

The Association for Critical Theory at the CUNY Graduate Center

Statement of Purpose for the Chartering Process

The Association for Critical Theory (ACT) is an association of students interested in maintaining and developing the rich tradition of Critical Theory. Underpinning this central objective is the belief that Critical Theory is a means to overcoming two academic divides—that between theory and practice, and that between disciplines.

Critical Theory was initially conceived in the Frankfurt School's Institute for Social Research in 1929. Briefly, its objective is to understand, explain, and overcome the social structures through which people are oppressed. In this objective alone, the unifying dimension of Critical Theory takes shape. Understanding is usually the domain of philosophy. Explanation generally lies in the realm of the natural and social sciences. Overcoming is left to practical politics and political science. Critical Theory draws from these seemingly diverse disciplines, but does so with its most distinctive feature—normativity. Critical Theory avoids instrumental politics by instead theorizing moral practice essentially aimed at human emancipation. In this way it is both distinct from other purely theoretical or practical approaches, yet applicable to a great number of academic disciplines. Indeed Critical Theory faculty can be found in GC departments including History, Urban Education, English, Political Science, Comparative Literature, Philosophy and Psychology.

Throughout the second half of the 20th century various intellectual currents such as Post-structuralism, Post-colonialism and Queer theory were inspired by Critical Theory. Fortunately, these currents of thought are well represented by existing DSC groups such as SPTSA, PSG and QUNY. Yet Critical Theory itself is unrepresented. It is the mission of ACT to fill this intellectual gap by bringing Critical Theory to GC student life. It intends to do so by organizing various interdisciplinary activities which will include: publishing an online journal, organizing graduate student conferences and maintaining a Critical Theory library. It is eager to draw on the wealth of talent within the GC community in order to build a diverse community and awaken new possibilities for thought and action.