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Office hours: Th 12-1 pm and by appointment

Winter 2020 GERM 385-Critical Theory (TTh 11:35-13:0 SHER 395)

Introduction to the Frankfurt School

This course investigates the intellectual heritage of the Frankfurt School and its theoretical reflections on society, media, culture, and art. It examines the history of critical theory in relation to current developments, arguing for the Frankfurt School's continuing and indeed acute relevance for contemporary intellectual engagements in a broad range of areas, including cultural, literary, and film studies, music, art, political science, sociology, philosophy, and intellectual history.

One of the goals of this course is to hone critical and analytical skills that will enable us to better understand to urgent institutional, political, societal, cultural, aesthetic, ethic, environmental, and postcolonial debates in the age of globalization, illiberalism, and populism. We ask if and how critical theory might suggest ways to react to the myriad of challenges we face today. Examining the critiques of culture, rationality, enlightenment, and society and debates on postmodernism, we investigate the practice of critical theory from its beginnings and the years of exile in the United States to its reinstatement in the Federal Republic of Germany after the WW II. As we explore the multidisciplinary impulses of the Frankfurt School, we will reflect on the stakes of critical theory then and now.

Discussions and readings are in English. Prerequisites: willingness to read, learn, and think; openness to intellectual challenge.

Sept. 1: General introduction and welcome

Sept. 6-8

Week 2: Critical Theory and Its Foundations

T: Historical overview/origins/motivation/impact

David Held, "Introduction" from *Introduction to Critical Theory* (1980)

Th: Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784)

Sept. 13-15

Week 3: Critiques of Mass Culture

T: Siegfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction" (1926)

Th: Kracauer, "Mass Ornament" (1927)

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mldt0Vcvl60>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajf53LFdARU>

Sept. 20-22

Week 4: The Politicization of Art and the Aestheticization of Politics

T: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935)

Th: Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" (1934)

Sept. 27-29

Week 5: The Culture Industry

T/Th: Adorno/Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947)

Oct. 4-6

Week 6: Dialectic of Enlightenment

Theodor W. Adorno/Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947)

T/Th: "Preface" and "The Concept of Enlightenment"

Oct. 11-13

Week 7: Thanksgiving break and assignment 1

No class meetings: watch Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and complete assignment 1

<https://mcgill.kanopy.com/video/metropolis-0>

Oct. 18-20

Week 8: Enlightenment of the Enlightenment

T/Th: "Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment" from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Oct. 25-27

Week 9: Critical Theory in Exile: The Authoritarian Personality—Prophets of Deceit

T/Th: Leo Löwenthal and Norbert Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit* (1949)

Th: excerpt from Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (1951)

Nov. 1-3

Week 10: Culture After Auschwitz

T: Adorno, "Commitment" (1962)

Th: Ernst Bloch, introduction to *The Principle of Hope* (1954)

Nov. 8-10

Week 11: Critical Theory+Postmodernism

T: Jürgen Habermas: "Modernity—An Incomplete Project" (1984)

Th: research and practice of aphoristic writing; no class meeting, complete assignment 2

Nov. 15-17

Week 12: Confrontations: Questions of Theory + Praxis

T: Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance" (1965)

Th: Marcuse, "The End of Utopia" (1967)

Nov. 22-24

Week 13: Critical Theory and Populism Today

T: Alex Ross, "The Frankfurt School knew Trump was coming" (2016)

Andreas Huyssen, "Breitbart, Bannon, Trump, and the Frankfurt School" (2017)

Stuart Jeffries, "Why a Forgotten 1930s Critique of Capitalism is Back in Fashion" (2016)

Martin Jay, "Trump, Scorsese, and the Frankfurt School's Theory of Racket Society" (2020=

Th: self-organized, final critical theory project meeting, no class meeting

Nov. 29

Week 13: Presentation of critical theory projects

Required coursework:

This course requires a commitment to sustained work from each participant. The readings aren't easy, but they are also not as difficult as you may think. It is important to keep reading even if you don't understand everything -- take notes while you read, jot down questions you have. If you are unfamiliar with the critical language used by the theorists, you will slowly get into it during the semester, and it will become much easier to tease out the arguments after some exposure to the principles of critical theory. After class you may want to go over the readings again. Reading the texts in a timely fashion is key to learning and understanding. To maximize the learning outcome, please come to class prepared, bring along the text, your notes, comments, ideas, and questions and be ready to participate in the discussion.

