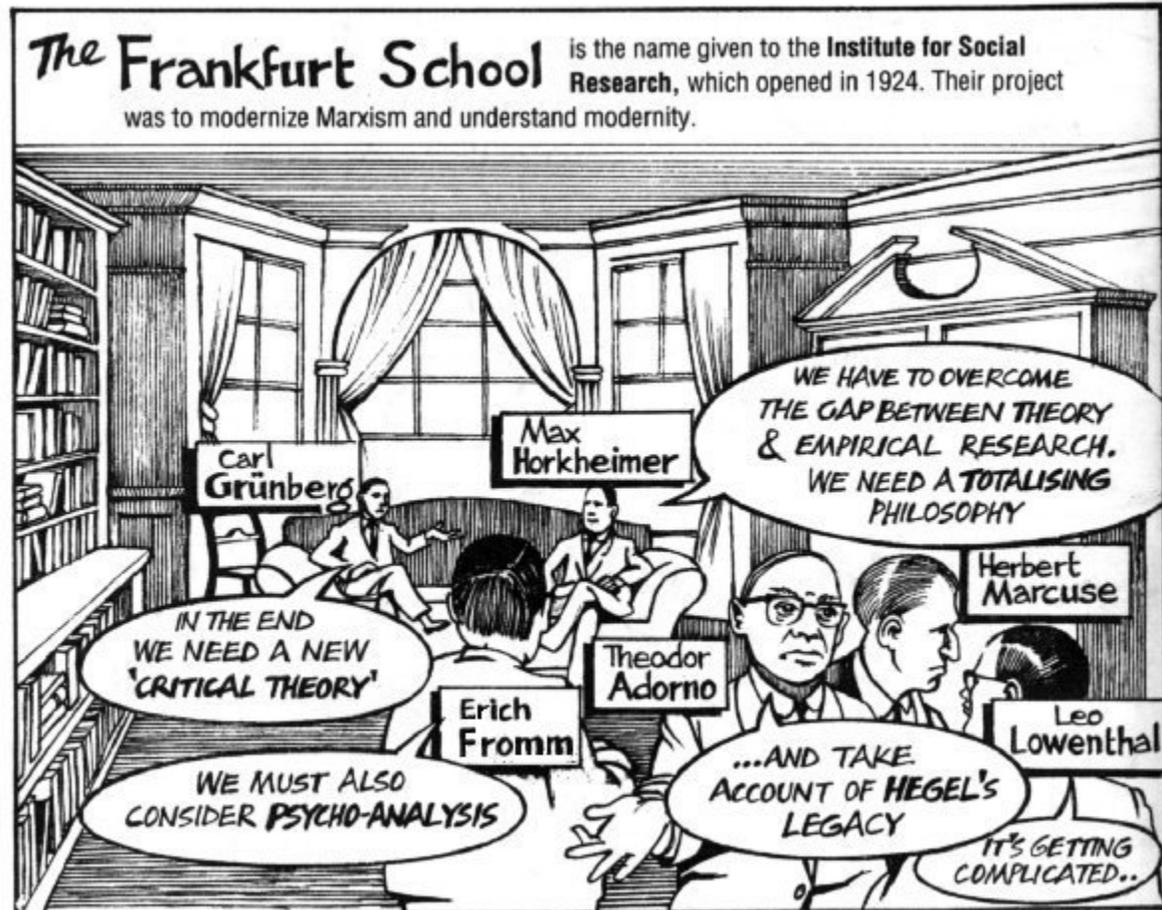


The University of Toronto

INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL THEORY

German 411H / Fall 2017



The failure of the revolutionary parties in the West and the success of Fascism led the Frankfurt School to try to understand capitalism's success.

Instructor: John Noyes
 Office: Odette Hall #304
 Email: john.noyes@utoronto.ca
 Tel.: 416-926-2344

Office Hours: Mondays 2:30-3:30
 Thursdays 12:30-1:30
 Or by appointment

Class meets on Wednesdays from 3:10 to 5:00

DESCRIPTION

Critical theory as developed by the so-called Frankfurt School is an attempt to formulate a philosophical response to the problem of injustice in the modern world. Its basic idea has been described (by Terry Pinkard) as “extracting the conceptions necessary for the actualization of freedom from out of the existing dynamic of social life itself.” Why teach this philosophical program in a German Department? This advanced undergraduate seminar takes as its point of departure the idea that reading literature is an engagement with freedom, social life, history, reason, and other key concepts of the Frankfurt School. We will examine the premises and strategies of critical theory under the headings of Enlightenment, History, Public, and Mediated Consciousness. Our aim will be to show how these central concepts emerged, and how they shaped the thinking of the Frankfurt School. By way of introduction, we will read works by Kant, Marx, and Nietzsche. Then we will engage with the writings of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, primarily their “Dialectic of Enlightenment,” written in Los Angeles in 1944 and published in 1947; also Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas. In order to investigate the possible uses of critical theory in a digital age, a media age and an age of global capitalism, we will also read writings of Axel Honneth, Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, Oskar Negt, and Alexander Kluge. Class language is English. Texts are available in English and German.

REQUIREMENTS / EVALUATION

Attendance and Participation	10%
Seminar Presentation	10%
Critical Review	10%
Short assignments	30%
Term paper	40%

MATERIALS

It is recommended that students purchase from the U of T Bookstore:

- Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer. *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: University of Stanford Press 2007.

A course reader will be made available to students on Blackboard.

DETAILS

Attendance and Participation

This course is evaluated according to your readings, written papers, and classroom discussion. You are expected to attend class regularly, and to come punctually and well-prepared. That means having completed the week’s reading and being prepared to discuss it. Discussing does not mean always having deep insight or profound things to say. It means being able to formulate what you like and don’t like about the reading, what you don’t understand, and the questions that arise in your mind when you read. If you know in advance that you will not be able to attend class, please let me know. If you miss more than two classes, you are required to bring a medical report.

Seminar Presentation

You will sign up for one seminar presentation. Seminar topics are listed each week and should be chosen in advance by listing your name on the course website / blackboard page. You will speak for 15 minutes, then take questions from the class. The aim is to explain the concepts at stake and link them to the main topics of the course.

Critical Review

Select a critical article or a chapter in a book dealing with one of the key concepts of the course. Decide for yourself (in consultation with me if you wish) which concept interests you, then locate a piece of writing about that concept – something not covered in class. Write a two page paper explaining the main ideas of the article or chapter.

Submit by e-mail by midnight **Monday 7 November**.

Short Assignments

There will be a total of 6 short assignments on the reading, each one page and carrying 5% of the course grade. They are to be submitted in class as hard copy on the following days:

Wednesday 27 September, 11 October, 25 October, 8 November, 22 November, 6 December

Term Paper

I will be meeting with you individually during my office hours toward the end of September. You will come with ideas about what you would like to write your term paper on, and we will arrive at a topic together. The paper will be 8 pages long.

Submit by e-mail by midnight **Monday 27 November**.