

**Submitted for comprehensive examination in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of PhD in Critical Disability Studies at York University**

**Critical Disability Theory: Critical Theory**

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York University  
M.A. & PhD (Critical Disability Studies)  
Created by: Joanna Rankin

CDIS 0000 3.0: *Everyone's a Critic? The place of critical theory in disability studies*

Course Syllabus

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*“The hostility to theory as such which prevails in contemporary public life is really directed against the transformative activity associated with critical thinking.”*  
(Max Horkheimer, 1937)

*“Truth is, in other words, a social relation (like power, ownership or freedom): an aspect of hierarchy built on superiority-inferiority units...”*  
(Zygmunt Bauman, 1993)

*“ [intellectuals] need to understand how subjectivities are produced and regulated through historically produced social forms and how these forms carry and embody particular interests. At the core of this position is the need to develop modes of inquiry that not only investigate how experience is shaped, lived and endured within particular forms...but also how certain apparatuses of power produced forms of knowledge that legitimate a particular kind of truth and way of life”*  
(Henry Giroux, 1988)

**Overall Objective:**

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This course provides a survey of the role of critical theory in the context of disability studies. The completion of this course will facilitate an understanding of the basic concepts and theoretical bases of both classic and contemporary critical theory. This relevant, but often seemingly elusive paradigm is explored as an emancipatory framework, through theoretical and conceptual developments, and interdisciplinary influences and uses. The potential of critical theory as a productive line of inquiry will be discussed based on analyses of power, economic structures and societal assumptions, and the valorization and recognition of difference. Diverse interpretations of critical theory will be considered, including post-modern and post-structuralist, feminist, legal, race, and cultural studies approaches. Topics also include the development and history of critical theory and the Frankfurt School, and the role of paradigms, oppression and empowerment models as they relate to disability.

**Specific Objectives:**

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- To develop a conceptual understanding of the various meanings of critical theory and its applicability to disability, through historical and theoretical applications
- To increase the use of theory in the study of disability and to demystify this approach
- To become familiar with various critical theory approaches
- To understand the fundamental grounding of critical theory and be able to apply a critical theory perspective in academic work

## Expectations and Requirements:

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- Students are expected to complete all course readings prior to class
- Class contribution and discussion are essential part of this course
- Class attendance is mandatory except in the case of outstanding circumstances or prior notification

## Course Readings:

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Rush, F. (ed.) (2005). *The Cambridge companion to Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CDIS 0000 Course Pack

\*Weekly readings are also available on reserve at the library

## Course Evaluation:

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Class Participation	15%
Student Presentation	15%
Critical Disability Theory Paper	30%
Application of Critical Theory Perspective Paper	40%

## Assignments:

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### **Class Participation: Ongoing** **15%**

Participation grades are given based overall attendance, participation in lecture and student presentations and course activities.

### **Student Presentations: Ongoing** **15%**

Each student will present one of the assigned readings to the class, outlining the major contributions of the reading, its overall relevance to the course and creating two discussion questions based on the reading for the class.

### **Critical Disability Theory Paper- Week 6** **30%**

This paper will provide students with the opportunity to explore their understanding of the role of critical theory in relation to disability studies. This 10-12 page paper will be discussed in greater detail in class.

### **Application of Critical Theory Paper – Week 12** **40%**

This paper will allow students the opportunity to apply critical theory perspectives/theories to a topic of personal interest pertaining to the study of disability. This 15-18 page paper will be discussed in further detail in class.

## Week 1: Introduction to Critical Theory

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### Required readings:

Morrow, R.A. (1994). What is critical theory? In Morrow, R.A. *Critical theory and methodology*. pp.2-26. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kincheloe, J. L. & McLaren, P. (2002). Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research. In Zou, Y, & Trueba, E.T. (eds.) *Ethnography and Schools*. Roman and Littlefield. pp. 87-96.

Femina, J. (1975). Hegemony and consciousness in the thought of Antonio Gramsci. *Political Studies*. 23(1), 29-48.

