

Seminar in Frankfurt School Critical Theory

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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. If you do not know Marx, at the very least read Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* carefully to get an idea what you've been missing. A minimal acquaintance 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 six 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, Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness*, followed by Horkheimer's classic introduction to Critical Theory.

Part II: The Fate of Enlightenment. The second part of the course includes several texts by Marcuse on individuality and science followed by the first chapter of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Part III: On Art. This section includes classic articles on art by Benjamin and Marcuse. 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.

Part IV: Mass Culture. This section includes the chapter on the culture industry from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This text is famous for its radical rejection of mass culture. This section and the previous one offer an introduction to the approach of the Frankfurt School to the understanding of the relation of high to mass culture.

Part V: 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. This section concludes with an essay by Marcuse that addresses the strategic implications of the decline of the public sphere.

Part VI: On Revolution. The course concludes with a reading of two texts by Marcuse written under the influence of the New Left.

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.

In addition to our face to face class meetings, we will hold an online seminar for one month beginning in week five with the discussion of art. I will explain how we will use the online seminar in the first class.

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. Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts into Air* is an excellent introduction to the general problem of modernity in social thought.

Assigned books:

M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford)

Feenberg and Leiss, *The Essential Marcuse* (Beacon)

J. 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

Readings:

Part One: Marxist Background

Week 1

Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts"
Marcuse, "The Foundations of Historical Materialism"

Week 2

Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat, Part I"
Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory"

Part Two: The Fate of Enlightenment

Week 3-4

Marcuse, "The Individual in the Great Society"

Marcuse, "Remarks on a Redefinition of Culture"

Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "Preface,"

Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "The Concept of Enlightenment"

Part Three: On Art

Week 5

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

Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture"

Part Four: Mass Culture

Week 6

Adorno and Horkheimer, "Enlightenment As Mass Deception"

Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered"

Part Five: The Public Sphere

Week 7-8

Habermas, "*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*"

Week 9

Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance"

Part Six: On Revolution

Week 10

Marcuse, "An Essay on Liberation"

Marcuse, "Nature and Revolution"