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Critical Theory

Lectures: **Tuesdays 4-5 pm** [Room RS 4] *STARTS 30/9*

Seminars: **Monday mornings** [Room 13.33] *STARTS 6/10*

*Voluntary* Discussion Group: **Wednesdays 2-3pm**
[Room SS 9.01] - *STARTS 8/10*

Office hours: **Mondays 1-2pm** [Room 13.33]

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Module Description and Structure

*Critical Theory* is a third level theory module. It has no pre-requisites, but it does require consistent work.

**Objectives:** To introduce contemporary issues in Western social and political thought by looking at the seminal debate between Critical Theory (Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas) and Postmodern theory (Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari). To examine their respective critiques of enlightenment and modernity. To inspect the relation of radical political theory to practice. To gather critical resources and explore political possibilities and obstacles. To sharpen intellectual skills and gain confidence in critical reasoning, accurate communication, textual and conceptual analysis. To encourage students to develop their own critical position.

**Assessment:** Two essays of 3000 words, due mid-term and first day of exam period respectively. Each essay is worth 50% of the final grade.

**Syllabus:** The course begins with an exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of Critical Theory as it developed from the Frankfurt School to Jürgen Habermas. Particular attention is paid to the critique of Enlightenment reason and its relation to a radical politics. Students then choose an area of practical concern to which Habermasian Critical Theory has been applied, and analyse it in an essay. The second section inspects the claim that we have moved into a period of Postmodernity, and concentrates on those theorists who have sought both to reject Enlightenment reason and to challenge the very nature of the political. Third, the acrimonious debate between Habermas and the Postmodernists is assessed and inspected for its political implications. Finally, theoretical advances in both modernist and postmodernist Critical Theory are used to explore the future of radical politics and participatory democracy. The literature of both camps offer rich seams of theory, giving students scope to explore individual interests in areas such as psychiatry, education, media, international politics, feminism and language. This is a course in radical political philosophy. It makes contemporary theory approachable, useful, personal and political.

**Structure:** The weekly *lecture* on Tuesdays introduces a topic. Students then do the required reading on that topic and explore it further in the following Monday *seminar*. Attendance at Monday's seminar is compulsory. In addition, there is a weekly *discussion group* on Wednesdays between 2 and 3pm. Please note that attendance at the discussion group is entirely voluntary. For more details on attendance, please see the section 'Rules and Procedures' at the end of this module pack.
Recommended Texts

You will need some way of getting primary material by Habermas and Foucault, as well as a range of secondary material on each. Most of these titles are available from the University Student Union Bookshop.

[PRIMARY MATERIAL]

[In library, also being reprinted, also in Student Union Bookshop.]

[In library and Student Union Bookshop.]

**Good overall introductions** to the first and second parts of the module respectively are:

**Introductory texts** that offer good introductions to Habermasian theory are:

**More challenging** and more rewarding are:

**Anthologies of secondary literature** that cover issues pursued in this module are:

**Reference works** are:

The sheer number of theorists we look at in this module is such that it is also helpful to buy a decent dictionary of ideas, or of political thought, philosophy, or the history of ideas. You might also use the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online at [www.rep.routledge.com](http://www.rep.routledge.com) and the excellent, indeed life-saving, *Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Also helpful is the open-source collaborative encyclopedia at [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org). A time-tested dictionary of the history of ideas is now available at [http://etext.virginia.edu/DicHist/dict.html](http://etext.virginia.edu/DicHist/dict.html). If you find any good sites, do let other students and the lecturer know. Liberal use should also be made of the ‘Dear Habermas’ site at [www.habermas.org](http://www.habermas.org).
### Lecture and Seminar Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecture:</th>
<th>[Tues. 30&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Sept.]</th>
<th>Introduction: reason, radicalism, relativism</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar week 2:</td>
<td>[Mon. 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
<td>The Problem of Justification</td>
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<td><strong>Lecture:</strong></td>
<td>[Tues. 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
<td>The Frankfurt School</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion Group</strong></td>
<td>[Wed. 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
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<td>Seminar 3:</td>
<td>[Mon. 13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
<td>The Critique of Reason</td>
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<td><strong>Lecture:</strong></td>
<td>[Tues. 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
<td>The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion Group</strong></td>
<td>[Wed. 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
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<td>Seminar 4:</td>
<td>[Mon. 20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
<td>Exploring Habermasian Theory</td>
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<td><strong>Lecture:</strong></td>
<td>[Tues. 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
<td>Critical Theory and its Practices (i)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion Group</strong></td>
<td>[Wed. 22&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
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<td>Seminar 5:</td>
<td>[Mon. 27&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
<td>Applying Habermasian Theory</td>
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<td><strong>Lecture:</strong></td>
<td>[Tues. 28&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
<td>Critical Theory and its Practices (ii)</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion Group</strong></td>
<td>[Wed. 29&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Oct.]</td>
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<td>Seminar 6:</td>
<td>[Mon. 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;. Nov.]</td>
<td>Essay Preparation – Critical Practice?</td>
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<td><strong>NO LECTURE:</strong></td>
<td>[Tues. 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Nov.]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion Group</strong></td>
<td>[Wed. 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Nov.]</td>
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<td><strong>NO SEMINAR 7:</strong></td>
<td>[Mon. 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Nov.]</td>
<td>A Transition to Postmodernity?</td>
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<td><strong>Lecture:</strong></td>
<td>[Tues. 11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Nov.]</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion Group</strong></td>
<td>[Wed. 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Nov.]</td>
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<td>Seminar 8:</td>
<td>[Mon. 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Nov.]</td>
<td>Feedback on Essays</td>
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<td><strong>Lecture:</strong></td>
<td>[Tues. 18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Nov.]</td>
<td>Postmodern Questions</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion Group</strong></td>
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<td>Seminar 9:</td>
<td>[Mon. 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Nov.]</td>
<td>Exploring Postmodernism</td>
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<td><strong>Lecture:</strong></td>
<td>[Tues. 25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Nov.]</td>
<td>Critical Theory and its Practices (iii)</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion Group</strong></td>
<td>[Wed. 26&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Nov.]</td>
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<td>Seminar 10:</td>
<td>[Mon. 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;. Dec.]</td>
<td>Postmodern Politics and Critique</td>
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<td><strong>Lecture:</strong></td>
<td>[Tues. 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;. Dec.]</td>
<td>Accusations and Counter-Accusations</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion Group</strong></td>
<td>[Wed. 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;. Dec.]</td>
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<td>Seminar 11:</td>
<td>[Mon. 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Dec.]</td>
<td>Focusing the Debate</td>
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<td><strong>Lecture:</strong></td>
<td>[Tues. 9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Dec.]</td>
<td>The Organisation of Resistance</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion Group</strong></td>
<td>[Wed. 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;. Dec.]</td>
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**FIRST ESSAY DUE:** 10<sup>th</sup>. Nov. 2008

**SECOND ESSAY DUE:** 12<sup>th</sup>. Jan. 2009
Seminar Week 2: [Monday, 6th. Oct.] The Problem of Justification

**Required Reading:** Bring definitions of 'The Enlightenment'; 'normative'; 'relativism' and 'universalism' from a dictionary or website.