### Supplemental readings:

Kellner, D. Critical theory and the crisis of social theory. In *Illuminations*.  
<http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell5.htm>

Agger, B. Critical theory, post modernism and post structuralism: Their Sociological relevance. *Illuminations*. <http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/agger.htm>

## Week 2: The Frankfurt School to Contemporary Critical Theory

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### Required readings:

Text: Rush, F. (2005). Conceptual foundations of early Critical Theory. In *The Cambridge companion to Critical Theory*. pp. 6-39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lewis, J. (2002). Marxism and the formation of cultural ideology. In *Cultural studies: The basics*. pp.75-108. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Kellner, D. (1993) Critical theory today: Revisiting the classics. *Theory, culture and society*. 10, 43-60. Available from *Illuminations*. <http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell10.htm>

Agger, B. (1991). Theorizing the decline of discourse or the decline of theoretical discourse? In Wexler, P (ed.), *Critical theory now*. pp. 118-144. London: Falmer Press.

### Supplemental readings:

Jay, M. (1973). The creation of the Institut für Sozialforschung and its first Frankfurt years. In *The Dialectical Imagination: A history of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*. pp. 3-41. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Held, D. (1980). Critical theory: The Frankfurt School 29-76. In *Introduction to critical theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*. pp. 13-28.

### Week 3: Paradigms & Ideologies

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#### Required readings:

Text: Roberts, Julian (2005). The dialectic of enlightenment. In *The Cambridge companion to Critical Theory*. pp. 57-73. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keat, R. & Urry, J. (1982). Positivist philosophy of science. In Keat, R. & Urry J. *Social theory as science*. pp. 9-22. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.

Radford, J.P. (1994). Intellectual disability and the heritage of modernity. In Rioux, M.H. & Bach, M. *Disability is not measles: New research paradigms in disability*. North York ON: Roehar Institute. pp. 9-28.

Davis, L.J. (2006). Constructing Normalcy: The bell curve, the novel and the invention of the disabled body in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In *The disability studies reader* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. pp. 3-26. New York: Routledge.

Oliver, M., J. (1999). Disabled people and the inclusive society or the times they really are changing. *Public Lecture*, Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research.

#### Supplemental reading:

Giddens, A. (1991). The contours of high modernity. In *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*. pp. 10-34.

Morrow, R.A. (1994). Post-empiricist critiques of positivism and empiricism. In Morrow, R.A. *Cultural theory and methodology*. pp. 62-84.

Rojek, C. (2003). Representation and Ideology. In Rojek, C. *Stuart Hall. Key contemporary thinkers series*. pp. 91-131.

Brown, S. C. (2001). Methodological paradigms that shape disability research. *Handbook of Disability Studies*. pp. 145-170.

### Week 4: The Role of Theory in the Study of Disability

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#### Required readings:

Gleeson, B. (1999). Social Science and Disability. In Gleeson, B. *Geographies of Disability*. pp.15-27. London; New York: Routledge.

Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (2010). Theories of Disability. In *Exploring disability*. Unpublished manuscript.

Devlin & Poithier, (2005) Introduction. *Critical Disability Theory*. pp. 1-24. Vancouver, UBC Press.

### Supplemental reading:

Thomson, R.G. (1999). The New Disability Studies: Inclusion or Tolerance? *SDFL Bulletin*. 31(1), 49-53. (5pgs)

## Week 5: Emancipatory and Critical Models

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### Required Readings:

Text: Guess, R. (2005). Dialectics and the revolutionary impulse. In *The Cambridge companion to Critical Theory*. pp. 103-138. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oliver, M. (1992). Changing the social relations of research production. *Disability, handicap and society*. 7(2).

Abberly, P. (1998). The spectre at the feast: Disabled people and social theory. In Shakespeare, T. (ed.) *The disability reader: Social science perspectives*. pp. 79-93. London: Continuum .

Mercer, G. (2002). Emancipatory disability research. In Barnes, C., Oliver, M.J., and Barton, L. (eds.). *Disability studies today*. pp. 228-249. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers.

