

## [Using Theory in Times of Crisis: The Frankfurt School in the 21st Century](#)

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“Critical theory,” Hortense Spillers has written, “witnesses its most impressive moments of efflorescence in times of crisis”. Yet classical critical theory’s analyses of consumer society, of totalitarianism, of the public sphere, and of culture, were predicated on a wholly different set of crises to those which ‘we’ are now experiencing. Under today’s drastically different conditions of cultural and material production, what tools can critical theory offer for grappling with ‘our current moment’?

Apathy and impasse seem to stem from a disenchanting language of posteriority: “post-posthumanism”, “post-politics” vs. “anti-politics”, or “the end of the end of history” all build on negatives instead of offering a positive critical framework or a new terminology. Simultaneously, there has been a rhetorical shift towards favouring praxis over ontology in academic discourse, with little visible outside effect.

In a cultural landscape upended by digital mediatisation and a political climate overshadowed by ecocidal danger, how far are the projects of classical critical theory still attainable or relevant today? At a time of renewed energy- and military nationalism, including or especially in the rich west, what social role exists for a critical posture that sets itself against ‘public opinion’? Does globalisation demand universal epistemes of humanity along the lines of Sylvia Wynter’s ‘homo narrans’, or does it require a multiplicity of local, untranslatable ‘languages’, or ‘forms of life’, as suggested by Rahel Jaeggi?

This panel is about the state of critical theory in 2023. It equally welcomes proposals that offer reinterpretations of classical critical theory (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas), that appraise the projects of third- or fourth-generation critical theorists (Honneth, Jaeggi), or that challenge the validity or usefulness of critical-theoretical approaches in light of contemporary concerns. All papers should seek to map out directions (or diagnoses) for the future of critical theory in the 2020s and beyond.

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