**Discussion:** Do we have, or need, normative grounds for social criticism?


**Required Reading:** Horkheimer & Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 3-42.

**Discussion:** What's wrong with Enlightenment reason? Is the *DofE* a usable critique?


**Required Reading:** W. Outhwaite, (ed.), *The Habermas Reader*. pp. 28-40; 160-168; 180-191; 248-264.

**Discussion:** Rehearsing Habermasian arguments and concepts.

**Task:** Students take list of applications.


**Required Reading:** W. Outhwaite, (ed.), *The Habermas Reader*, pp. 278-303.  
R. Blaug, "Habermas’ Treatment for Relativism,"  

**Discussion:** What use is critical theory?

**Task:** Students select one application from list to read for next week.


**Required Reading:** Your chosen article applying Habermasian theory to practice.

**Task:** Working in pairs on chosen applications of Habermasian theory.

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**FIRST ESSAY DUE:** 10th. November, 2008

Seminar 7: [Monday, 10th. Nov.] NO SEMINAR
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Seminar 8:</th>
<th>[Monday, 17th. Nov.]</th>
<th>Feedback on Essays</th>
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<tr>
<td>Required Reading:</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>Discussion:</td>
<td>Clarifying issues around power and knowledge.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Seminar 10:</th>
<th>[Monday, 1st. Dec.]</th>
<th>Postmodern Politics and Critique</th>
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</table>
| Required Reading: | Best & Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, ch. 6. AND  
EITHER C. Mouffe, "Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?"  
in *Universal Abandon*, pp. 31-45,  
OR N. Fraser, L. Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy:  
An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism,"  
in *Universal Abandon*, pp. 83-104,  
| Discussion: | Clarifying the differences between critical theories.  
What are the strengths and weaknesses of the postmodern approach? |

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<tr>
<th>Seminar 11:</th>
<th>[Monday, 8th. Dec.]</th>
<th>Focusing the Debate</th>
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</table>
| Required Reading: | J. Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity,"  
*New German Critique*, pp. 3-14,  
| Discussion: | Rehearsing the arguments and counter-arguments. |

Assessment

Both essays should be 3000 words long, typed, double-spaced, single-stapled and please number your pages, as this assists feedback. You should give page number references for quotes and a full bibliography. Each essay constitutes 50% of final grade. Please check Rules and Procedures at the end of this pack for more details on assessed essays, particularly on how to hand your work into the office.

FIRST ESSAY

FIRST ESSAY DUE: 10th. November,

Having chosen an article from the list of 'Applications of Habermas,' please write your first essay using the following title:

"Applying Habermas: A Critical Assessment of {your chosen application}"

Possible Essay Plan:
- Open with the importance of applying critical theory to social problems
- State your central argument and the plan by which you will deliver it
- Briefly outline Habermas's intellectual project
- Clarify Habermasian concepts used in your chosen application
- Describe and assess your chosen application
- What did this application reveal about the social problem it examined?
- What did this application reveal about Habermas's theoretical project?

SECOND ESSAY


Please write your second essay on one of the following titles:

1. What theoretical problems arise for those who claim the West has entered an age of postmodernity?
2. How might Foucault's analysis of power inform a radical politics?
3. Describe and assess (Deleuzian) 'nomadic' organisational forms and their relevance to contemporary politics.
4. Must there be a normative basis for social criticism?
5. Why does Habermas accuse 'postmodern' theorists of crypto-normativism, performative contradiction and/or conservativism? (i.e. all three or focus on just one)
6. Is modernity doomed? Discuss with reference to both French and German critical theory.
7. Critically assess a selected case-study article in which postmodern theory is applied to a current social problem (please see seminar leader with your suggestion and make sure you state your chosen area of application at the beginning of your essay)
Supplementary Reading List

The Problem of Justification:


The Frankfurt School


P.U. Hohendahl, "The Dialectic of Enlightenment Revisited: Habermas' Critique of the Frankfurt School," *New German


**Habermas**


Habermasian politics and social criticism

[Also see the handout "Areas of Application of Critical Theory" for further references.]


**Postmodernity**


**Foucault**


N. Fraser, "Michel Foucault: A 'Young Conservative'?" in *Unruly Practices*, pp. 35-54.


**Postmodern Politics and Social Criticism:**


*Differences*, Special Issue on feminism and postmodernism, Vol. 6, no. 2/3, 1994.


Habermas and Postmodernism


