

**SCAND 533/COMP LIT 535**  
**Theories of the Social Imaginary**  
<http://faculty.washington.edu/akn/scand533.htm>

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**Course Information**

5 Credits  
M., W. 3:30-5:20  
Denny 312  
Office Hours: M. 2:00-3:00  
or by appointment

**Instructor**

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**1. DESCRIPTION**

In the seminar we'll study theories of the social imaginary. Theories of the social imaginary seek to explain the way imagination, not simply reason, figures in the construction of central social institutions, representations, and practices. During the last two decades, arguments related to social imaginaries have become a key discussion in conversations about collective belonging and action on a transnational terrain of multiple modernities.

Paul Cardan first began writing about social imaginaries in the 1950s in the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Cardan used the term to attack what he saw as the bureaucratic calcification of the Soviet bloc countries, arguing Stalinism worked by the same institutional logic as advanced forms of capitalism. He angered the Soviets and many Eurocommunists. It later turned out that Paul Cardan was a pseudonym for Cornelius Castoriadis, an émigré in France, who only began publishing under his own name in 1970. Castoriadis's arguments fuse Marxian and psychoanalytic theories to argue that Marx, and most other philosophers since Plato, get it wrong. In their ontology, or philosophy of being, argues Castoriadis, being is "being determined" by some other force or relationship—"reason," "productive forces," "the unconscious." For Castoriadis, being is self- and collective-creation. This creation occurs through both representing (language) and doing (praxis). In these processes, imagination is salient, because representation and action can never be reduced to reason but always include a symbolic excess. Despite the fecund arguments that make up Castoriadis's body of work during the postwar period, until the 1990s he remained relatively little studied in Anglo-American universities. Yet Castoriadis's work provides a rich point of departure for examining imagination, which figures centrally in many recent theories of the relation between subject and collective in modernity. Among those we'll read in class are Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Appadurai's *Modernity at Large*, Taylor's *Modern Social Imaginaries*, and Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*.

In approaching social imaginaries, we will stress these theories' dialogue with other ideas about ideology, imagination, and social forms. So, roughly, Castoriadis's theoretical emphasis on creation must be understood as part of a dialogue with Marx's economic determinism; the Marxian assumptions underpinning Anderson's argument that print capitalism mobilizes national imagining is rejected by Appadurai's argument that

people on the move construct imaginary relations through many print and electronic images. Taylor revises conventional philosophical concepts of subject, economy, and public sphere to explain modern social imaginaries, while Warner advocates retheorizing Habermas's idea of "bourgeois public sphere" to better understand multiple modern and postmodern "publics." Interspersed within these dialogues I have also included critiques of the critiques. That is, I have tried to select feminist and postcolonialist critiques of these theories of the imaginary to create productive, stimulating conversation that helps illustrate the inclusions and exclusions that structure the discussions. The aim of the course then, is not to present a canon of fixed ideas about "The Imaginary," but rather to put these texts in dialogue with each other, opening spaces for us to question them, and to question each other.

## **2. AIMS**

- Seminar participants will gain basic familiarity with the central terms in debates over the role of "imagination" in the constitution of subjective and collective identities
- Participants will become acquainted with salient arguments and terms in discussions of psychoanalysis, Marxism, and civil society as these intersect with theories of culture
- Participants will improve their facility in speaking clearly and pointedly to an audience about theoretical topics that arise from the course readings and from the participants' areas of interest
- Participants will draft a scholarly article that, with further revision, has the potential to be submitted to a reputable professional journal in their field

## **3. REQUIREMENTS**

- **ORAL PRESENTATION:** Each student will make one oral presentation of 15 minutes. On 10/4, seminar participants will register in the course schedule for the date on which they'll make their seminar presentation. The presentation will be made up of two components. First, presenters should post to the course email list (at least 24 hours in advance of their presentation) an abstract of the presentation. This will help others prepare for the presentation, as well as help prevent overlaps in discussion. Second, presenters will make a 15 minute presentation at the beginning of class on the day for which they've signed up. The presentation might take up a major issue in the reading assigned for that day and seek to explain it. It might focus on a question that arose for the presenter, and seek to articulate it in the most compelling way possible. Or it might fix on a minor detail, which arguably has major implications for the argument spelled out in the reading assigned for the day. Or the presentation might outline a comparison with another reading in the course, or one from the presenter's own area of specialty, which the presenter introduces. (Remember that if you introduce new material, don't assume

your audience knows it as well as you.) Following the presentation, we will discuss issues raised, passing gradually into the discussion for the day.