### Supplemental readings:

Pfieffer, D. (2001). "The conceptualization of disability". In *Exploring theories and expanding methodologies : Where we are and where we need to go*. In Barnartt, S.N. and Altman, B.M. (eds.) 29-52. Amsterdam; New York: JAI.

Hughes, B. (2007). Being disabled: towards a critical, social ontology for disability studies. *Disability and Society*. 22(7), 673-684.

Abberly, P. (1987). The concept of oppression and the development of a social theory of disability. In *Disability Studies: Past, present and future*.

## Week 6: Post-modern & Post-structural approaches

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### Required Readings:

Smith, P. & Riley, A. (2009). Post-modern and post-structuralist critical theory. In *Cultural theory: An introduction 2<sup>nd</sup> ed*. pp.228-240. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Corker, M, & Shakespeare, T. (2002). Mapping the terrain. In Corker, M. & T. Shakespeare (eds.) *disability/postmodernity*. pp. 1-17. London; New York: Continuum.

Hughes, B. (2005). What can a Foucauldian analysis contribute to disability theory? In Tremain, S. (ed.). *Foucault and the government of disability* pp. 78-92. University of Michigan Press.

### **Supplemental readings:**

Text: Hanssen, B. (2005). Critical Theory and poststructuralism: Habermas and Foucault. In *The Cambridge companion to Critical Theory*. pp. 280-309. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harvey, D. (2008). The condition of post-modernity. In Seidman & Alexander, G.C. *The New Social Theory Reader*.

Price, J. & Shildrick, M. (2002). Bodies together: touch, ethics and disability. In *disability/postmodernity*.

Bauman, Z. (1993). Postmodern ethics. Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishing.

## **Week 7: Critical Feminist Theory**

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### **Required Readings:**

Fraser, N. (2005). Mapping the feminist imagination: From redistribution to recognition to representation. *Constellations*.12(3), 295-307.

Thomson, R.G. (1997). Theorizing disability. In *Extraordinary bodies: Figuring physical disability in American culture and literature*. pp. 19-54. New York: Columbia University Press.

Morris, J. (1993). Feminism and disability. *Feminist Review*. 43(57-70).

Schriempf, A. (2001). (Re)fusing the amputated body: An interactionalist bridge for feminism and disability. *Hypatia*. 16(4). 53-73.

### **Supplemental Readings:**

Wendell, S. (2006). Towards a feminist disability theory, In Davis, L.J. (ed.) *The disability studies reader*. pp. 243-256.

Fawcett, B. (2000). Feminist perspectives on disability. New York, Prentice Hall.

Kittay, E. Silvers, A. & Wendell, S. (2001). Feminism and Disability Part 1. *Hypatia*. 16(4).

Price, J. & Shildrick, M. (1999) Feminist theory and the body.

## Week 8: Social Policy and Critical Legal Theory

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### Required Readings:

- Tushnet, M.V. (2005). Critical legal theory. In Golding, M.P. & Edmundson, W.A. (eds.) *The Blackwell guide to the philosophy of law and legal theory*. pp. 80-89. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Rioux, M. & Valentine, F. (2005). Does theory matter? Exploring the nexus between disability, human rights and public policy In Pothier, D, and R Devlin. *Critical disability theory*. p. 47-69. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Campbell, F.A.K. (2001). Inciting legal fictions: “Disability’s” date with ontology and the ableist body of the law. *Griffith Law Review*, 10, 42-62.

### Supplemental Readings:

- Asch, A. (2001). Critical race theory, feminism, and disability: Reflections on social justice and personal identity. *Ohio State Law Journal*, 62, 391-424.
- Russell, M. (2002). What disability civil rights cannot do: Employment and political economy. *Disability & Society*, 17(2), 117.
- Prince, M. J. (2004). Canadian disability policy: Still a hit-and-miss affair. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 29(1), 59-82.
- Malhotra, R. (2006). Justice as fairness in accommodating workers with disabilities and critical theory: The limitations of a Rawlsian framework for empowering people with disabilities in Canada. In Pothier, D. & Devlin, R. (eds.) *Critical Disability Theory: Essays in Philosophy, Politics, Policy, and Law*. pp. 70-86. Vancouver: UBC Press.

