

# EN9C1-30 Critical Theory Today

**24/25**

**Department**

English and Comparative Literary Studies

**Level**

Taught Postgraduate Level

**Module leader**

Michael Gardiner

**Credit value**

30

**Module duration**

10 weeks

**Assessment**

100% coursework

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

---

## Description

### Introductory description

Critical and Cultural Theory has never been more vibrant, nor more urgently needed, than today. Work in all areas of the Humanities has long been inextricably intertwined with critical reflection, often drawing from a multiplicity of disciplines, from philosophy and sociology, to literary and visual studies. This module charts key developments in the development of critical and cultural theories, focusing on specific movements or schools, and methodologies, as well as on important figures such as Adorno, Arendt, Brown, Buell, Butler, Derrida, Gramsci, Hall, Lacan, Latour, Mulvey, and Williams. We explore different, often clashing, critical perspectives on culture, from textual, material, philosophical, and other perspectives. These situated, and often transnational, critical platforms, allow us to both map historical developments in the study of the Humanities and focus on specific, particular elements. The interaction between aesthetics, culture, and societal issues remains a permanent concern throughout the module.

[Module web page](#)

### Module aims

To familiarize students with the key developments and currents in critical and cultural theory from the Frankfurt School to the present, covering a wide range of theoretical perspectives such as Affect Theory, Psychoanalytic modes of interpretation, Gender and Queer Theory, Ecocriticism, Deconstruction and Critical Race Theory. The module will form the core module for the MA in

## Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1: General Debates on Critical and Cultural Theory and the Humanities.

Readings from: Rosi Braidotti and Paul Gilroy, Eds. *Conflicting Humanities*, 2016

Week 2: The Emergence of Critical Theory and Cultural Materialism.

Readings from: Theodor Adorno, *The Cultural Industry*, 1991; and Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, 1975.

Week 3: The Birmingham School and the emergence of Cultural Studies.

Readings from: Stuart Hall, *Foundations of Cultural Studies*, 2018

Week 4: Deconstruction, Politics, and Intellectual Legacies.

Readings from: Jacques Derrida. *Spectres of Marx*, 2006.

Week 5: The Psychoanalytical Turn.

Readings from: Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition*, 2017.

Week 6: Gender and Queer Theory.

Readings from: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, and Donald E. Hall et al, Eds. *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, 2013.

Week 7: Visual Cultures: Aesthetics and Politics.

Readings from: Nicholas Mirzoeff, Ed. *Visual Culture Reader*, 2002.

Week 8: Ecocritical Perspectives in the Humanities.

Readings from: Ken Hiltner, Ed. *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*, 2015.

Week 9: The Cultural Politics of Affect Theory.

Readings from: Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2014 and Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, Eds. *The Affect Theory Reader*, 2010.

Week 10: Critical Race Theory.

Readings from: Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela Harris, Eds. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition, 2017.

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- To provide an advanced-level overview of Critical and Cultural Theory and enable students to interpret, evaluate and critique the key debates and major concepts in the field, both in its historical development and at the forefront of current work.
- To develop a comprehensive and advanced understanding of a variety of interpretative strategies and methodologies
- To confidently and autonomously apply advanced conceptual ideas to the interpretation of

literature and other cultural forms

- Demonstrate an ability to understand the complex contextual frames (historical, social, cultural) within which Critical Theory and Cultural Studies has been and continues to be developed.

## **Indicative reading list**

Representative only: assigned readings subject to change

Rosi Braidotti and Paul Gilroy, Eds. *Conflicting Humanities*, 2016

Theodor Adorno, *The Cultural Industry*, 1991

Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, 1975

Stuart Hall, *Foundations of Cultural Studies*, 2018

Jacques Derrida. *Spectres of Marx*, 2006

Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition*, 2017

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990

Donald E. Hall et al, Eds. *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, 2013

Nicholas Mirzoeff, Ed. *Visual Culture Reader*, 2002

Ken Hiltner, Ed. *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*, 2015

Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2014

Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, Eds. *The Affect Theory Reader*, 2010

Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela Harris, Eds. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition, 2017

## **Research element**

All students are required to propose a research question and discuss it with module convenor. Essays must reflect some independent research.

## **Interdisciplinary**

The module surveys theoretical positions and debates that pertain to many fields of inquiry, from the Social Sciences and Law to Global Sustainability and Literary and Cultural Studies.

## **International**

Authors of texts read in the module are from diverse areas and engage with a variety of national and transnational perspectives including Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

## **Subject specific skills**

- To interpret, evaluate and critique the key debates and major theoretical concepts in critical and cultural theory, both in its historical development and at the forefront of current work in the field.
- Demonstrate an ability to understand the complex contextual frames (historical, social, cultural) within which critical and cultural theory has been and continues to be read, interpreted, received, and applied.

- To confidently and autonomously apply theoretical ideas to the study of literary and cultural texts
- To develop independent research skills that enable a self-directed research project in the field
- To develop a comprehensive and specialized insight into a particular topic relating to the field of critical and cultural theory
- To work independently to devise advanced hypotheses regarding the current state of critical and cultural theory
- Advanced understanding of the social, political, and historical contexts in which particular theoretical ideas have emerged
- Targeted intervention, through cultural commentary or writing for diverse audiences, on topics related to the study of critical and cultural theory (could include debates around sex, gender and contemporary society; the role of the university in the public sphere; race and representation; nationalism, populism, and political language; environmentalism, energy, and ecology).

## Transferable skills

- To develop a comprehensive and advanced understanding of critical and cultural theory's major strands and debates
- To develop independent research skills that enable a self-directed research project in the field
- Demonstrate an ability to prepare and execute an extended research project that evaluates, critiques and advances the field of literary studies.
- An ability to apply abstract and theoretical ideas to cultural texts
- Critical reflection and informed opinion on the formations of power, identity, and contemporary society
- Evidence of being able to conduct advanced-level and extended independent research projects in culturally complex topics

---

## Study

### Study time

| Type           | Required                    |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Seminars       | 10 sessions of 2 hours (7%) |
| Other activity | 280 hours (93%)             |
| Total          | 300 hours                   |

### Private study description

No private study requirements defined for this module.

## Other activity description

Students must prepare extensive list of readings for discussion at each week's seminar. Students must develop and present a research question and a proposal for a final essay. Students must carry out some independent research linked to their chosen topic. Students must write a final essay.

## Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

---

## Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

### Assessment group A1

|  | Weighting | Study time |
|--|-----------|------------|
| 6,000 word essay   | 100%      |            |
| Final essay based on an approved research question and with evidence of some independent research. |           |            |

### Feedback on assessment

Oral comments in seminars; oral comments on optional presentation. Detailed written comments on final essay.

---

## Availability

### Courses

This module is Core for:

- TENA-Q3PD Postgraduate Taught Critical and Cultural Theory
  - Year 1 of Q3PD Critical and Cultural Theory
  - Year 1 of Q3PD Critical and Cultural Theory
  - Year 2 of Q3PD Critical and Cultural Theory

This module is Optional for:

- Year 1 of TENS-Q2PE MA World Literature
- Year 1 of TENA-Q3P1 Postgraduate Taught English Literature

- TENA-Q3PE Postgraduate Taught English and Drama
  - Year 1 of Q3PE English and Drama
  - Year 1 of Q3PE English and Drama
  - Year 2 of Q3PE English and Drama
- Year 1 of TENA-Q3PK Postgraduate Taught Environmental Humanities

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 1 of TPHA-V7PN Postgraduate Taught Philosophy and the Arts