- FINAL PAPER: Each seminar participant will write a final paper of at least 15 pages on the topic of their choice. The only limit on the paper is that its theoretical framework must include parts of the course bibliography. As an upper-level graduate seminar, I expect that your research and paper will carry you beyond the course bibliography. However, texts that figure in the course should play a prominent role in your argument. Please discuss your project with me, if you feel you need more guidance.

#### **4. GRADES**

- Oral Presentation 20 %
- Final Paper 80 %

#### **5. TEXTS**

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. Verso, 1991.

Castoriadis, Cornelius. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. MIT University Press, 1987.

Mankell, Henning. *Sidetracked (Vilospå)*. New York: Vintage/Black Lizard 2003.

Taylor, Charles. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Tucker, Robert C., ed. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Norton, 1972.

Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. Zone Books, 2003.

Course Reader, available at the Ave. Copy Center, 4141 University Way NE.

(206) 633-1837.

Please note that I have included the bibliography for the course reader after the syllabus, and at the front of the reader as well. You might find it useful in budgeting your time for the readings assigned to take a look at the bibliography, by which you can determine the number of pages in articles in the course reader.

#### **6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND REASONABLE ACCOMODATION**

The University of Washington reaffirms its policy of equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, or status as a disabled veteran or Vietnam era veteran in accordance with University policy and applicable federal and state statutes and regulations. The University of Washington is committed to providing access and reasonable accommodation in its services, programs, activities, education and employment for individuals with disabilities. To request disability accommodation in the application process contact the Department of Scandinavian Studies' administrative assistant Linda Norkool at 543-0645, or the Disability Services Office at least ten days in advance at: 206.543.6450/V, 206.543.6452/TTY, 206.685.7264 (FAX), or e-mail at [dso@u.washington.edu](mailto:dso@u.washington.edu).

# COURSE PLAN

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## I. THEORETICAL ISSUES

### Week 1: Social Imaginaries

W.	9/29	Introductions Lecture: “Why Social Imaginaries?”
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### Week 2: Marx

M.	10/4	Gaonkar “Toward New Imaginaries” in Course Reader (CR) “Theses on Feuerbach” <i>Marx-Engels Reader</i> 143-145 <i>German Ideology</i> excerpts <i>Marx-Engels Reader</i> 146-200 <i>Communist Manifesto</i> <i>Marx-Engels Reader</i> 469-500
W.	10/6	<i>Capital</i> , Vol.1 excerpts, <i>Marx-Engels Reader</i> 302-388, 419-431

### Week 3: Imaginary Institution of Society I

M.	10/11	Castoriadis Excerpt from “‘The Only Way to Find Out If You Can Swim is to Get into the Water’: Introductory Interview” (1974) in CR Castoriadis <i>Imaginary Institution</i> 1-29, 56-114  Suggested Reading: “About Cornelius Castoriadis” (Obituary) at <a href="http://www.agorainternational.org/">http://www.agorainternational.org/</a> (10 pp.)
W.	10/13	Castoriadis <i>Imaginary Institution</i> 115-220

## Week 4: Imaginary Institution of Society II

M.	10/18	Castoriadis <i>Imaginary Institution</i> 221-373
W.	10/20	Naranch “The Imaginary and a Political Quest for Freedom” in CR Habermas <i>The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity</i> 327-335 in CR Whitebrook “Intersubjectivity and the Monadic Core of the Psyche”

## II. HISTORICIZING IMAGINARIES

### Week 5: National Imaginaries

M.	10/25	Lecture: “National and Postnational Imaginaries”  <i>Anderson Imagined Communities</i> 1-112
W.	10/27	<i>Anderson Imagined Communities</i> 113-206

### Week 6: From National to Postnational Imaginaries

M.	11/1	Culler “Anderson and the Novel” in CR Parker et al. <i>Nationalisms and Sexualities</i> “Introduction” in CR Chakrabarty “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History” in CR
W.	11/3	Robbins “Some Versions of US Internationalism” in CR Taylor “Modes of Civil Society” in CR Chatterjee “A Response to Taylor’s Modes of Civil Society” in CR

