

UC-2: “Alienation: what is it good for?” [på svenska och engelska / in Swedish and English]

Söndag 16 oktober, 13:30–16:45, Erlander
Sunday 16 October, 13.30–16.45, Erlander

We propose two sessions (1,5 hour each) with presentations and a discussion concerning the concept of alienation. The first session would provide a general introduction and the historical genealogy of the concept. The second session would focus on contemporary issues regarding alienation around labor, economy and social movements.

panel 1: Utanförskapets alienation [Swedish] (13:30–15:00)

deltagare/participants: Li Eriksson, Maja Allelin, Johannes Björk, Tobias Davidsson

Panel 2: Variations of alienations [Swedish/English] (15:15–16:45)

deltagare/participants: Erik Bryngelsson, Astrid Grelz Andersson, David Payne, Gustav Strandberg

Content and Theme

The notion of alienation has in recent decades suffered a strange fate. On the one hand, it remains a term used in everyday language to designate certain affective states (e.g. ‘isolation’, ‘disorientation’ and ‘indifference’) as well as collective experiences of marginalization, exclusion and political disenfranchisement. On the other hand, as a critico-analytical category, alienation has fallen into theoretical disreputation. A period of sustained interest from Marxists during the first part of the twentieth century has given way to a general dissatisfaction with the category, now often regarded as insufficient in both describing class exploitation and understanding developments in capitalist relations of production. Our overarching aim will be to provide a genealogical excavation of the concept in order to examine its continued analytical relevance as well as its uncharted potential in the political articulation of a contemporary anti-capitalist discourse.

In light of the political and theoretical landscape that has emerged from the 1960s onwards, i.e. the hegemony of neoliberal policies and the concomitant systemic changes neoliberalism has brought with it (New Public Management, immaterialization of labour, reification of time and personal relationships etc.), we claim that the concept of alienation needs to be rethought.

This does not mean that we simply aim to “update” the concept of alienation, re-applying the category to what is new and distinct about neo-liberal discourse. Rather, the task is to rethink the term from within and against the fertile history of Marxism, accentuating those aspects of the Marxian/Marxist interpretation of alienation that are still at work today, but also re-articulating them with other (Pre-Marxian and Post-Marxist) theoretical elements and phenomena that can contribute to a thoroughgoing critique of the present. If all aspects

of our lives are fully subsumed under capitalist relations, alienation would then be nothing but an empty concept, unable to account for internal differences within social structures or for the possibility of emancipatory change.

The questions we hope to address are: in which ways are we alienated today and what would it mean not to be alienated?