## Week 9: Critical Race Theory

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### Required Readings:

- Campbell, F.A.K. (2008). Exploring internalized ableism using critical race theory. *Disability and Society*, 23(2), 151-162.
- Ghai, A. (2002). Disability in the Indian Context: Post-colonial perspectives. In Corker, M, & Shakespeare, T. (eds.). *disability/postmodernity*. London; New York: Continuum.
- Dossa, Parin (2008). Creating alternative and demedicalized Spaces: Testimonial narrative on disability, culture, and racialization Available at:  
<http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jjws/May08/Parin.pdf>

Stuart O. (1993) *Double oppression: An appropriate starting point?* In, J. Swain, V. Finkelstein, S. French & M. Oliver (Eds.), *Disabling barriers-- enabling environments* (pp. 101-106). London ; Newbury Park, Calif: Open University.

### Supplemental Readings:

Delgado, R. (1993). Critical race theory: An annotated bibliography. *Virginia Law Review*.

Banton, M. & Singh, G. (2004). "Race," disability and oppression. In *Disabling barriers, enabling environments*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. pp. 111-117.

## Week 10: Critical Theory and Cultural Studies (part 1)

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### Required Readings:

Barker, C. (2003). Questions of culture and ideology. In *Cultural studies: Theory and practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. pp. 57-87. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Barnes, C. & Mercer, G. (2001?). Disability Culture: Assimilation or inclusion? In Albrecht, G. M. Bury, & K. Seelman. *The Handbook of Disability Studies*. 515-534.

Abbas, J., Church, K., Frazee, C., & Panitch, M. (2004). *Lights...camera...attitude! Introducing disability arts and culture*. Toronto: Ryerson RCB Institute for Disability Studies Research and Education. Retrieved from <http://www.ryerson.ca/ds/files/ArtsReport.pdf>

### Supplemental Readings:

Leistyna, P. (2005). Revitalizing the dialogue : Theory, coalition-building, and social change. In Leistyna, P. (ed.). *Cultural studies: From theory to action*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Galvin, R. (2003). The paradox of disability culture: The need to combine versus the imperative to let go. *Disability & Society*, 18(5), 675-690.

## Week 11: Critical Theory and Cultural Studies (part 2)

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### Required Readings:

Held, D. (1980). The culture industry: Critical theory and aesthetics In *Introduction to critical theory*. pp. 77-110. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Mitchell, D.T., & Snyder, S.L. (2001). Representations and its discontents: The uneasy home of disability in literature and film In G. L. Albrecht, K. D. Seelman & M. Bury (Eds.), *Handbook of disability studies* (pp. 195-218). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Franks, B. (2001). Gutting the golden goose: Disability in Grimms' fairy tales. In J. C. Wilson, & C. Lewiecki-Wilson (Eds.), *Embodied rhetorics : Disability in language and culture* (pp. 244-260). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

## Week 12: Summary/Futures of Critical Theory

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Text: Honneth, A. (2005). A social pathology of reason: on the intellectual legacy of Critical Theory. In *The Cambridge companion to Critical Theory*. pp. 103-38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bronner, S.E. (2002). Points of departure: Sketches of critical theory with public aims. In *Of critical theory and its theorists*. pp231-258. Available at <http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/bron4a.htm>

This third comprehensive “paper” provides a brief description of the activities that I have completed and their relevance to my third comprehensive topic, Critical Disability Theory: Critical Theory. Firstly, in collaboration with Marcia Rioux and Ivan Brown, an entry for the Oxford bibliography on-line entitled “Disabilities Overview” was created. This entry, under the wider heading of “Social Work” identifies the most significant and widely cited readings in the study of disability. The second part of this activity has been the creation of a course outline which identifies and explores the role of critical theory in the study of disability. The completion of these two components of this comprehensive project have allowed me to firstly identify and become firmly grounded in the prominent literature related to the study of disability from a selection of perspectives, and secondly to gain a thorough understanding of the basis, and genesis of critical theory. This process has clarified for me the vital role of critical theory in the development of disability studies and its applicability in the progress of increasingly emancipatory and theoretically grounded disability research.

