Michigan Technological University
*Rhetoric and Technical Communication Program*
**HU 5004: Communication in Cultural Contexts**
Spring Semester 2007
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 and Thursday, 3:30-4:15 p.m.
(Other times by appointment)

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**Syllabus**

This course explores key issues in how cultural contexts and processes of communication affect representation, understanding, and practice. We will focus on two themes: the philosophical discourse between modernity and postmodernism, and theories of the "other," especially in a time of terror.

**Required Books and Readings:**


**Prerequisite:** Graduate standing or permission of the instructor.
Course Description and Objectives:

This course focuses on the study of communication in multicultural societies. It provides students with theoretical as well as literary texts. Reading and discussing the assigned works 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.

Throughout the term, we will use Stephen Brookfield's books, The Power of Critical Theory: Liberating Adult Learning and Teaching, to get an overview of various intellectual traditions that are critical of our Western societies, and aim at emancipating humankind. This book should be of particular interest to RTC students, in that it focuses on how theory can contribute to liberating adult learning and teaching.

In addition to discussing Brookfield's book, we will use Horchheimner and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment and Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition (by Lyotard) as an introduction to modernist and postmodernist critiques of culture and communication, and precede with Günter Grass's literary critique of Western (especially his own German) culture and communication in his book, Crabwalk (German title: im Krebsgang.

Finally, we'll discuss the attempts of postmodernist as well as critical theorists to philosophically contemplate on the challenges of “September 11” and the ongoing resistance against Western civilization as well as the colonization of other societies. While Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida provide a ideological critique or even “deconstruction” of the dominant mindset and language that use the term “September 11” (see Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues With Jürgen Habermas and Jacques, Derrida, Giovanna Borradori, ed.), Susan Buck-Morss' book, Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left," aims to include Non-Western intellectual traditions as well as alternative intellectual and artistic media in order to overcome the limitation of both dominant forms of communication and “traditional” critical theory.

Every member of this course is strongly encouraged to voice her or his personal opinion and to actively participate in discussions.

The course requirements are:

a) Regular attendance
b) Active participation
c) Required readings (see schedule, “Discussion: x-y”)
d) Two oral reports  
e) Three written reading responses, due 2/5, 3/19, 4/16  
h) Abstract for final paper, due 4/9  
i) Research Paper, due 4/30

**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, 15 January; attendance optional) Course Introduction

### Meeting 2 (Monday, 22 January)  
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, pp. vii-xviii and 1-38  
- **Report:** Horkheimer and Adorno  
- **Discussion:** *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, pp. xi-xix, 217-52

### Meeting 3 (Monday, 29 January)  
- **Report:** Marx and "traditional" Marxism  
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, pp. 39-65  
- **Report:** "The Frankfurt School" as part of Neo-Marxism  
- **Discussion:** *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, pp.1-34

### Meeting 4 (Monday, 5 February, OR another day that week)  
- **Reports:** Althusser; Marcuse; Willis  
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, pp. 66-92  
- **Discussion:** *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, pp.35-93

### Meeting 5 (Monday, 12 February, OR another time/day that week)  
- **Report:** *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, pp.137-216  
- **Reports:** Gramsci; Freire  
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, pp. 93-116  
- **Discussion:** *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, pp.94-136  
- **Discussion:** Lyotard, vii-xxv, 71-82 ("What is Postmodernism?")

### Meeting 6 (Monday, 19 February, OR another time/day that week)  
- **Report:** Foucault; Lyotard  
- **Discussion:** Brookfield, pp. 117-47  
- **Discussion:** Lyotard, 3-67
Meeting 7 (Monday, 26 February)  
Reports: Fromm; Marcuse’s One-Dimensional Man  
Discussion: Brookfield, pp. 148-218  
Discussion: Grass, 3-26

Meeting 8 (Monday, 5 March)  
Report: Habermas (esp. his work on The Public Sphere)  
Report: Immanuel Kant on Enlightenment, Ethics, and Perpetual Peace  
Discussion: Brookfield, pp. 219-46  
Documentary: Grass  
Discussion: Grass, Crabwalk, 27-129

Meeting 9 (Thursday, 22 March, at my house?)  
Reports: Habermas’ Th. Of C. Action and Bey. Fact & Norm  
Discussion: Brookfield, pp. 247-73  
Discussion: Grass, Crabwalk, 130-234

Meeting 10 (Monday, 26 March)  
Report: Philosophy in a Time of Terror, 45-81  
Reports: Cornel West; Karenga  
Discussion: Brookfield, pp. 274-309  
Discussion: Philosophy in a Time of Terror, ix-xvi, 1-43

Meeting 11 (Monday, 2 April)  
Reports: bell hooks; recent feminist theorists  
Discussion: Brookfield, pp. 310-48  
Discussion: Philosophy in a Time of Terror, 85-136  
Discussion: Philosophy in a Time of Terror, 137-72

Meeting 12 (Monday, 9 April)  
Report: Radical Pedagogy  
Discussion: Brookfield, pp. 349-373  
Discussion: Buck-Morss, pp. 1-40  
Report: Walter Benjamin’s View of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Meeting 13 (Monday, 16 April)  
Discussion: Buck-Morss, 40-91  
Discussion: Buck-Morss, 113-35  
Reports: On final paper projects

Meeting 14 (Monday, 23 April)  
Discussion: Buck-Morss, 92-35  
Final Discussion