

PL303 THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL: WHAT IS CRITICAL THEORY?

Modules: Social Theory; Critical and Cultural Theory
Credits: 8 ECTS (4 US)

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Spring Semester 2021
Wednesday, 14.00-17.15 CET
Online until April 1, 2021
Meetings by Appointment

Zoom link for all course sessions:

<https://bard.zoom.us/j/4098222791?pwd=MnhzZGlddXF0d05sRk93b0JsK2dsUT09>

Meeting ID: 409 822 2791

Passcode: Halloween

This course focuses on the central preoccupation of “Frankfurt School” thought: the question of ideology and its critique. What is ideology? How, and from what vantage point, can one distinguish between ideological and non-ideological forms of consciousness? What, if anything, makes a work of literature or art ideological? How, if at all, can a work of art resist or criticize ideology? What exactly is the Frankfurt School’s notion of “critique”?

In attempting to answer these questions, we will trace a central strand in German aesthetic and social philosophy, one that runs from Kant to Habermas and beyond. We will proceed from a close re-examination of Marx’s often perplexing statements on the matter: What is ideology in Marx’s sense? Is it an attribute of individual consciousness or of shared cultural norms? And what is the epistemological status of Marx’s own theory of social reality? What makes a theory “non-ideological”? What makes a theory “dialectical” or “critical”?

We will attempt to make sense of the divergent answers different Marxist and post-Marxist thinkers have given to these and other questions. Finally, what happens to these questions and answers “after Marxism”? What is at stake in questions of ideology today?

Students able to do so are encouraged to read the material in the original. In selected seminar sessions, attention will be given to the terminology in the original German texts and to its development across the works of the thinkers discussed.

Required Texts

Course Reader. Available for purchase at the library.

Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York, NY: Norton, 1978). Available at the library for borrowing (for the duration of the semester).

Stephen Bronner and Douglas Eric MacKay Kellner (eds.), *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1989). Please purchase.

Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). Please purchase.

Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1971). Please purchase.

Some additional texts are available for download from the Google Drive associated with your Bard College Berlin email account or on Google Classroom. Please **print** double-sided whenever possible, get a **binder** for the course, and bring **paper copies** of all readings to all (online or in-person) class sessions.

Requirements

- Short weekly **responses** to the readings. (Please post on Google Drive.)
- One seminar **presentation**.
- One **midterm paper** (draft and final version: 2,000 words; double-spaced; font style and size: Times New Roman 12-point or similar).
- One **final paper** (draft and final version: 3,000 words).
- Informal writing assignments or quizzes.

*****Please note: Use only your Bard College Berlin email account (jane.doe@berlin.bard.edu) for all correspondence.*****

Grading

Midterm Essay: 25%

Final Essay: 35%

Seminar Participation: 40%

- Presentation: 10%
- In-class contributions: 20% (quality and quantity of preparation and contributions)
- Weekly written responses: 10% (quality and quantity)

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Intellectual honesty is at the heart of academic ethics, and plagiarism is the most serious offence against it. Please cite the ideas of others properly. See me if you have any questions about when or how to acknowledge your sources. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, one absence from one of our weekly sessions will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Further absences require documentation and may affect the participation

grade. Absences are registered in all sessions—whether conducted remotely or in person—and lateness is registered as absence. Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8. When pandemic conditions and regulations allow in-person sessions, students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. I will offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

Please be punctual and considerate. In both remote and in-person meetings, switch off your phone and keep bathroom breaks to a minimum. Do not use the “Chat”-function on the Zoom platform unless instructed.

Participation

Your consistent and considered participation in our oral and digitally mediated discussions is crucial to your success in the course. Class sessions may include breakout sections, brainstorming and writing periods, in which you may work alone or with a partner. You are expected to take an active part in all activities.

Please come prepared to seminar meetings: Upon reading the assigned texts every week, formulate a specific **question** that you want the group to address. Paste it into the blank document shared with you on the **Google Drive** (labeled “Response Week x”), no later than **Tuesday, 12.00h**. Before our meeting on Wednesday, please print out the document, read everybody else’s questions and prepare **responses** to two of them. You will be asked to present your questions and responses briefly and coherently in class. Take **notes**.

Default Essay Deadlines

Midterm Essay, First Version	March 11
Midterm Essay, Final Version	March 18
Final Essay, First Version	May 9
Final Essay, Final Version	May 20

Submission of Papers

Essays must be submitted through Google Classroom. (Electronically submitted essays have to be in the European “A4” format! In the MS Word “file” menu, choose “page setup,” then change the “paper size” from “US letter” to “A4.”) Essays that are up to 24 hours late may be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Essays and Tutorials

Students write **two versions** of each essay. The first version has to be a **complete and coherent essay**. For the midterm paper: After handing in the first version, students will have individual tutorial meetings on

how to improve their essays. For the final paper: Students share a paper copy with a **writing partner** of their choice. Writing partners are expected to provide critical questions, comments, and suggestions for each other and to share these (*in writing*) in a one-on-one meeting. It is worth spending a substantial amount of time on revisions for your final version. For this process to function, **hard copies** of both the first and second versions have to be handed in **on time**. Extensions can only be granted in documented medical or other emergencies.

