Post-Marxism: A Culture of Critical Discourse
Talk by Kelvin Auld, Sydney Unitarian Church 2017
**Post-Marxism**

Post-Marxism is a current trend in critical social theory that informs:
- A culture of critical discourse, competing social movements & identity politics.
- The criticism & rejection of official Orthodox Marxism e.g. Marxism-Leninism & Stalinism etc.
- Revisiting Classical Marxism – the original ideas of Marx.
Criticism of Orthodox Marxism

- Anti-Humanism: mechanistic social theory
- Economic Determinism: history not inevitable
- Pseudo Science: not a “natural science”
- Dogmatic Doctrine: like a State religion
- Poor prediction: not supported by events
- Negates human agency, choice & action
- Repressive: Elitist Communist Dictatorship
- As a “Grand Theory” or science of society & history is flawed & impossible in any event.
- Narrow idea of class consciousness/ideology
- Did not work and caused human misery.
Classical Marxism 1

Classical Marxism refers to the original theory of Karl Marx.
Intended as a “grounded” or “real world” form of philosophical “materialism”

Includes:
- a “Grand” or “Total” theory of society/history,
- a methodology (History/Dialectics/Critique) &
- a political program (Communist Manifesto 1848).
Classical Marxism 3

The original project of Marx amounted to an unfinished “work in progress”. An ambitious attempt to develop a materialist “Grand Theory” of society & history based mainly on “a priori speculation” informed by:

- **German Speculative Philosophy;** Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach
- **French Socialism;** Proudhon, Fourier, Saint-Simon
- **English Political Economy;** Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus
STRUCTURE OF HUMAN SOCIETY

SUPERSTRUCTURE
(EVERYTHING NOT TO DO WITH PRODUCTION IN SOCIETY)
EDUCATION, FAMILY
RELIGION, POLITICS MEDIA

BASE
(ALL THINGS NEEDED TO PRODUCE)
MACHINES, FACTORIES,
LAND, RAW MATERIALS
PEOPLE’S RELATIONS TO PRODUCTION

SHAPES THE SUPERSTRUCTURE
MAINTAINS AND LEGITIMATES THE BASE.
Marx developed a socio-economic model of “Capitalism” that generated hypotheses that needed to be tested and verified over time.

Marx thought that a “natural” conflict between labor and capital was inherent in the production process itself.

This conflict, that was both a material & social relational one, was the ultimate driver of social and historical change.

The ultimate resolution of this conflict would result in collapse of Capitalism leading to Communism.

Notable ideas: surplus value - labour theory of value, class struggle, alienation/exploitation of workers & material conception of society & history.

The productive base (forces & relations of production) was seen as real & essential. The base historically shapes the political, religious & cultural superstructure.
Orthodox Marxism was official doctrine conceived & written following the death of Karl Marx.

Initially it was the official “Marxist” political doctrine of the socialist movement as represented in the **Second International (1889-1916)**.

After that the official doctrine of the **Third International (1919 - 1943)** was Orthodox Marxism combined with Lenin’s doctrine on revolutionary organization. The orthodox doctrines of Marxism-Leninism, “*dialectical materialism*” and “*historical materialism*” were developed during this period in the USSR.

Stalinism via COMINFORM (1947-1956) etc. Doctrine along the lines of *Dialectical & Historical Materialism* 1938 etc by Joseph Stalin.
Orthodox Marxism aimed to simplify, codify and systematize methodology and theory by omitting the perceived ambiguities and contradictions of Classical Marxism.
The initial emergence of orthodox Marxism can be associated with the late works of Friedrich Engels, such as *Dialectics of Nature* and *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. 
Orthodox Marxism was further developed during the Second International by thinkers such as George Plekhanov and Karl Kautsky. Kautsky, and to a lesser extent, Plekhanov, were in turn major influences on Vladimir Lenin, whose version of Marxism was known as Leninism by its contemporaries.

The official ideology of the Third International (COMINTERN) was based in orthodox Marxism combined with Leninist views on revolutionary organization via a Vanguard Party - was called Marxism-Leninism - State ideology of the USSR.
Orthodox Marxism akin to Religious Dogma says Bertrand Russell (1945)

- Yahweh = Dialectical Materialism
- The Messiah = Karl Marx
- The Elect = The Proletariat
- The Church = The Communist Party
- The Second Coming = The Revolution
- Hell = Punishment of the Capitalists
- The Millennium = The Communist Commonwealth
Western Marxism: Critical Theory and Post-Marxism 1

Western Marxism, the academic or intellectual Marxism developed in Western Europe from the 1920s

Sought to make Marxism more "sophisticated", humanist, open and flexible by examining issues like culture, identity and individual freedom that were well outside Orthodox Marxism.
Western Marxism: Critical Theory and Post-Marxism 2

Western Marxists, included Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci and the Frankfurt School (Marcuse, Adorno & later Habermas etc).

