

# English Studies and the Ends of Modernity

## ENGL 7/8701: History of Critical Theory



*Arrival*, dir. Denis Villeneuve (2016)

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**Professor:**

Donal Harris

**Class Information:**

Monday, 1-4pm

**Contact:**

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**Office Hours:**

TBA

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This course will offer a history of the theoretical and methodological debates that have defined modern humanistic thinking. Our objectives are twofold: 1) to demonstrate how a range of disciplines produced the field of “critical theory” 2) to articulate how we (as members of a 21<sup>st</sup> century English Department) can see our own work as both part of and distinct from theory’s task of interpreting the world.

To do this, the course will offer week-long modules that isolate key moments in the development of “critical theory”: from Kant’s 1784 declaration that we live in an “age of enlightenment”; to the suspicious thinking of theories’ holy trinity (Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche); to the anti-enlightenment “social research” of the Frankfurt School; to the sociologist Bruno Latour’s 1991 pronouncement that “we have never been modern”; to a range of contemporary writers from various disciplines who document our current post-humanity. Throughout, we will stay attuned to the fundamental role that literature, language, and writing have played in this history and consider fiction and films that relate to the ideas in the course.

**Note:** This course assumes no prior knowledge of course material. This is not a literature course. It is intended to be useful for all students in the English Department.

**Requirements:** weekly response papers (~1000 words), academic book review (~2500 words), in-class teaching presentation (~15 minutes), project abstract (3 pages), conference-length seminar paper (~12 pages).