

EN2C8-30 Explorations in Critical Theory and Cultural Studies

26/27

Department

English and Comparative Literary Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Nicholas Lawrence

Credit value

30

Module duration

20 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

ECTCS is designed to allow sustained and intensive engagement with selected traditions of classic and contemporary critical theory. The module examines two interrelated topics: (1) the future of work (encompassing theories of automation, digital labour, social reproduction, Afrofuturism, queer futures and post-capitalism); and (2) the question of ecological futures (involving readings on climate breakdown, environmental justice, decolonising green movements, eco-utopias/dystopias and debates around the Anthropocene/ Capitalocene). Each strand is anchored by a literary or cultural work that extends and fleshes out the implications of the theory covered.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

The format enables students to read in a focused manner across traditions of thought and to map connections between writers and their arguments. The module aims to explore ways in which the convergence of capitalist crises around work and sex sheds light on the origins and future of each, while feeding urgent projects of envisioning and mapping alternatives to the status quo. Authors

include, among others, Karl Marx, Amia Srinivasan, Kathi Weeks, Kodwo Eshun, José Esteban Muñoz, Michaela Coel and Silvia Federici.

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.

Term 1: The Future of Work

Week 1: Introduction

J. M. Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren" (1930)

David Graeber, "A Practical Utopian's Guide to the Coming Collapse" (2013) (<https://thebaffler.com/salvos/a-practical-utopians-guide-to-the-coming-collapse>)

Week 2: What is Work?

Karl Marx, "The Dual Character of the Labour Embodied in Commodities," *Capital* Vol. 1 [1867] (Penguin, 1976): 131-37

Amelia Horgan, "Work's Fantasy" and "Work, Capitalism and Capitalist Work," *Lost in Work* (Pluto, 2021)

Week 3: The Problem of Work

Kathi Weeks, "Introduction: The Problem of Work" and "Mapping the Work Ethic," *The Problem of Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke UP, 2011)

Theodor W. Adorno, "Free Time," *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, (Routledge, 1992): 162-70

Week 4: Accelerationism vs. Degrowth

Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, "Introduction," "Left Modernity," "The Future Isn't Working" and "Post-Capitalist Imaginaries," *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work* (Verso, 2015)

Jason Hickel, "Pathways to a Postcapitalist World," *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World* (William Heineman, 2021)

Week 5: Rise of the Robots?

Aaron Benanav, "The Automation Discourse," "Labor's Global Deindustrialization" and "Necessity and Freedom," *Automation and the Future of Work* (Verso, 2020)

Week 6: Reading week

Week 7: Gender and Emotional Labour

Silvia Federici, "Wages against Housework" [1975], *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (PM Press, 2012): 15-22

Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Exploring the Managed Heart," *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (University of California Press, 1983): 3-23

Week 8: Afrofuturism / Undercommons

Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism," *CR: New Centennial Review* 3.2 (Summer 2003): 287-302

Moten, Fred and Stefano Harney, "The University and the Undercommons," "Debt and Study" and

“Fantasy in the Hold,” *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions, 2013)

Listen: Sun Ra, Alice Coltrane, George Clinton, Drexciya

Watch: John Akromfah, *The Last Angel of History* (1996)

Week 9: Queering the Future

José Esteban Muñoz, “Feeling Utopia” and “Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism,” *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press, 2009)

Week 10: Earthseed

Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (Headline, 2019 [1993])

Term 2: Sex and Capitalism

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2

Sheila Heti, *How Should a Person Be?* (Vintage, 2014)

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Leslie Kern, from *Feminist City: Claiming Space in a Man-made World* (Verso, 2021)

Week 3

Michaela Coel, *I May Destroy You* (BBC/HBO, 2020)

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Katherine Angel, from *Tomorrow Sex Will be Good Again* (Verso, 2021)

Week 4

Torry Peters, *Detransition, Baby* (Penguin, 2021)

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Alan Sears, “Body Politics: The Social Reproduction of Sexualities,” in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (Pluto, 2017)

Week 5

Tangerine, dir. Sean Baker (Magnolia Pictures, 2015)

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Juno Mac and Molly Smith, *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers’ Rights* (Verso, 2018)

Week 7

Andrea Lawlor, *Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl* (Picador, 2020)

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Andrea Long Chu, *Females* (Verso, 2021)

Week 8

Elena Ferrante, *The Lost Daughter*, trans. Ann Goldstein (Europa Editions, 2008)

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Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex* (Bloomsbury, 2021)

Week 9

Mieko Kawakami, *Breasts and Eggs*, trans. Sam Bett and David Boyd (Picador, 2020)

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Natalie Fiennes, *Behind Closed Doors: Sex Education Transformed* (Pluto, 2019)

Week 10

Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, trans. Deborah Smith (Portobello Books, 2015)

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Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (Bloomsbury, 2015)

Learning outcomes

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

- Identify and critically assess significant tenets and claims within the field of modern critical and cultural theory.
- Understand and evaluate the argumentative concerns, traditions and methodological approaches within a variety of analytic modes, together with their formal and rhetorical strategies.
- Enhance the ability to make abstract connections between individual ideas and conceptual frameworks.
- Gain confidence in understanding, interrogating and applying a variety of theoretical positions.
- Broaden awareness of the relation of critical-theoretical arguments to the general study of literary and cultural works.

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

Research element

Independent research required for writing essays and creating podcasts/video presentations.

Interdisciplinary

Exploration of a variety of theoretical approaches drawn from across the arts and social sciences.

Subject specific skills

- Ability to identify and critically assess significant tenets and claims within the field of modern critical and cultural theory;
- Ability to recognise historical contexts shaping critical debates;
- Ability to broaden awareness of the relation of critical-theoretical arguments to the general study of literary and cultural works.
- Enhanced confidence in understanding, interrogating and applying a variety of theoretical positions.

Transferable skills

- Ability to work individually as well as a member of a group;
 - Ability to construct well supported arguments and express them plausibly in both oral and written forms;
 - Ability to recognise the relative values of web-based and multimedia resources;
 - Enhanced ability to make abstract connections between individual ideas and conceptual frameworks;
 - Enhanced ability to work efficiently and professionally toward stated deadlines.
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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	18 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Online learning (independent)	(0%)
Other activity	18 hours (6%)
Private study	264 hours (88%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

Reading of primary and secondary texts, preparation for seminars

Other activity description

Flexible mixture of lecture/seminar dependent upon syllabus and number of students.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A2

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
Essay 1 First essay	40%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
Essay 2 Second essay	40%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
Podcast review Recorded review of a critical work	20%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
Feedback on assessment			
Commentary on feedback sheets			

Availability

Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 2 of UCXA-QQ39 Undergraduate English and Classical Civilisation

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UENA-Q300 Undergraduate English Literature

- Year 2 of UENA-QP36 Undergraduate English Literature and Creative Writing
- Year 2 of UENA-VQ32 Undergraduate English and History
- Year 2 of UENA-VQ34 Undergraduate English and History (with a term in Venice)
- Year 2 of UTHA-QW34 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies
- Year 2 of UFIA-QW25 Undergraduate Film and Literature
- Year 2 of UPHA-VQ52 Undergraduate Philosophy, Literature and Classics

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 2 of UCXA-QQ37 Undergraduate Classics and English

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 2 of UPHA-VQ72 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature