

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam) people. Musqueam traditional sites exist throughout the area now occupied by UBC buildings. Please visit the UBC Vancouver Aboriginal Portal <https://aboriginal.ubc.ca/> to learn more about the history of Aboriginal presence on the locations of the Vancouver and Okanagan campuses and about the UBC programs and research that support Aboriginal communities and organizations.

## COURSE INFORMATION

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| Course   | Code Number                | Credit Value |
|--|----------------------------|--------------|
| The Frankfurt School   | GMST 274 (former GERM 207) | 3 credits    |
| Dr. Ilinca Iurascu, <a href="mailto:ilina.iurascu@ubc.ca">ilina.iurascu@ubc.ca</a> , she/her |                            |              |



*Modern Times* [still], 1936. Directed by Charlie Chaplin (Wikimedia commons)

## COURSE THEME

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Foundations of critical theory, and key media and cultural studies concepts developed by the members of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research (1923 -), their collaborators and followers.

Readings may include texts by: Gretel Adorno, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler, Angela Davis, Erich Fromm, Jürgen Habermas, Herta Herzog, Max Horkheimer, Rahel Jaeggi, Alexander Kluge, Hans-Juergen Krahl, Leo Löwenthal, Herbert Marcuse, Oskar Negt, et al.

## LEARNING MATERIALS

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All readings and other materials will be available on Canvas in the modules section.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

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What is “critical theory” and what is its relevance for discussions of media, history, cultural and artistic practices today? This course will examine key texts by writers associated with the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, from the Weimar era to the current moment. The focus will be on their engagement with art, technology and popular culture, as well as the Marxist critique of ideology and mass media before the digital turn (photography, radio, cinema, television). We will discuss terms and concepts developed by Frankfurt School thinkers (aura, technological reproducibility, culture industry, instrumental reason, mass ornament, negative dialectics, communicative action etc.) and place them in the context of current discussions about digital media and cultural politics.

### **Week 1:** Who’s Afraid of Critical Theory?

course overview; cultural contexts; history of the Institute of Social Research; the rise of the Adorno tweet

Readings: Jeffries; @NeinQuarterly

### **Week 2:** The Angel of History

dialectical image; ruins; arcades

Readings: Hegel; Marx; Benjamin; Boym

### **Week 3:** Odysseus as Capitalist

negative dialectics; instrumental reason; culture industry

Readings: Homer; Kant; Horkheimer; Adorno

### **Week 4:** A Brief History of Photography

aura; optical unconscious; technological reproducibility

Readings: Benjamin; Barthes; Sontag

[Museum Visit]

### **Week 5:** The Frankfurt School Goes to the Movies (I)

distraction; mass ornament; the Disney debate

Readings: Adorno; Benjamin; Kracauer

[Screening. Modern Times]

**Week 6:** The Frankfurt School Goes to the Movies (II)

films as 'visible hieroglyphs'; collective psychology and film history

Readings: Kracauer

[Screening: The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari]

**Week 7:** Bad Reception

radio voice; radio as apparatus of communication; Princeton Radio Research Project

Readings: Brecht; Herzog; Adorno

**Week 8:** Public Spheres

publicity; bourgeois and proletarian public spheres

Readings: Habermas; Kluge; Negt

**Week 9:** The Frankfurt School Self-Help Book

capitalism and psychopathology

Readings: Freud; Fromm; Marcuse; Adorno

**Week 10:** Theory as Praxis

praxis; liberation; critical theory and political action

Readings: Horkheimer; Marcuse; Davis; Krahl

**Week 11:** Alienation and Authenticity

history of alienation; self-alienation; experience

Readings: Marx; Heidegger; Jaeggi

**Week 12:** The Work of Art in the Age of AI

post-humanism; post-anthropocentric aesthetics; legacy of the Frankfurt School

Readings: TBA

**Week 13:** Conclusions

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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At the end of this course, upon successfully completing all assignments, students will be able to:  
develop a solid grounding in the fundamentals of critical theory; become familiar with the conceptual frameworks of the critique of mass media, technology and culture; identify the philosophical contexts of the

rise and transformation of the Institute for Social Research in Germany and beyond; relate those contexts to historical developments in the Weimar era, the Third Reich, and post-war Germany; read and discuss key texts pertaining to the Frankfurt School canon; examine and apply concepts associated with the Frankfurt School tradition; discuss and analyze contemporary cultural and social media phenomena in light of the critical material studied.

## ASSESSMENTS OF LEARNING

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| Participation in class discussions and class assignments | 10% |
| Canvas threads (3)                                       | 15% |
| Midterm  | 25% |
| Blog post contributions (2)                              | 20% |
| Final Project  | 30% |

**Participation in class discussions and class assignments:** In this course, we will regularly switch between lecture, discussion and group work. Active participation is encouraged throughout and across all components of the course.

**Canvas threads:** To enhance class interaction and dialogue, your instructor will post questions on Canvas (3 threads in total). Post your answer by replying to the thread. Your answers should be concise (ca. 50-100 words) and clearly address the question asked. The due dates will be indicated on the syllabus.

**Midterm:** The midterm exam will consist of two brief critical discussion topics, based on the materials studied in class. There will be a review session to fully prepare you for the exam.

**Blog post contributions:** Blog post contributions (2 posts in total) are critical reflections (ca. 500 w) on the texts read in class which will be published on the internal class blog. The due dates will be indicated on the syllabus.

**Final Project:** Your final project will consist of a creative contribution (any medium) inspired by the topics/readings of the course, and a short paper (ca. 1000 w TNR, 12 p. double-spaced) in which you briefly explain the concept of your creative work. Full details on formatting and content guidelines will be posted on Canvas and will be discussed in class.

## GRADING

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|--------|----------|
| 90-100 | A+       |
| 85-89  | A        |
| 80-84  | A-       |
| 76-79  | B+       |
| 72-75  | B        |
| 68-71  | B-       |
| 64-67  | C+       |
| 60-63  | C        |
| 55-59  | C-       |
| 50-54  | D        |
| 0-49   | F (Fail) |

Please familiarize yourselves with the [academic concession policies](#) as well as with the [COVID-19-related student resources](#).

You may be eligible for academic concession when one or more of the conditions listed below unexpectedly hinders your ability to complete an assignment or participate in classes or an examination:

Medical circumstances

Compassionate grounds

Conflicting responsibilities

In all cases, your request for academic concession should be made as early as reasonably possible to your instructor or [Arts Academic Advising](#). If you are not an Arts student, you should consult with your home faculty for your concession.

If you are already registered with the Centre for Accessibility and your concession is related to your registered medical condition or disability, contact your Accessibility Advisor.

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

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UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available on [the UBC Senate website](#).

## LEARNING RESOURCES

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Please visit <https://learningcommons.ubc.ca/> for a wide range of resources on improving your writing and learning skills, exam preparation, note-taking and presentation tips.