The course aims to study critical theory not as a principle of universal abstraction but as an instrument for cultural analysis, which is responsive to variances and transformations in the world. Instead of treating the canonical work of Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Raymond Williams, and Stuart Hall as representative of the scope of critical theory, this course asks how it offers of a point of departure given changes to social and economic conditions from the restructuring of the capitalist system, the expansion of media networks, and the dissolution of national borders.

Critical theory emerged in the period after the Second World War alongside standardized forms of mass entertainment such as cinema and television. Its analytical methodology uncovered how the economic boom experienced in North America and Western Europe rested on a rigid work regime and consumer economy, which produced homogeneous, docile and atomized individuals. The potency of the protest movement in the 1960s and the financial crisis of the 1970s caused the capitalist system to undergo changes to improve profitability. Businesses transplanted their factories to other geographic locations with lower wages and weaker unions. The new regime of flexible accumulation emphasized the freedom of individuals and businesses from state intervention. The 1990s and 2000s were characterized by the rise to dominance of digital and social media, which have enabled consumers to create and share their own content.

Since the turn of the millennium, humanities programs in the university, which had once furnished the intellectual space for cultural studies, have been gradually curtailed in favor of scholarship that is more quantitative and utilitarian. Rooted in the analysis of prevailing conditions, critical theory has needed to reimagine itself to maintain its relevance as a weapon of social critique and transformation. Beginning with writings about the death of critical theory, the course uses such questions as a staging ground for exploring its continued intervention in two areas of inquiry. The first is to look at how theory maps changes to economic production and media
circulation with under conditions of neoliberalism capitalism and digital convergence. The second is to attempt to overcome the predominance of knowledge production centered in North America, Western Europe, and Australia by becoming acquainted with critical theory from South Asia, East Asia, and Latin America.

**SCHEDULE**

**Week 1: The Ends of Theory (Sep 3)**  
*Because of undergraduate inauguration ceremony, class will start at 1:30pm*

**Required:**
- Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18

**Recommended:**

**Week 2: Image as Critique (Sep 10)**

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

**Week 3: Asia as Method (Sep 17)**

**Required:**

**Recommended:**
- Arnika Fuhrmann, “*The Ghost Seer*: Chinese Thai Minority Subjectivity, Female Agency, and the Transnational Uncanny in the Films of Danny and Oxide Pang”, *Ghostly Desires: Queer Sexuality and Vernacular Buddhism in*
Tutorial: Producing a short essay film

**Week 4: Field trip to M+ and Para Site (Sep 24)**

**Week 5: NO CLASS – National Day (Oct 1)**

**Week 6: Minority Histories (Oct 8)**

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

Tutorial: Workshop on writing and presentation

**Week 7: Neoliberalism and Precarity (Oct 15)**

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

Tutorial: Presentation of critical reflection

**Week 8: Performativity and Relationality (Oct 22)**

**Required:**
Recommended:
- Nicholas Bourriaud, "Relational Form" and “Art of the 1990s", in *Relational Aesthetics* (France: Les Presses Du Reel, 1998), pp. 11-40

Tutorial: Presentation of critical reflection

**Week 9: Literary Production and Island Aesthetics (Oct 29)**
- Forum on Archipelagic Imaginaries in Philippine and Southeast Asian Literary Production

**Week 10: Politics of Affect (Nov 5)**

Required:

Recommended:

Tutorial: Presentation of critical reflection

**Submission of individual critical reflection (Nov 11)**

**Week 11: Algorithmic Culture (Nov 12)**

Required:

Recommended:

Tutorial: Workshop on final project

**Submission of summary of final project (Nov 17)**

**Week 12: Consultation on final project (Nov 19)**

**Week 13: Presentation of final project (Nov 26)**
Submission of final project (Dec 2)

ASSESSMENT

Class participation = 20%
   You are expected to participate actively during lectures, presentations, and discussions by asking salient questions and sharing relevant insights.

Individual critical reflection (400-600 words) (20%), presentation (5-7 mins.) (10%), and response (2 comments or questions) (5%) = 35%
   For your mid-term paper, you will submit an individual critical reflection that applies one of the critical theories discussed in class to analyzing one of the works on display at *In Search of Southeast Asia through the M+ Collections*.
   In every tutorial session starting with week 6, 3-4 students will be assigned to share with the rest of the class their insights from their critical reflection. Each presenter should prepare a presentation of 5-7 minutes. Another student will be assigned to respond to the presentation with salient comments or questions.

Group video project (5 mins.) (15%), paper (1500-2000 words) (20%), and presentation (10 mins.) (10%) - 45%
   For your final project, you will work in groups to produce a short essay film, which applies critical theory to the analysis or critique of social realities in Hong Kong using a combination of existing and original video footage and still photography. The theories used should come from at least three different required or recommended readings. The video project will be accompanied by a final paper that explains its use of critical theory.
   By the end of week 11, each group should submit a brief summary of your proposed project, which concisely describes the synopsis of the film, the realities to be analyzed, and the theories to be applied. In week 13, the groups will give a presentation in class about their video project, which will be their last opportunity to receive feedback before submitting the final version. The presentation should include sample images from the film’s storyboard.

GRADING RUBRIC

Exceptional = A
   The paper or project greatly exceeds the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented not only about the chosen example but also about the theory used. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of the chosen example and the theory used that goes beyond the scope of the class discussion. The language used to explain the theory and its application is complex yet lucid. The writing is grammatically correct and coherently organized. The chosen example is unique for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

Outstanding = A-
   The paper or project exceeds the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented about the chosen example. The paper or project displays a
comprehensive understanding of either the chosen example or the theory used that goes beyond the scope of the class discussion. The language used to explain the theory and its application is complex yet lucid. The writing is grammatically correct and coherently organized. The chosen example is unique for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

**Very good = B+**
The paper or project more than meets the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented about the chosen example. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is lucid. The writing is coherently organized. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

**Good = B**
The paper or project more than meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example could have been developed further. The paper or project displays a sufficient understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is lucid. The writing is moderately coherent. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

**More than satisfactory = B-**
The paper or project meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used lack elaboration or development. The paper or project displays a sufficient understanding of either the chosen example or the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is understandable. The writing is moderately coherent. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

**Satisfactory = C+**
The paper or project meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used lack elaboration or development. The paper or project displays a basic understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is understandable. The writing is slightly coherent. The chosen example may not be suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

**Fair = C, C-**
The paper or project barely meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used are vaguely elaborated. The paper or project fails to display a sufficient understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is virtually understandable. The writing is incoherent. The chosen example may not be suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

**Pass = D+, D**
The paper or project does not meet the expectations for this requirement. No additional insights are presented about the chosen example or the theory used on top of what was discussed in class. The language used to explain the theory and its application are almost incomprehensible. The writing is incoherent. The chosen example is irrelevant. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

**Fail = F**
The paper or project does not meet the expectations for this requirement. The language and writing are poor. The chosen example is irrelevant. The theory used was not covered in class. The paper or project may have been submitted long past the deadline.

**ACADEMIC ETHICS**
You are expected to abide by the university’s principles and regulations on academic dishonesty. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with the information on the following webpage: http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/. Violations such as plagiarized work or multiple submissions will not be tolerated in any form and will be subject to disciplinary action. Remember that all words, phrases, or ideas taken from sources other than your own submitted assignment must be properly cited.

Students are required to submit their assignments with a signed declaration, acknowledging their awareness of and subscription to the university’s policies and regulations. Assignments submitted without a signed declaration will not be graded. When in doubt about an assignment with a possible violation, please feel free to consult me.