

SERIES PREFACE

Theory is back

Critical theorists of the universal, organic or situated kind used to be defined by their ethical-political commitment to account for power relations at work in the real world, as well as in scientific practice. But their prestige waned throughout the 1990s. The "theory wars" in the U.S.A. targeted critical theory as an outdated ideological activity, dismissing the theorists as "tenured radicals." They got replaced by new "content providers," experts, and consultants, in a context of increased privatization of academic research. By the turn of the millennium, with the internet as the only true "content provider," former theorists were relocated to the market-oriented position of "ideas brokers" and, in the best cases, "ideas leaders." By now, we are all entrepreneurs of the mind. The cognitive character of contemporary capitalism and its high technological mediation paradoxically produced a "post-theory" mood and intensified attacks on radical thought and critical dissent. This negative mood also resulted in criticism of the social and scholarly value of the humanities, in a neo-liberal corporate university ruled by quantified economics and the profit motive.

And yet, the vitality of critical thinking in the world today is palpable, as is a spirit of insurgency that sustains it. Theoretical practice may have stalled in the academic world, but it exploded with renewed energy in other quarters, in media, society, the arts, and the corporate world. New generations of critical "studies" areas have grown alongside the classical radical epistemologies of the 1970s: gender, feminist, queer, race, postcolonial and subaltern studies, cultural studies, film, television, and media studies. The second generation of critical "studies" areas includes: animal studies and eco-criticism, cultural studies of science and society, religion studies, disability studies, fat studies, success studies, celebrity studies, globalization studies, and many more. New media has spawned new meta-fields: software studies, internet studies, game studies, digital postcolonial studies, and more. The end of the Cold War has generated: conflict studies and peace research; human rights studies; humanitarian management; human rights-oriented medicine; trauma, memory, and reconciliation studies; security studies; death studies; suicide studies; and the list is still growing.

These different generations of "studies" by now constitute a theoretical force to be reckoned with.

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This series aims to present cartographic accounts of these emerging critical theories and to reflect the vitality and inspirational force of on-going theoretical debates.

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