between you and a specific writing consultant throughout the term.

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**Course outline**

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**Part one: Marx's critique of political economy**

**Week one**  
**Introduction to the course and Marx's critique of political economy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Material</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 5</td>
<td>Welcome and introductions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Jan 7 | *Capital*, Chapter 1 (pp. 125-163)  
*Harvey*, Chapter 1 (pp. 15-37) |
| Jan 9 | *Capital*, Chapter 1 (pp. 163-177); Chapter 2 (178-187)  
*Harvey*, Chapter 1 (pp. 38-53) |

**Week two**  
**Marx on money, labor, value**

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Material</th>
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| Jan 12 | *Capital*, Chapter 3 (pp. 188-244)  
*Harvey*, Chapter 2 (pp. 55-83) |
| Jan 14 | *Capital*, Chapters 4-6 (pp. 247-280)  
*Harvey*, Chapter 3 (pp. 85-107) |
| Jan 16 | *Capital*, Chapters 7-9 (pp. 283-339)  
*Harvey*, Chapter 4 (pp. 109-134) |

**Week three**  
**Marx on the production process**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Material</th>
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| Jan 19 | *Capital*, Chapter 10 (pp. 340-416)  
*Harvey*, Chapter 5 (pp. 135-162) |
| Jan 21 | *Harvey*, Chapters 6 & 7 (pp. 163-212)  
*Harvey*, Chapters 8 & 9 (pp. 213-262) |

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**Part two: Culture, consciousness, subjectivity**

**Week four**  
**Primitive accumulation; and moving beyond Marx to “critical theory”**

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Material</th>
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| Jan 26 | *Capital*, Chapters 26, 27, 32, 33 (pp. 873-895; 927-940)  
*Harvey*, Chapter 11 (pp. 289-313) |
| Jan 28 | Georg Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” |
| Jan 30 | Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Concept of Enlightenment” and “The Culture Industry” |

**Week five**  
**One-Dimensionality: Marcuse’s critique**
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2</td>
<td><em>One-Dimensional Man</em>, Chapters 1 &amp; 2 (pp. 3-55)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 4</td>
<td><em>One-Dimensional Man</em>, Chapters 5 &amp; 6 (pp. 127-173)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 6</td>
<td><em>One-Dimensional Man</em>, Chapters 8-10 (pp. 207-262)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Part three: Contemporary problems and theories**

**Week six**

**Contemporary dynamics of global capitalism**

- **Feb 9**  
  Midterm break – no class

- **Feb 11**  
  Sassen, *Expulsions*, Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 1-116)

- **Feb 13**  
  Sassen, *Expulsions*, Chapters 3 & 4 (pp. 117-225)

**Week seven**

**The commodity frontier: Biocapital**

- **Feb 16**  
  Rajan, *Biocapital*, Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-76)

- **Feb 18**  
  Rajan, *Biocapital*, Chapters 2 & 3 (pp. 77-137)

- **Feb 20**  
  Rajan, *Biocapital*, Chapters TBA

**Week eight**

**Fair trade? Green capitalism?**

- **Feb 23**  
  Keith Brown (2013) *Buying into Fair Trade: Culture, Morality, and Consumption* (excerpts)

- **Feb 25**  

- **Feb 27**  
  Adrian Parr (2013) *The Wrath of Capital: Neoliberalism and Climate Change Politics* (excerpts)  
  Naomi Klein (2014) *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Climate* (excerpts)

**Week nine**

**Cognitive capitalism?**

- **Mar 2**  
  Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, chapters TBA

- **Mar 4**  
  Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, chapters TBA

- **Mar 6**  
  Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, chapters TBA

**Week ten**

**(Re)thinking alternatives**

- **Mar 9**  
  Eric Olin Wright (2010) *Envisioning Real Utopias* (excerpts)

- **Mar 11**  