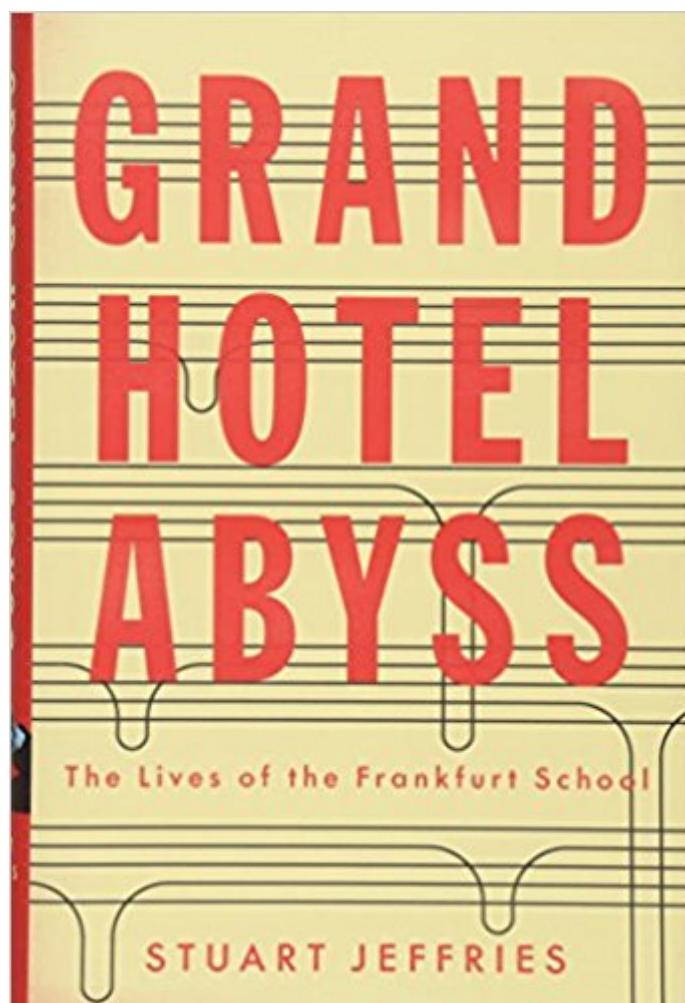


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# Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives Of The Frankfurt School



## Synopsis

This brilliant group biography asks who were the Frankfurt School and why they matter today. In 1923, a group of young radical German thinkers and intellectuals came together to at Victoria Alle 7, Frankfurt, determined to explain the workings of the modern world. Among the most prominent members of what became the Frankfurt School were the philosophers Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse. Not only would they change the way we think, but also the subjects we deem worthy of intellectual investigation. Their lives, like their ideas, profoundly, sometimes tragically, reflected and shaped the shattering events of the twentieth century. *Grand Hotel Abyss* combines biography, philosophy, and storytelling to reveal how the Frankfurt thinkers gathered in hopes of understanding the politics of culture during the rise of fascism. Some of them, forced to escape the horrors of Nazi Germany, later found exile in the United States. Benjamin, with his last great work "the incomplete *Arcades Project*" in his suitcase, was arrested in Spain and committed suicide when threatened with deportation to Nazi-occupied France. On the other side of the Atlantic, Adorno failed in his bid to become a Hollywood screenwriter, denounced jazz, and even met Charlie Chaplin in Malibu. After the war, there was a resurgence of interest in the School. From the relative comfort of sun-drenched California, Herbert Marcuse wrote the classic *One Dimensional Man*, which influenced the 1960s counterculture and thinkers such as Angela Davis; while in a tragic coda, Adorno died from a heart attack following confrontations with student radicals in Berlin. By taking popular culture seriously as an object of study "whether it was film, music, ideas, or consumerism" the Frankfurt School elaborated upon the nature and crisis of our mass-produced, mechanised society. *Grand Hotel Abyss* shows how much these ideas still tell us about our age of social media and runaway consumption.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