They expanded their critical analysis to include psychoanalysis, ideological & cultural dominance and the humanist sociology of Max Weber.
Cultural Hegemony: Gramsci (1930s)

- Cultural Hegemony is the sociological theory that a culturally diverse society can be ruled or dominated by one of its social classes.
- It is the dominance of one social group over all other classes e.g. the ruling class over all other classes.
- The theory claims that the ideas of the ruling class come to be seen as the norm; they are seen as universal ideologies, perceived to benefit everyone whilst really only benefiting the ruling class.
New Left Ideology

- Neo-Marxism [Frankfurt School's/critical theory] extended Marxist frameworks of critique to areas of life that Karl Marx himself had not focused upon in traditional Marxism, such as gender, race, and sexual orientation.
New Left Ideology 1960-70s-
Marcuse etc

Frankfurt School’s “critical theory” extended Neo-Marxist frameworks of critique to areas of life that Karl Marx did not focus on such as:
- gender,
- race/ethnicity,
- sexual orientation,
- culture/identity, and
- language/discourse
Jurgen Habermas: 1980-2000s

"Civil society must beware of sacrificing individual liberty, tolerance towards the diversity of life-styles and readiness to take on the perspective of the other (...)"

Jürgen Habermas
Jurgen Habermas 2

- Put Marx’s ideas into critical framework
- Shift from materialism to idealism
- Added Weber’s rationalization, Durkheim’s consensus, Parson’s value generalization
- Emphasis on communicative action and the generation of understanding/ideology.
Marx said change developed out of contradictions in material base

But Habermas says change occurs out of contradictions in ideas/language and how they are legitimated through norms and values.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dimension of society</th>
<th>Definition of power</th>
<th>Structures of power in modern society</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Control of use-values and resources that are produced, distributed and consumed.</td>
<td>Control of money and capital.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Influence on collective decisions that determine aspects of the lives of humans in certain communities and social systems.</td>
<td>Control of governments, bureaucratic state institutions, parliament, military, police, parties, lobby groups, civil society groups, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Definition of moral values and meaning that shape what is considered as important, reputable and worthy in society.</td>
<td>Control of structures that define meaning and moral values in society (e.g. universities, religious groups, intellectual circles, opinion making groups, etc.).</td>
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*Table 2: Three forms of power structures*
Neo-Liberal Globalization: The Dominant Discourse (Hegemony)
Neo-Liberal Globalization - Concept

Economic neo-liberalism & globalization are closely linked? Not only a discourse but a real political practice.

1. Intense global competition encouraging governments to deregulate, privatize & liberalize taxation, borders & immigration etc.

2. IMF & World Bank adopt the “Washington Consensus”. Other institutions follow.

3. Advance of Neo-Liberal Globalization coincided with over 30 years of growth in the world economy.

4. Critics observe that this growth is associated with decline in the representative & welfare role of the Nation State, widening inequality & social breakdown.
Neo-Liberal Globalization Project

Why does the Neo-Liberal Globalization project (NLGP) have so much appeal?

- As the business community benefits from “open” economies it supports NLG continuous promotion & implementation by the Nation State (Government policy) e.g. “Big Australia”, free trade, infrastructure, high immigration/diversity, deregulation/privatization, IR reforms, foreign takeover policies etc etc.
- Business supports think tanks and studies justifying Neo-Liberal Globalization
- Funds political parties that support the project.
- Business lobby drives and influences “policy discourse” and policy outcomes.
Global Networks of Power
(Manuel Castells)

- Global financial network
- Global multimedia network
- Global criminal network
- Cultural production network
- Strategic partnership and competition
- Ad hoc networks on specific projects
- Global network of production and application of science, technology and knowledge management
- Political network
- Military / security network
Responses to “Neo-Liberal Globalization” & local social change

Manuel Castells distinguishes 3 responses:

**Resistant Identity:** A defensive reaction of people who feel threatened and defend local traditional solidarity or retreat into fundamentalism.

**Project Identity:** The response of those who are “forward looking” and engage with social or identity movements (e.g. Environmentalism) to change the social system.

**Legitimising Identity:** Societal projects that are outside the State but draw on State resources/support. e.g. NGOs and social networks of Civil Society
Towards A Post-Modern Utopia
Or Dystopia?

Institutional complexes of modernity

- capitalism
- industrialism
- administrative power
- military power

Types of social movement

- labour
- ecological (counter-cultural)
- civil and human rights
- peace

Objectives of a new order

- socialized economic organization
- system of planetary care
- coordinated global order
- transcendence of war

Institutional elements ‘beyond modernity’

- post-scarcity system
- humanization of technology
- multilayered democratic participation
- demilitarization

Post-modernity?