

Marxism Workshop

The aim of this workshop is to explore Marxist ideas (social theory). Marx provides an explanation of how society works, and also of how and why history has unfolded as it has (there is a specific emphasis on capitalism). You should consider the relative merits of different aspects of Marxist thought and how these can help you make sense of material and economic aspects of the social world and/or the development of historical societies specifically within the context of your own discipline. In particular to what extent are his ideas of value for describing the structure of ancient/historical/modern society & economies? Can we use these ideas to make sense of problems in our society today?

Influences on Marx:

1. Hegel's idealist philosophy (which he critiqued heavily);
2. Observing first-hand the emergence of the industrial worker in Europe & the conditions of the *Proletariat*.

Key points to remember:

- Marxism is a materialist philosophy: concentrating on the material world;
- Essentially an empirical perspective: reality is grounded in the material world & not in our ideas of the world around us (in opposition to Hegel's rationalist perspective)
- Using dialectical method to make sense of progress/historical change

Marx: Key Concepts	Synopsis
Materialist view of knowledge & society	Our quest for knowledge is not abstract rationalism but should be embedded in positive analysis of material things in physical world.
Alienation	Humanist approach: the potential of being human, because people have the ability to imagine before they do something (distinct from other animals' engagement with material world). Capitalist modes of production alienate people from their production, labour & thus their potential.
Historical materialism	Explaining the emergence of modern industrial society from pre-modern, feudal society (and other historical developments). The focus is economic: looking at means & modes of production & how these determine social & political relations. (Base & Superstructure)
Value (commodities)	Use value: how useful (necessary) is it? Relative exchange value: the relentless rise of exchange value undermines capacity for assessing other values of commodities
Ideology	System of ideas & beliefs (derived from material activity) which affect our perception of reality. Means of legitimisation over control of production.

Marxism Activity: Exploring Commercial & Ideological Spaces in Lampeter Town

Is it possible to understand social institutions without understanding the economic base?

Choose from one of the following activities:

1. Visit the graveyard at Lampeter & with reference to the following questions think about how we can explore social worlds in this space. Make a detailed record of your observations (field notes and or photos, sketches).

Think about the use of ideology to legitimate social structures.

How is this expressed physically in this space?

How are class structures expressed in this space? Do these reiterate ideologies?

Can you identify alienation within this space?

2. Exploring commercial spaces in Lampeter: visit one of the supermarkets in town or otherwise make a sample of some of the private commercial enterprises. Make a detailed record of your observations (field notes and or photos, sketches).

Think about modes of production in the commercial landscape of Lampeter.

What might you observe about commodity fetishism?

Marxist notions of value: what can you say about the use value and exchange value of two different (and distinct) commodities?

Are there hierarchical levels in the commercial landscape of Lampeter?

Can you identify exploitation or alienation in the commercial landscape of Lampeter?

3. Think about the architectural landscape of Lampeter: this should include sacred spaces, residential spaces and commercial enterprises. Make a detailed record of your observations (field notes and or photos, sketches).

Think about how class is expressed spatially: you will need to draw upon two or more specific examples.

What about the expression of ideology?

Can you identify alienation within this space?

How can you see Marx's notion of base and superstructure in operation in the urban environment of Lampeter?