• "Marvellously entertaining, exciting and informative." • "John Banville, Guardian (Best Books of 2016)" • "An engaging and accessible history of the lives and main ideas of the leading thinkers of the Frankfurt School." • "New York Review of Books" • "This seemingly daunting book turned out to be an exhilarating page-turner" | Grand Hotel Abyss is an outstanding critical introduction to some of the most fertile, and still relevant, thinkers of the 20th century. • "Michael Dirda, Washington Post" • "Stuart Jeffries has produced a compelling and politically pressing group portrait of the philosophers associated with the Frankfurt School. Their thinking has never seemed less forbidding and more inspiring." • "Matthew Beaumont, author of Nightwalking" • "Stuart Jeffries' intelligent, accessible new book reminds us of the value of critical thinking." • "Globe and Mail" • "A fractious Europe, a failing currency, a challenged economy, populist parties on the rise, a divided left, migration from the east, an atmosphere of fear combined with social and sexual liberalism. The parallels between Britain today and Germany in the 1920s may well make this a compelling moment to revisit those postwar German thinkers who gathered in what was known as the Frankfurt school for social research" • "something akin to a Marxist thinktank, though one whose policy papers and brilliant books fed future generations as much or more than their own" | Little wonder, given the history of the 20th century, that the Frankfurt school gave us intellectual pessimism and negative dialectics. Jeffries' biography is proof that such a legacy can be invigorating. • "Lisa Appignanesi, Observer" • "There is much to provoke interest and thought, even entertain, in Jeffries' informative account of a group of highly intelligent observers and analysts of the imprisonment of humanity, both socially and individually by the corrosive system under which it suffers." • "Morning Star" • "Attempts something rather daring" | An easily accessible, funny history of one of the more formidable intellectual movements of the twentieth century | an easy, witty, pacy read. • "Owen Hatherley, Guardian" • "Jeffries moves swiftly across the decades, retracing the jagged paths from the official founding of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt in June 1924, through its years in exile in New York in the '30s and Los Angeles in the '40s and its hasty return to Frankfurt in the early postwar years, up to the work of Horkheimer and Adorno's prized protégé Jürgen Habermas and the Institute's legacy today." • "Noah Isenberg, Bookforum" • "Throughout the book, Jeffries demonstrates that he is

comfortable and conversant with the often thorny philosophical ideas of his subjects. A rich, intellectually meaty history. • "Kirkus • "An impressive work of popular intellectual history. • "Open Letters Monthly • "Intriguing and provocative • | Jeffries has done a great service in producing such a readable, wry and detailed introduction. • "Stuart Kelly, The Scotsman • "[Gives] a step by step insight into what they thought • | A lot of that stuff they wrote about still applies. • "Jason Williamson (Sleaford Mods), Guardian • "Equally sympathetic and critical, this book is sure to gain an enthusiastic reception from academics, armchair philosophers, and fellow travelers. • "Library Journal • "A towering work of staggering scholarship. • "Irish Times • "A valuable introduction to the lives and ideas of an influential group of twentieth century philosophers. I recommend it to anyone who wants to understand why much of what passed for radical thought in academia in the late twentieth century was so obscure and depressing. • "Ian Angus, Climate & Capitalism

Stuart Jeffries worked for the Guardian for twenty years and has written for many media outlets including the Financial Times and Psychologies. He is based in London.

Accessible read with a nice overview of the key thinkers of the Frankfurt School. Great introductory text. Main issue is that Jeffries does not add much in terms of their biographies - main focus is on intellectual comparison (with appropriate biographical context).

Gives much to think about, whether I agreed with Mr. Jeffries or not. He does have a non-academic historian's point of view and manner of writing (i.e., "entertaining" and opinionated with popular language-phraseology), but for me this was a fine, if sometimes annoying, summary of the beautiful early socialist years.

This book is a well-done combination of the lives of the Frankfurt School theorists and discussions of their major works. Jeffries treats their ideas with due seriousness, but is not afraid to criticize some of their ponderousness or to bring in apposite pop culture references. It's an enjoyable synthesis and recommended.

Jeffries provides an insightful and accurate intellectual history of the Frankfurt School and its cultural critique of late capitalism. Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, Fromm, Marcuse, and Habermas are engaged in a decades-long argument about capitalism, fascism, and Holocaust, from Donald Duck

to Dr Faustus.

This is a good book on the context, background and development of the Frankfurt School as a whole. It provides valuable detail on the lives and vicissitudes of the members of the School and it also provides some critical comments on their members. However, one major issue, maybe the most important one, the imputed charge of theirs being a " marxism without guts" ( sublimated version), is not examined in depth. Which is a shame since this theme has been brought time and again by different scholars and marxist activists. Anyhow, the book is worth reading as it is illustrative and beautifully written.

I wish I had read this extremely well written and informative book when I was twenty five instead of seventy four. The very engaging and interesting treatment of complex issues holds my attention and certainly increases my grasp of the subject.

Fun reading, good writing. About that group of older post-war theoretical Communists who when it came to the Sixties knock-down-smash-it-all time --couldn't act with the Revolution kids. Just couldn't guillotine the new-money capitalist heads.

very good reading important contribution for understanding events in Germany in the 1930's those lucky to have the means get out of Hitler Germany and find refuge

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