

RYERSON UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Arts
Department of Philosophy

PHL 8111 – Seminar in Social and Political Philosophy: The Frankfurt School
Winter 2015
Thursday 3:00 – 6:00, JOR 440

Professor: Paula Schwebel
Office: JOR 434
Office Hours: Monday 2:30-3:30 and Wednesday 2:30-3:30
Course Web Site: my.ryerson.ca
Phone: 416.979.5000, ext. 2251
Email: pschwebel@ryerson.ca



Office Love, 2001 - William Kentridge - Tapestry weave with embroidery: mohair, acrylic, and polyester - (344 x 455.9 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art; Purchased with funds contributed by the Committee on Modern and Contemporary Art

Course Description

This seminar focuses on the area of 20th-century Social and Political Philosophy known as Critical Theory. Critical Theory emerged in the interwar period in Germany around the activities of the Institute for Social Research, founded in Frankfurt in 1923, and later referred to simply as the Frankfurt School. After Hitler's rise to power, the members of the Frankfurt School continued their work in exile, mostly in the United States. Hardly a monolithic 'School,' the group of Critical Theorists included philosophers, sociologists, economists, historians, and psychologists, who were committed to an interdisciplinary, experimental approach to social theory. The main commonality linking these diverse thinkers was their basis in Marxism and an understanding of the task of theory as *critique*: critique of 'traditional' or mainstream theory; critique of 'bourgeois' ideologies – from 'mass culture' to religion; and critique of conditions of oppression and domination, which prevent humanity from realizing itself as free. So understood, critique is *emancipation* from the various forms of false consciousness that keep people trapped in a distorted way of life.

The first part of this class (up to the reading break) will focus on the notion of 'critique' involved in Critical Theory and on understanding its roots in Western Marxism. In the second part of the class, we will study two key texts of the Frankfurt School, which both engage in a critique of modernity: Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*. Both of these texts attempt to understand why the 'enlightenment' (with its promise of liberation from nature and extrinsic authority, and technological advances that could have eliminated poverty) did not lead to a fully free and rational humanity, but contained the seeds of regression, in the form of the domination of nature (Horkheimer and Adorno), or the 'one-dimensionality' of modern thought and society (Marcuse).

Course Material and Readings

Required Readings: The following books are required reading for this course. They are available at the Ryerson Bookstore, and have been placed on print reserve at the Ryerson library. These texts can also be found online (links provided below).

Note: if you plan on using the online version of these texts, **please print a copy to bring with you to class**.

- 1) Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man (Martino Publishing, 2011)
<http://www.univpgri-palembang.ac.id/perpus-fkip/Perpustakaan/Filsafat/FilsafatModern/13884244-Fromm-Erich-Marxs-Concept-of-Man.pdf>
- 2) Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment (Verso, London: 1979)
http://monoskop.org/images/2/27/Horkheimer_Max_Adorno_Theodor_W_Dialectic_of_Enlightenment_Philosophical_Fragments.pdf
- 3) Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man (Beacon Press, Boston: 1964)
<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/one-dimensional-man/one-dimensional-man.pdf>

All additional required readings will be made available to you as PDF files on Blackboard.

Recommended Readings: I have included a limited selection of recommended texts for most weeks. These are intended as suggestions for deepening your understanding. I will gladly provide further recommendations if you are interested in pursuing a topic in more depth.

A note about reading for this course: In case you cannot complete all of the readings, *please prioritize the primary texts, and please only read as much as you can manage carefully and thoughtfully*. There is no advantage to completing the assigned readings if you rush through them and do not take the time to digest what you have read.

Office Hours and Email Contact

My office hours are dedicated to meeting with you to discuss any questions or concerns having to do with this class, so please feel free to drop by my office anytime during my scheduled office hours. If you would like to talk with me but my office hours conflict with your schedule please let me know and we can easily arrange to meet at another time.

I can also be contacted over email at the address given above. I will typically respond to any class-related emails within a 24-hour period (or within 48 hours for emails sent on weekends). Since many of the questions that you might have about the content of readings, lectures, or assignments can be difficult to answer over email, I encourage you to come see me in office hours to discuss any content-related questions.

Teaching Methods

This class will meet for three seminar hours per week, with a short break mid-class. Typically, I will give a brief introduction highlighting what I consider to be major themes and important background for the week's reading selection. The rest of the session will be devoted to discussion organized around your reading responses (see below) and close reading of difficult passages.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

Weekly reading responses (c. 2 pages).....	50%
Final essay (c. 15 pages).....	50%

All course work will be assigned a letter grade.

Explanation of the Evaluations

Reading Responses: Each week, you are asked to submit a short (2 page) reading response on the assigned readings. This can take the form of a **well-posed question** that you want to address in the seminar, or **an interpretation** of a key passage or passages from the readings that you think we should look at together in depth. These responses are to be submitted to me by email on **Wednesday by noon**, so that I can use your questions and comments to organize our discussion for the seminar on Thursday.

****Responses will be marked on a pass/fail basis, but you will only get credit for a submission where you both submit your response on time and are present in class to discuss your response.**

Each response will be worth 5% for a combined total of 50%, which means that **you can miss one week with no penalty**. However, you are encouraged to submit a reading response every week, since active reading (i.e., reading that engages with a text by *writing* about it) helps to open up the meaning of these difficult texts, and *continuous* writing about the course material will help you as you choose and develop a topic for your final essay.

Essay: The final outcome of this seminar will be an essay of approximately 15 pages on a topic of your choice, due before the final grade deadline (exact date TBD). The purpose of the final essay is to engage with the primary material(s) in order to elaborate and defend an original interpretation or argument. Although you may consult the relevant secondary literature (please feel free to ask me for guidance about your bibliography), the assignment is not to write a review essay.