--**Attendance** is expected at every class meeting. I ask that you email me if you have to miss a class. For more than 3 absences I will ask that you provide medical or other documentation. (3% of your final attendance and participation grade will be deducted for the 4th and each subsequent absence).

--**Participation** and active engagement with the class material are of essence. Participation means to be able and ready to ask informed questions and to make informed observations with the aim to create an open and engaging thought forum. To this end, I ask participants to abstain from using electronic devices for purposes not related to the discussion at hand. Prolonged staring at screens for whatever reason, checking emails, looking at social media, and doing non-course related tasks during class is distracting and disrespectful to others.

Methods of Evaluation:

Attendance, Preparation, Engagement, and Contribution to Discussions

While attendance is expected, attendance alone is not enough and will count for no more than 20% of your attendance and participation grade. In order to get a good participation grade, you must participate, you must be alert and prepared for class. No silent observers, please. Distracted media and technology users are not welcome. In-class assignments and group work count toward participation grade.

20%

Discussion Prompt

You will each be responsible for submitting a discussion prompt over the course of the semester. The prompt is due before the assigned class meeting in the assignment section on myCourses by 12 pm on Mondays (for the Tuesday class) and by 12 pm on Wednesdays (for the Thursday class). The prompt should consist of two thoughtful and cogently formulated prompts/questions; it should be max. one page (1.5 spaced, 12 pt, no pdf) in length (for the two questions) and should direct attention to interesting, resonant, and/or troubling aspects of the text that you would like us to discuss in class. A strong prompt will frame the question and point to a passage or aspect of the text that warrants critical reflection. It will explain why the issue or passage seems significant. It might refer to other texts we have read and offer a possible approach to resolving the issue. The goal is to prompt an insightful and productive discussion. You will be asked to present your prompt (2-3 min) in class. Assignment of prompts is done at random by the instructor, but you may indicate your preference by email.

10%

Group project: Why does critical theory matter? Why and how does it matter to you, to your studies, to your understanding of the world? Groups will be assigned after the drop-add period at random by instructor, email me before that date, if you want to work with a specific person or persons. Prepare a 10min. presentation on the relevance of critical theory today, to you/your group. A mix of critical thinking and creativity is encouraged.
20%

2 assignments due October 21: assignment 1 and November 14: assignment 2. Submission on myCourses; no pdf. 30%

a take-home final (during the final exam period; 48 hours, available at a date and time of your choice); response to 4 of 6 questions. 20%

The use of laptops is permitted for note taking and to refer to the texts; students who use laptops, tablets, cell phones for purposes other than those related to class activities will be asked to leave.

Required course material:

Dialectic of Enlightenment is available at the McGill bookstore; check myCourses for all other readings.

Additional resources:

Introduction and historical overview:

Held, David. *Introduction to Critical Theory*. Berkeley: UC Press, 1980.

Jay, Martin. *The Dialectical Imagination*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973.

Wiggershaus, Rolf. *The Frankfurt School*. Trans. M. Robertson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998.

Siegfried Kracauer:

Watch: Then&Now https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_qm4DtPQMM

Kevin McNeilly: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGTHiEVc1rs>

Hansen, Miriam Batu. *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Theodor W. Adorno, "The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer," in *Notes on Literature, Volume 2*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Koch, Gertrud. *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Von Moltke, Johannes and Gerd Gemünden, eds. *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012.

Walter Benjamin:

watch YaleCourses: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFpGf7aPXNA>

Adorno, Theodor W. "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin," *Prisms*, Cambridge, MA.: MIT., 1983, 227–242.

Buck-Morss, Susan, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," in *October*, 62 (1992) 3–41.

Hansen, Miriam Batu. *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and*

Theodor W. Adorno, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Wolin, Richard. *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Dialectic of Enlightenment:

watch Then&Now <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMiF9Bv-72s>

Held, David. *Introduction to Critical Theory*. Berkeley: UCPress, 1980.

