

CMNS 857 Seminar in Frankfurt School Critical Theory Fall 2014

Professor Andrew Feenberg

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This course introduces Frankfurt School Critical Theory through the writings of Benjamin, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas. The course also includes background readings in Marx and Lukács. The course presupposes some knowledge of Marx's work and the philosophical tradition. A minimal acquaintance with Marx and with modern philosophy (Descartes to Kant) will be very helpful. I will lecture on the philosophical background and the more difficult texts.

The course has five parts, as follows:

Part I: The Marxist Background

The first assignment consists of Marx's early "Manuscripts of 1844" and Marcuse's interpretation of this text. We will read next a selection from the founding text of Western Marxism, Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*.

Part II: The Fate of Enlightenment

The second part of the course includes several texts by Marcuse, including *One-Dimensional Man* and essays on individuality and science, followed by a chapter from Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Part III: On Art and Mass Culture

This section includes classic articles by Benjamin, Marcuse and Adorno. The selection brings together Benjamin's theory of the aura and his rather open view of mass culture and Marcuse's critique of bourgeois culture and Adorno's critique of mass culture.

Part IV: The Public Sphere

This part of the course is based on a reading of Habermas's early book on *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The aim of this section of the course is to explore the relevance of the Frankfurt School to theories of democratic politics and mass society. An essay by Benjamin sets the stage. The section concludes with an essay by Marcuse that addresses the strategic implications of the decline of the public sphere.

Part V: On Revolution

The course concludes with a reading of two texts by Marcuse written under the influence of the New Left and Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

Course Requirements:

I will give some lectures on these texts, but at least half the class time will be spent in discussions based on short written questions/comments you will prepare each week on the readings.

The requirements of the course also include a research paper on a topic of your choice related to the course.

The grade will be based equally on 1) your questions/comments and class participation, 2) your participation, and 3) your paper.

Office Hours:

I will hold office hours in the afternoon of the day of our class. My office is in HC 3598. My email is feenberg@sfu.ca. You are welcome to make an appointment outside the regular office hours.

Recommended Reading:

- Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination* is a good introduction to the Frankfurt School. Shane Gunster's *Capitalizing on Culture* is good on the relation of Frankfurt School critique to contemporary cultural studies.
- Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts into Air* is an excellent introduction to the general problem of modernity in social thought.
- For background my interpretation of this theoretical tradition, see *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács and the Frankfurt School*.

Assigned Books:

- Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford)
- Feenberg and Leiss, *The Essential Marcuse* (Beacon)
- Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Beacon)
- Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Beacon)
- Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (MIT)
- *Writings of the Young Marx on Politics and Philosophy*, edited by L. Easton and K. Guddat (Doubleday)

Course Syllabus includes additional readings by Lukács, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin.

Course Syllabus

Readings

Part I: Marxist Background

Week 1

Marx, "Writings of the Young Marx," pp. 203-358

Marcuse, "The Foundations of Historical Materialism"

Week 2

Lukács, "What Is Orthodox Marxism," "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat: I"

Part II: The Fate of Enlightenment

Week 3-4

Marcuse, "The Individual in the Great Society," Remarks on a Redefinition of Culture," "A Note on Dialectic"

Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*

Weeks 5-6

Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (except "Enlightenment as Mass Deception" chapter)

Part III: On Art and Mass Culture

Week 7

Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture"

Adorno, "Aesthetic Theory: On Society"

Week 8

Adorno and Horkheimer, "Enlightenment As Mass Deception"

Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered"

Part IV: The Public Sphere

Week 9

Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the 19th Century"

Weeks 10-11

Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*

Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance"

Part V: On Revolution

Week 12

Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*

Marcuse, "Nature and Revolution"