

# Critical Theories

## Syllabus

1<sup>st</sup> semester 2021/22, block 2

Room: OMHP C1.23

ECTS: 6

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Time: Wednesdays, 9-12 h

First session November 10<sup>th</sup>, last session December 15<sup>th</sup>

## Objectives

After successfully completing this course, you will

- have familiarized yourself with canonical classical and contemporary approaches in critical theory;
- be able to apply these approaches in order to analyze recent social and political developments;
- have improved your analytical and hermeneutical skills.

## Content

The aim of this course is to introduce some central methods and motifs in critical theory. In this seminar, the term “critical theory” is not limited to particular traditions or philosophical schools (like the “Frankfurt School”) but has a broader meaning: a theory is to be called ‘critical’ if it understands itself as part of social or political struggles, thus reflecting on its own historical situatedness. We will focus on classical and contemporary texts on the topics capitalism, gender relations, and racism, and we will read canonical texts from Marxist, feminist, poststructuralist, and post- and decolonial traditions.

## Recommended prior knowledge

- General basic knowledge about critical theory (basic ideas about Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial thought) is an advantage, but not required. You should bring enthusiasm and curiosity about contemporary social and political problems.
- To prepare for class, you can read Chad Kautzer, *Radical Philosophy: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2015).

## Format

The seminar has the following structure: 1. Introductory lecture, 2. Group discussion, led by student experts (see below) 3. Break, 4. general class discussion.

It is absolutely essential to read the assigned texts thoroughly. The background reading is not required (except for the experts), but useful. The texts will be made available through Canvas.

You are highly encouraged to form independent reading groups to continue the class discussion, as well as to present drafts of your papers to each other. You can post a “Looking for reading groups”-ad under “Pages” on Canvas.

If you want to plan to attend the course via zoom (for example if you need to quarantine), let me know at least the day before, so I can arrange the technical equipment.

## Exam

In order to successfully complete this course, you have to:

- Attend class regularly and well prepared.
- Actively participate in class discussion.
- We will use the program Perusall (on canvas) to collaboratively read the texts. You will find a few reading hints there to help you structure the reading, as well as some initial questions and comments. Each student can add more questions, answer somebody else's question, start or contribute to a discussion, or include links to background information or further reading. In order to pass the course, you have to engage with each week's reading at least 2 times (it can be a question, comment, etc.). The assessment of Perusall is on a pass/fail basis.
- Be an "expert" for one of the 6 sessions. Experts prepare for the particular session especially thoroughly (including the background texts) and moderate the sessions in the workgroups (there will be multiple experts for each session, one in each workgroup). On canvas, you can put your name in a list (under "pages") for which of the sessions you would like to be an expert.
- Write a final paper (about 3000-4000 words). Deadline for submission of the paper (via email) is 31.12.2020. The final grade of the class will be based solely on the paper.
- Please take notice of UvA's regulations on plagiarism and fraud.

## Class climate

Creating a respectful, inclusive and attentive atmosphere in the classroom is the shared responsibility of teacher and students. This includes reflecting on the different backgrounds, experiences and social positionings among the participants, a sensibility with regard to one's own conduct in the classroom, and an openness towards other perspectives and opinions. The seminar aims at including all students and thus attempts to reduce structural disadvantages. Please contact me with any discomfort with regard to the class climate.

## Program

### 10.11. *What is Critical Theory?*

#### *Background Reading*

- Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction", in *Marx Engels Collected Works* vol. 3, London 1975: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 175-187

#### *Primary Reading*

- Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", in *Critical Theory. Collected Essays*, New York 2002: Continuum, pp. 188-252
- Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?", in *The Politics of Truth*, New York 1997: Semiotext(e), pp. 41-67

## 17.11. *Capitalism*

### *Background Reading*

- Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, “Bourgeois and Proletarians”, *The Communist Manifesto*, *Marx Engels Collected Works* vol 7, London 1977: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 483-496

### *Primary Reading*

- Theodor W. Adorno, “Reflections on Class Theory”, in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, Stanford 2003: Stanford University Press, pp.93-110
- Mario Tronti, “Forms of Struggle”, in *Workers and Capital*, London 2019: Verso

## 24.11. *Gender*

### *Background Reading*

- Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction”, *The Second Sex*, London 1956: Jonathan Cape, pp. 13-28

### *Primary Reading*

- Monique Wittig, „The Category of Sex“, „One is Not Born a Woman“, „The Straight Mind“ in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, New York 1992: Beacon, pp. 1-32
- Silvia Federici, “Wages Against Housework”, “Why Sexuality is Work”, in *Revolution at Point Zero*, Oakland 2012: pm press, pp. 15-27

## 1.12. *Race and Anti-Semitism*

### *Background Reading*

- Frantz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness”, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London 2008: Pluto, pp. 82-108

### *Primary Reading*

- Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, „Elements of Anti-Semitism”, in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Stanford 2002: Stanford University Press, pp. 137-172
- Cedric Robinson, “Racial Capitalism” + “The Atlantic Slave Trade and African Labor”, *Black Marxism*, London 1983: Zed, pp. 9-28, 101-120

## 8.12. *Intersectionality* (taught by Jana Cattien)

### *Background Reading*

- The Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement”, Linda Nicholson (ed.), *The Second Wave. A Reader in Feminist Theory*, New York 1997, pp. 63-70

### *Primary Reading*

- Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”, 43 *Stanford Law Review*, pp. 1241-1299
- Gail Lewis, “Unsafe Travel: Experiencing Intersectionality and Feminist Displacements”, in: *Signs*. 38 (4) (2013), pp. 869-892.

- Jasbir K. Puar, “I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess‘. Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory”, in: *philoSOPHIA*. 2 (1) (2013), pp. 49–66

### 15.12. *Political Strategies*

#### *Background Reading*

- Herbert Marcuse, “Solidarity”, in *An Essay on Liberation*, New York 1969: Beacon, pp. 79-91

#### *Primary Reading*

- Jodi Dean, “Occupation and the Party”, in *The Communist Horizon*, London 2012: Verso, S. 207-250
- Chantal Mouffe, “The Populist Moment”, in *For a Left Populism*, London 2018: Verso
- Andreas Malm, “Learning from Past Struggles”, in *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, London 2021: Verso, pp- 5-65

#### **Useful Resources**

- “Critical Theory” in the Stanford Encyclopedia: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-theory/> and in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://iep.utm.edu/frankfur/>
- International Consortium of Critical Theory Programs: <https://criticaltheoryconsortium.org/>
- The Critical Theory Archives at UC Irvine: <https://cta.lib.uci.edu/>