Michigan Technological University  
*Rhetoric and Technical Communication Program*  
**HU 5110: Backgrounds of Critical Theory**  
Spring Semester 2006  
Monday, 7:05-9:35 p.m.  
Walker Arts and Humanities Center, Room 139

**Professor:** Dr. Dieter Wolfgang Adolphs  
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**Office Hours:** Tuesday, 12:00-12:30 p.m., Thursday, 3:30-4:20 p.m.  
(other times by appointment)

**Syllabus**

This course studies the major critical theories that have influenced contemporary theories such as feminist theory, postmodern theory, cultural studies, critical pedagogy, and discourse theory. It focuses on primary texts and introduces students to the challenges of reading theoretical texts and texts in translation.

**Required Books and Readings:**


Book Description: Distinguished international contributors examine the major figures in Critical Theory, including Adorno, Benjamin, and Habermas, as well as lesser known but important thinkers. They survey the shared philosophical concerns that have given impetus to Critical Theory throughout its history, and reveal the diversity among its proponents that contributes so much to its richness as a philosophical school.


Book Description: Brookfield attempts to put the "critical" back into critical thinking by emphasizing that it is an inherently political process. The book presents powerful arguments for the importance of critical theory in fostering the kind of learning that leads to a truly democratic society, and it explores a number of tasks for adult learners including learning to challenge ideology, contest hegemony, unmask power, overcome alienation, learn liberation, reclaim reason, and practice democracy.

(Book Description: "Dialectic of Enlightenment", one of the most celebrated texts of the Frankfurt School, endeavours to answer why modernity, instead of fulfilling the promises of the Enlightenment (e.g. progress, reason, order) has sunk into a new barbarism. Drawing on their own work on the "culture industry", as well as the ideas of the key thinkers of the Enlightenment project, (Descartes, Newton, Kant) Horkheimer and Adorno explain how the Enlightenment's orientation towards rational calculability and man's domination of a disenchanted nature evinces a reversion to myth, and is responsible for the reified structures of modern administered society, which has grown to resemble a new enslavement.


(Book Description: This is Jürgen Habermas's most concrete historical-sociological book and one of the key contributions to political thought in the postwar period. It will be a revelation to those who have known Habermas only through his theoretical writing to find his later interests in problems of legitimation and communication foreshadowed in this lucid study of the origins, nature, and evolution of public opinion in democratic societies.)


(Book Description: Kristeva, who teaches linguistics at the University of Paris and is also a practicing psychoanalyst, traces the concept of the "stranger" or "foreigner" in various cultures and periods from the Greeks to the present. This--albeit highly selective--excursion through intellectual/political history is influenced by Freud's notion of the alienation, or "splitting off," of the self that comes about as the result of the repression of feelings and the ideational content attached to them. It is the sense, Kristeva argues, that we are also "strangers to ourselves."

Prerequisite: graduate standing or permission of the instructor.

Course Objectives:

Reading and discussing these works listed above will help you:

(a) To deliberate on the way communicative actions function and perhaps also malfunction at a time of increasing globalization/fragmentation;
(b) To understand how particular social and global conflicts affect the dynamics of communicative actions;
(c) To deliberate on the conceptual challenges of postmodernism and colonizing forces to the philosophical discourse of modernity;
(d) To understand the role of historical, political, philosophical, and religious factors in creating cultural stereotypes, perceptions, fears, desires, and misunderstandings.
Every member of this course is strongly encouraged to voice her or his personal opinion and to actively participate in discussions.

**Course Requirements:**

a) Regular attendance  
b) Active participation  
c) Required readings (see schedule, "Discussion: x-y")  
d) Two oral reports  
e) Three written reading responses, due 2/6, 2/19, 4/3  
h) Abstract for final paper, due 4/10  
i) Research Paper, due 4/20  

**Please note:** MTU complies with all federal and state laws regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students (487-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department chair, or the Affirmative Action Office (487-3310).

Also: this course description and all schedules are tentative and may be changed. If any such changes are made, you will receive a printed update during our regular class meetings.

**Tentative Schedule**

**Meeting 1 (Monday, 9 January)**

Course Introduction  
Discussion: *Cambridge*, pp. xiii-xv and 1-5;  
Brookfield, pp. vii-xviii; *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. xi-xiv  

**Meeting 2 (Monday, 16 January or Wednesday, 19 January, at my house?)**

Discussion: *Cambridge*, 6-39  
Report: *Cambridge*, 57-73  
Video (excerpts; in German) on Adorno (100 years after his birth)  
Discussion: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1-34

**Meeting 3 (Monday, 23 January)**

Discussion: *Cambridge*, 57-102  
Report: *Cambridge*, 103-138  
Report/s: Adorno and/or Horkheimer (overview of their life-long projects)  
Discussion: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 35-93

**Meeting 4 (Monday, 30 January)**

Report: *Cambridge*, 139-164  
Discussion: *Cambridge*, 165-139  
Discussion: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 94-136
### Meeting 5 (Monday, 6 February)
- **Report:** *Dialectic of Enlightenment, 173-216*
- **Report:** *Cambridge, 219-247*
- **Discussion:** *Dialectic of Enlightenment, 217-252*
- **Discussion:** *Cambridge, 194-218*

### Meeting 6 (Monday, 13 February)
- **Report:** *Cambridge, 280-309*
- **Discussion:** *Cambridge, 248-279*
- **Report:** Habermas (overview of his life-long project)
- **Discussion:** Habermas, 1-56

### Meeting 7 (Monday, 20 February)
- **Discussion:** Habermas, 52-88
- **Report:** Habermas, 89-140
- **Discussion:** Habermas, 141-180

### Meeting 8 (Monday, 27 February)
- **Discussion/Report:** *Cambridge, 310-335*
- **Discussion:** Habermas, 181-235; 236-250
- **Report/Discussion:** *Cambridge, 336-360*

### Meeting 9 (Thursday, 16 March, at my house?)
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, 1-65
- **Report:** Brookfield, 66-92
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, 93-116

### Meeting 10 (Monday, 20 March)
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, 117-147
- **Report:** Brookfield, 148-180
- **Report:** Brookfield, 181-208
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, 219-246

### Meeting 11 (Monday, 27 March)
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, 247-273
- **Report:** Kristeva (overview of her life-long project)
- **Discussion:** Kristeva, 1-40
- **Report:** Kristeva, 41-64

### Meeting 12 (Monday, 3 April)
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, 274-309
- **Report:** Kristeva, 77-94
- **Discussion:** Kristeva, 95-104

### Meeting 13 (Monday, 10 April)
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, 310-348
- **Report:** Kristeva, 105-127
- **Discussion:** Kristeva, 127-168

### Meeting 14 (Monday, 17 April)
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, 249-374
- **Discussion:** Kristeva, 169-195
- **Final Discussion**