*****This syllabus is subject to change. All updates to the schedule will appear in the electronic version of this document on Google Drive. You remain responsible throughout the semester for knowing where and when we meet for classes (online or in person), and what your assignments are for each meeting.*****

Semester Schedule

Week One

February 3

Organizational Meeting and Introduction: Conceptions of Ideology

Reading for today:

Timothy J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton: PUP, 1984), pp. 8-9 (reader)

Raymond Williams, "Ideology" from *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977) (reader)

Karl Marx, "Towards a Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right: Introduction" (1844), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 53-65

Week Two

February 10

Marx's Models of Ideology I

Reading for this week:

Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 143-145

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The German Ideology" (1845-46, selections), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 146-200

Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy: Preface" (1858-59), from Karl Marx (ed. David McLellan), *Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 424-427 (reader)

Week Three

February 17

Marx's Models of Ideology II

Reading for this week:

Karl Marx, *Capital*, volume I (1866), selections, focus on "The Fetishism of Commodities, and the Secret Thereof," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 302-329

Background:

Alasdair MacIntyre "Hegel and Marx," from MacIntyre *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1966) (reader)

Week Four

February 24

The Rediscovery of Marx's Dialectic

Reading for this week:

Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy* (1923)

Week Five

March 3

The Idea of a Critical Theory: Interdisciplinarity and Critique

Reading for this week:

Max Horkheimer, "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research" (1930), in Kellner and Bronner (eds.), *Critical Theory and Society*

Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory" (1937), from Horkheimer *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1973) (reader)

Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory," in Kellner and Bronner (eds.), *Critical Theory and Society*

Background:

Fred Rush, "Conceptual Foundations of Early Critical Theory," from Rush (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004) (reader)

Week Six

March 10

Critical Theory and Cultural Production: Marcuse

Reading for this week: Herbert Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," from Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) (reader)

Midterm Essay, First Version Due.

Week Seven

Review and tutorials on your essays

March 18

Midterm Essay, Final Version Due.

Week Eight

March 24

Critical Theory and Cultural Production: Adorno

Reading for this week: Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Social Situation of Music" (1932), from *Telos* 35 (1978) (reader)

"Lyric Poetry and Society" (1957) in Kellner and Bronner (eds.), *Critical Theory and Society*

"Commitment," from Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, volume 2 (New York: Columbia UP, 1992) (reader)

—Fall Break—

Week Nine

April 7

The Culture Industry

Reading for this week: Adorno, "The Culture Industry Revisited," in Kellner and Bronner (eds.), *Critical Theory and Society*

Background:

Andreas Huyssen, "Adorno in Reverse," from Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) (reader)

Week Ten

April 14

Benjamin

Reading for this week: Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Kellner and Bronner (eds.), *Critical Theory and Society*
Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical

Reproducibility (Second Version),” from Benjamin (eds. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin), *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2008) (reader)

Week Eleven

April 21

The Public Sphere

Reading for this week:

Jürgen Habermas, The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article, in Kellner and Bronner (eds.), *Critical Theory and Society*

Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7; 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22

Background:

Peter Uwe Hohendahl, “Introduction to Habermas ‘Public Sphere,’” from *New German Critique* 3 (Autumn 1974) (reader)

Week Twelve

April 28

After Marx: The Standpoint of Critique

Reading for this week:

Jürgen Habermas, “The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society,” in Kellner and Bronner (eds.), *Critical Theory and Society*. (This is part of the conclusion to *The Theory of Communicative Action*, volume 2, “VIII. Concluding Reflections: From Parsons via Weber to Marx.”)

Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, volume 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984):

“III. Intermediate Reflections: Social Action, Purposive Activity, and Communication,” pp. 273-337 (reader), and

“IV. From Lukács to Adorno,” pp. 339-399 (containing Habermas’ criticisms of Weber, Lukács, and Adorno) (Google Drive)

Background:

J.L. Austin, “Performative Utterances,” from Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) (reader)

Week Thirteen

May 5

After Rationalism: The Standpoint of Critique II

Reading for this week:

Ernst Tugendhat, “Habermas on Communicative Action,” from Tugendhat, *Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 433-440 (reader)

Bernard Williams, “Truthfulness, Liberalism, and Critique,” from Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton, PUP, 2002), especially the section entitled “The Critical Theory Test” (reader)

Background:

Bernard Williams, "In the Beginning Was the Deed," from Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Theory* (Princeton, PUP, 2005) (reader)

Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), pp. 40-44, on false consciousness (reader)

Final Essay, First Version Due.

Week Fourteen

Essay tutorials

Completion Week

May 20

Final Essay, Final Version Due.

Please detach, fill in and return (or copy and paste into an email) to the instructor:

I have read The syllabus for PL303 (Spring 2021) and I am aware of my obligations throughout the semester, including reading assignments, essay deadlines and punctual attendance of all online and in-person seminar sessions. I will check periodically for updated versions of the semester schedule on Google Drive.

Name (please print)

Date

Signature