All topics should have my prior approval, and to that end, **a preliminary outline must be submitted to me in hardcopy by the last week of class.**

Note about final essays: If you would like to revise your essay for submission for a conference or for eventual publication, please let me know and I will tailor my feedback to help you meet this goal.

Schedule of Readings

Note that the following schedule of readings and evaluations is subject to possible change. Any alteration to the posted readings and dates will be announced in writing and ahead of time on Blackboard and in class.

1) Critical Theory and Western Marxism

01/15 *Introduction to the course and to the Frankfurt School*

Read: Max Horkheimer, "The State of Contemporary Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research" [Blackboard]

Recommended: 1) Horkheimer, "The Social Function of Philosophy" [Blackboard]
2) Douglas Kellner, ch. 1 of Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity [on reserve at the Ryerson library]
3) Fred Rush, "Conceptual Foundations of Early Critical Theory" in The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory [on reserve at the Ryerson Library]

01/22 *What is 'critical' about critical theory?*

Read: 1) Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory" [Blackboard]

Recommended: 1) Marx, Letter to Ruge (September 1843)
[http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm]
2) Douglas Kellner, ch. 2 of Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity [on reserve at the Ryerson library]

01/ 29 Read: 1) Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory" [Blackboard]

02/5* *Western Marxism I: the 1844 Manuscripts, alienation and Marxist humanism*

Please note that I will have to re-schedule this class. [The class will likely be rescheduled for either Tuesday, Feb 3rd or Tuesday, Feb. 10th from 3-6. Further details TBD].

Read: 1) Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, chapters 4 and 5 ('The Nature of Man' and 'Alienation'), pp. 24-58

[Available online: <http://www.univpgri-palembang.ac.id/perpus-fkip/Perpustakaan/Filsafat/Filsafat Modern/13884244-Fromm-Erich-Marxs-Concept-of-Man.pdf>]

2) Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, "Estranged Labor"

[Available online:

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>]

Recommended: 1) Marcuse, "The Foundations of Historical Materialism"
[Blackboard]

02/12 *Western Marxism II: Reification and consciousness*

Read: 1) Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat I: The Phenomenon of Reification" [Blackboard], pp. 83-110

2) Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" in *Capital* v.1 chapter 1 [Available online: <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm>]

Recommended: 1) George Markus, "Alienation and Reification in Marx and Lukács," Thesis Eleven 5-6 (1), p. 139-161 [Available online through the Ryerson library]

2) Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* [online access available through the Ryerson library]

02/19 **Reading Week**

2) Adorno and Horkheimer's Dialectic of Enlightenment

Over the next three weeks, we will be discussing three chapters of Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment:

http://monoskop.org/images/2/27/Horkheimer_Max_Adorno_Theodor_W_Dialectic_of_Enlightenment_Philosophical_Fragments.pdf

02/26 *The promise of the Enlightenment project and the logic of domination*

Read: 1) Immanuel Kant, "An answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?" [Blackboard]

2) Front matter (Preface and Introduction) plus "The Concept of Enlightenment"

Recommended: 1) Jürgen Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment" *New German Critique* No. 26, Critical Theory and Modernity (Spring - Summer, 1982), pp. 13-30 (available online through the library)

2) Yvonne Sherratt, "Adorno and Horkheimer's Concept of Enlightenment" *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* (2000) 8:3, pp 521-544 (available online through the library)

3) Douglas Kellner, ch. 4 of Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity [on reserve at the Ryerson library]

03/05 *Myth and Enlightenment*

Read: "Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment"

Recommended: 1) Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Notes on Dialectic of Enlightenment: Translating the Odysseus Essay" *New German Critique*, No. 56, Special Issue on Theodor W. Adorno (Spring - Summer, 1992), pp. 101-108 (available online through the library)

03/12 *The culture industry*

Read: "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"

Recommended: 1) Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered" [Blackboard]

2) Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "The Frozen Imagination: Adorno's Theory of Mass Culture Revisited" *Thesis Eleven*, January 1993, 34 (1), pp. 17-41 (available online through the library)

3) Hauke Brunkhorst, "Critical Theory and the analysis of contemporary mass society" in The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory [on reserve at the Ryerson Library]

4) Douglas Kellner, ch. 5 of Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity [on reserve at the Ryerson library]

3) Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man

In the last four weeks of class, we will focus on Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man:

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/one-dimensional-man/one-dimensional-man.pdf>

03/19 *Administered society and one-dimensionality*

Read: *One Dimensional Man*, pp. 1-34

Recommended: Melos Rastovic, "Marcuse's One-Dimensional Society in One-Dimensional Man" *Agathos* 4.1 (2013), pp. 111-125 (available online through the library)

03/26 *The one-dimensionality of culture and language*

Read: 1) *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 56-71 (stop at "adequate criteria for the answer"); 2) ODM, pp. 84-104 (stop at "ritual victims").

04/02 *One-dimensional thought*

Read: pp 104-108 (stop at "reduction of thought"); pp 123-169

Recommended: 1) Andrew Feenberg, "Marcuse's Phenomenology: Reading Chapter Six of One-Dimensional Man" *Constellations* December 2013, 20 (4), p. 604-614 (available online through the library)

Note: due to time limitations I am not assigning chapter 7 as required reading, but I recommend that you read it if you have the time. Chapter 7 contains Marcuse's critique of positivism and ordinary language philosophy (Austin and the late Wittgenstein), which he sees as exemplary of 'one-dimensional' thought.

04/09 *The Chance of Alternatives*

Read: pp. 203-257; please focus on chapter 9 (pp. 225-246)

Essay outline due in class.

Final Essay: deadline TBD, but probably no later than April 20th.