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FALL 2024

LLCU 609: Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School

This seminar introduces students from a variety of disciplines to the major tenets of the Frankfurt School. It 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 relevance for a broad range of issues in areas such as cultural, literary, and film studies, music, art, political science, sociology, philosophy, and intellectual history.

One of the goals of this course is to facilitate a better understanding of critical methods, modes of inquiry, and critical theory's emancipatory potential in our age struggling with misinformation, manipulation, rampant violence, exploitation, authoritarianism, and war. Honing our critical and analytical skills will also enable us to better understand current institutional, political, societal, cultural, aesthetic, ethic, environmental, and postcolonial debates on globalization, illiberalism, populism, and structures of power. We ask if and how critical theory might suggest ways to react to the myriad challenges we face today.

Examining the critiques of culture, aesthetics, rationality, and enlightenment, 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 expand our critical vocabulary and reflect on the stakes of critical theory then and now.

Requirements:

Close reading of and critical engagement with the assigned texts, active participation in class discussions, oral presentation, reflection on relevance for your own research, presentation of term paper topic and thesis, and a seminar paper (for further details please see below)

Required texts:

Dialectic of Enlightenment will be available for purchase at the Le James, the McGill bookstore. Any edition will do. All other required course materials are posted myCourses.

Assessment:

- 15% Preparation, critical engagement, contribution to discussions
- 20% Oral Presentation
- 20% Reflection on the relevance and potential impact of Critical Theory on your research (about 3 pages, 1.5 spaced, 12 ft) due November 22
- 5%. Presentation of paper topic and thesis
- 40% Paper (10-15 pages, 1.5 spaced, 12 ft)

Sept. 10: Critical Theory and Its Foundations

Historical overview/origins/motivation/impact

Max Horkheimer: “Traditional and Critical Theory” (1937)

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

Sept. 17: Critiques of Mass Culture

Siegfried Kracauer, “Cult of Distraction” (1926)

Kracauer, “Mass Ornament” (1927)

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

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

Sept. 24: The Politicization of Art and the Aestheticization of Politics

Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935)

Benjamin, “The Author as Producer” (1934)

Oct. 1: The Culture Industry and Its Other

Adorno/Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947)

Oct. 8: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Theodor W. Adorno/Max Horkheimer, *DE*: “Preface” and “The Concept of Enlightenment”

Thanksgiving/Fall Reading Break

Oct. 22: Enlightenment of the Enlightenment

“Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment” from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Jürgen Habermas, “The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment” (1982)

Oct. 29: Critical Theory in Exile: The Authoritarian Personality—Prophets of Deceit

Leo Löwenthal and Norbert Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit* (1949)

excerpts from Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (1951)

Nov. 5: Culture After Auschwitz

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

Adorno, “Essay as Form” (1958)

Adorno, “Commitment” (1962)

Nov. 12: Confrontations: Questions of Theory + Praxis

Herbert Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance” (1965)

Marcuse, “The End of Utopia” (1967)

Nov. 19: The Angel of History, Modernity, Postmodernism

Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940)

Jürgen Habermas: “Modernity—An Incomplete Project” (1984)

Nov. 26: **Critical Theory and Populism Today**

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)

Dec. 3: Presentation and discussion of term paper abstracts

Formats and Criteria

1. **Oral Presentation:** presentation and discussion prompt. You will be responsible for an oral presentation followed by 2-3 questions prompting a discussion. Your presentation should be about 20 min (including discussion prompt). You will be asked to submit the presentation at the latest 1 day before the date of your presentation on myCourses. In your presentation you are asked to discuss the text/topic we are studying and engage in an analysis of an aspect of the text. With your discussion prompt, you should direct attention to an interesting, resonant, and/or troubling aspect of the text that you would like to discuss in class. A strong prompt will briefly outline and contextualize the issue to be discussed and point to a passage or aspect of the text that warrants further critical reflection; it will explain why the 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 open an insightful and productive discussion. Please indicate your preferred topic. First come, first serve. One presentation per meeting.
2. **Critical Reflection** on the relevance and potential impact of critical theory on your thinking and research: Essay form, about 3 pages, 1.5 spaced, 12 ft; deadline November 22.
3. **Paper:** You are encouraged to write on a topic related to your research interests. I will be happy to discuss the topic with you. About 10-15 pages, 1.5 spaced, 12 ft. Submission deadline is December 15.

Please submit all documents on myCourses in Word or compatible format (no pdf)

Additional readings and viewings

1. critical theory and its foundations:

Martin Jay: "The Creation of the Institut für Sozialforschung and Its First Frankfurt Years" and "The Genesis of Critical Theory" from *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-50* (1973)

watch Adorno Horkheimer Clips

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WapFxzfsPrE&ab_channel=Intellectualpedia

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

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

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

2. Critiques of Mass Culture and the Culture Industry:

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.

3. The Politicization of Art and the Aestheticization of Politics

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.

4. Dialectics of Enlightenment

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.

5. Critical Theory in Exile

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

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

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

6. Culture 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.

6. Confrontations: Questions of Theory + Praxis

“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.

Statements

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.

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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

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- . *Notes to Literature*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Transl. Shierry Weber Nicholson. NYC: Columbia UP, 2019.
- . "Culture Industry Reconsidered." *New German Critique* 6 (1975) 12-19.
- . "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.
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- 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, Mass: 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.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *The Mass Ornament*. Ed. Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge: Harvard, 1995.
- 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.
- . <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/1967/end-utopia.htm>
- . <https://www.marcuse.org/herbert/index.html>

Selected Bibliography of Secondary Works

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- . "Nietzsche, Enlightenment, and the Incomplete Project of Modernity." *Habermas, Nietzsche, and Critical Theory*. Ed. Babette Babich. New York: Prometheus Books, 2004. 105-23.
- Benhabib, Seyla. *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: Columbia UP, 1986.
- . "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.
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