Wilson Daniel W and Robert C. Holub, eds. *Impure Reason: Dialectic of Enlightenment in Germany*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1991.

Fleming, Katie. Odysseus and Enlightenment: Horkheimer and Adorno's "Dialektik der Aufklärung." *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* Vol. 19, No. 2 (JUNE 2012) 107-128.

Critical Theory in Exile:

Jenemann, David. *Adorno in America*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Werz, Michael. "Personality, Authority, and Society: Remarks on the Analysis of Authoritarianism and Prejudice in the Social Sciences". *Social Thought & Research*. Vol. 21, No. 1/2, 1998

Rose, Gillian. *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno*, London: Macmillan Press, 1978.

Adorno After Auschwitz

Hohendahl, Peter Uwe. *Prismatic Thought: Theodor W. Adorno*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

Jarvis, Simon. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*. London+New York: Routledge, 1998.

Jay, Martin. *Adorno*. Cambridge: HarvardUP, 1986.

Rose, Gillian. *The Melancholy Science*. London: Macmillan Press, 1978.

Herbert Marcuse:

watch "Marcuse and the Frankfurt School," with Bryan Magee and Herbert Marcuse https://fod-infobase-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/p_ViewVideo.aspx?xtid=7305&tScript=0

Bernstein, Richard, "Marcuse's Critical Legacy," *Radical Philosophy Review*, 16 (1) 2013. 59–71.

Kellner, Douglas, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, London: Macmillan, 1984.

Kraushaar, Wolfgang, ed. *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung: Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail*. Vols. 1–3. Hamburg: Rogner & Bernhard, 1998.

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté.

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#), 514-398-6009.

McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

Selected Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Ed. J. M. Bernstein. London: Routledge, 1991.

----- . *Critical Models*. New York: Columbia UP, 1998.

----- . *Prisms*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981.

----- . and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum, 1993.

Seyla Benhabib, "Critical Theory and Postmodernism: On the Interplay of Ethics, Aesthetics, and Utopia in Critical Theory." *The Handbook of Critical Theory*. Ed. David M. Rasmussen. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.

----- . and Theodor Adorno. *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*. Harvard UP, 1999.

----- . *Reflections*. New York: Schocken, 1978.

Bloch, Ernst. *The Principle of Hope*. 3 vol. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987.

Horkheimer, Max. "Traditional and Critical Theory." *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell. New York: Herder & Herder, 1972.

Huysen, Andreas. "Breitbart, Bannon, Trump, and the Frankfurt School." *Public Seminar*.

<http://www.publicseminar.org/2017/09/breitbart-bannon-trump-and-the-frankfurt-school/#.Wf0HRkdrx0s>

Kant, Immanuel "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?"

Löwenthal, Leo and Norbert Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949.

Marcuse, Herbert. *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*. Ed. Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1969. 95-137.

Nietzsche, Friedrich *Toward a Genealogy of Morals*. Transl. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Selected Bibliography of Secondary Works:

Bauer, Karin. *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives: Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.

Bernstein, J.M. *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.

- Benhabib, Seyla. *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: Columbia UP, 1986.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute*. New York: The Free Press, 1977.
- . *Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.
- Calhoun, Craig. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.
- Drake, Alfred. *New Essays on the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009.
- Held, David. *Introduction to Critical Theory*. Berkeley: UCPress, 1980.
- Hohendahl, Peter Uwe. *Prismatic Thought: Theodor W. Adorno*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Jarvis, Simon. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*. London+New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Jay, Martin. *The Dialectical Imagination*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973.
- . *Adorno*. Cambridge: HarvardUP, 1986.
- Miles, Malcolm. *Herbert Marcuse: An Aesthetics of Liberation*. London: Pluto Press, 2012.
- Wiggershaus, Rolf. *The Frankfurt School*. Trans. Michael Robertson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998.
- Witkin, Robert W. *Adorno on Popular Culture*. London+New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Wolin, Richard. *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Zuidervaart, Lambert. *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.