### Week 7: Postnational Imaginaries

M.	11/8	Appadurai <i>Modernity at Large</i> 1-88
W.	11/10	Appadurai <i>Modernity at Large</i> 139-200

### III. REVISING IMAGINARIES

#### Week 8: Taylor's Modern Social Imaginaries

M.	11/15	Taylor <i>Modern Social Imaginaries</i> 1-100
W.	11/17	Taylor <i>Modern Social Imaginaries</i> 101-196

#### Week 9: National Imaginary in Crisis

M.	11/22	Mankell <i>Sidetracked (Vilospår)</i>
W.	11/24	No Class--Day before Thanksgiving Holiday Appointments for discussing final papers on Wed. 11/24 advised

#### Week 10: Imagination and the Public Sphere

M.	11/29	Lecture: Imagination and the Public Sphere  Habermas "Introduction: Preliminary Demarcation of a Type of Bourgeois Public Sphere" in CR Calhoun "Introduction" from <i>Habermas and the Public Sphere</i> Fraser "Rethinking the Public Sphere" in CR
W.	12/1	Warner <i>Publics and Counterpublics</i> 7-124

#### Week 11: Imagining Publics

M.	12/6	Warner <i>Publics and Counterpublics</i> 125-223
W.	12/8	Brief presentation of final papers to class

Tu.	12/14	<b>Final paper due by 5 PM. To be turned in at Raitt 318 to my mailbox in the Scandinavian Studies departmental office.</b>
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### Course Reader Bibliography

- Calhoun "Introduction." *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Ed. Craig Calhoun. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992. 109-142.
- Castoriadis, Cornelius. "The Only Way to Find Out If You Can Swim is to Get into the Water": Introductory Interview." *The Castoriadis Reader*. Ed. David Ames Curtis. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997. 17-34.
- Chatterjee, Partha. "A Response to Taylor's 'Modes of Civil Society'" *Public Culture* 3.1 (1990): 95-132.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000. 27-46
- Culler, Jonathan. "Anderson and the Novel." *Diacritics* 29.4 (1999): 20-39.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracies" *Habermas and The Public Sphere*. Ed. Craig Calhoun. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992. 109-142.
- Gaonkar, Dilip. "Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction." *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002): 1-19.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991. 1-26.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Trans. Frederick Lawrence Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987. 318-335.
- Naranch, Laurie E. "The Imaginary and a Political Quest for Freedom." *differences* 13.3 (2002): 64-82.
- Parker, Andrew, Russo, Mary, Sommer, Doris, and Yaeger, Patricia, eds.. "Introduction." *Nationalisms and Sexualities*. New York: Routledge. 1-17.
- Robbins, Bruce. *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress*. New York, London: New York University Press, 1999. 39-60.
- Taylor, Charles. "Modes of Civil Society" *Public Culture* 3.1. (1990): 95-132.
- Whitebrook, Joel. "Intersubjectivity and the Monadic Core of the Psyche: Habermas and Castoriadis on the Unconscious." *Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales* 86 (1990): 225-244.

## Selected Further Reading

- Appadurai, Arjun. 2002. "Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics." *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002): 21-47.
- Calhoun, Craig. "Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere." *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002): 147-171.
- Cornell, Drucilla. "Autonomy Re-Imagined." *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 8.1 (2003): 144-149.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Imaginary Domain: Abortion, Pornography, and Sexual Harassment*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- <http://www.agorainternational.org>: Cornelius Castoriadis website, with complete primary and secondary bibliography in numerous languages.
- Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, eds. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón, and Mino Moallem. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1966.
- Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Jonathan Culler. New York: Routledge, 2003. Originally published as special issue of *Diacritics*, Winter 1999.
- Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Ed. Craig Calhoun. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1977.
- McNay, Lois. *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity, 2000. Esp. Chapter 4, "Gender and Agency."
- Nationalisms and Sexualities*, eds. Andrew Parker et al. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Multiculturalism and The Politics of Recognition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992.
- The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory*. Eds. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.
- Robbins, Bruce. *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- Smith, Anthony. *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1991.