The following sections will outline the two processes which have taken place as part of this comprehensive “paper”. The bibliography will be discussed very briefly in terms of its purpose and content. The second section, pertaining to critical theory will describe the sections that I have chosen to explore in the development of a twelve week course, the rationale for each section and the readings included each week working towards a progressive understanding of critical disability theory.

#### *Disabilities: Overview*

The Oxford Bibliography Online is a new initiative being built to direct researchers in web-based inquiry, as a starting point for further academic investigation. Noting the surfeit of information faced by researchers on a variety of topics, this resource is intended to map the most significant and

commonly used content which is intended to facilitate access for undergraduate and graduate students and scholars. This overview contains introductions, readings and annotations for the following sections:

- Comprehensive Works/Overview
- Professional Social Work Texts
- Approaches to Defining and Classifying Disability
- Historical Considerations and their Influence on Current Values (Disability in History, The Institutional Era and Eugenics, The Disability Rights Movement)
- Theoretical Approaches (Individual Pathology: Biomedical & Rehabilitation, Social Pathology: Rights Based, Environmental and Social, & Post- Modern/Post-Structuralist),
- Social Policy (Policy Discussion & Evaluation, International Policy Documents)
- Emerging Themes (Accommodation and Adaptation, Education, Income & Poverty, Human Diversity, Disability Culture, Health, Bio-Ethics, Self-Determination/Autonomy in Services, Lived Experiences of Disability)
- Accessing Resources in Disability (Online Resources, National/International Organizations)

Based on these readings the course outline has served as a way for me to link what is presented in the literature in terms of reactions to disability, research, professional training and theory and the role of the questionings and action used by critical theorists.

### *Critical Theory in the Study of Disability*

The syllabus that I have created on the topic of critical theory and disability provides a twelve week course outline including objectives, expectations, weekly topics, course readings and assignments.

The course, as it has been prepared, provides a survey of the role of critical theory in the context of disability studies. The completion of this course would facilitate for students, an understanding of the basic concepts and theoretical bases of both classic and contemporary critical theory. This relevant, but often seemingly elusive paradigm is explored as an emancipatory framework, through theoretical and conceptual developments, and interdisciplinary influences and uses. The potential of critical theory as a productive line of inquiry will be discussed based on analyses of power, economic

structures and societal assumptions, and the valorization and recognition of difference. Diverse interpretations of critical theory will be considered, including post-modern and post-structuralist, feminist, legal, race, and cultural approaches. Topics also include the development and history of Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School, and the role of paradigms, oppression and empowerment models as they relate to disability. Based on the course objective to develop a conceptual understanding of the various meanings and incarnations of critical theory, I have entitled this course *Everyone's a Critic? The place of critical theory in disability studies*, to reflect multiple interpretations of critical inquiry, the intersection of ideas and forces and the role of questioning and contradiction present in the study of disability through this multifaceted area of inquiry.

The initial weeks of the course introduce critical theory and provide a theoretical grounding in this paradigm. By using introductory works to bring in relevant concepts, readings which apply such perspectives, will be more readily identifiable, will generate more fruitful discussion and can be built upon on a weekly basis. The first part of the course reviews historical developments and uses of critical theory and identifies its scarce role in disability related literature. The last seven weeks, each commence with a reading outlining the theoretical perspective to be discussed, followed by readings which apply or challenge perspectives presented under each specific category. The final week serves as a synopsis of materials and look at the future of critical theory.

Proposed assignments reflect the value of class participation and the importance of completing weekly readings. A presentation is required to practice the dissemination of knowledge, discussion of individual understandings and interpretations and to allow students the opportunity to actively engage in critical theoretical analysis. The first paper gives students the opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of critical theory and its relevance to this field, and the final paper requires the application of a critical theory framework to a relevant issue.

Each week is divided below by topic, and weekly readings followed by a brief discussion of the relevance of each week's readings to the specific topic and their applicability to the field in general.

***Week 1: Introduction to Critical Theory***

Morrow, R.A. (1994). What is critical theory? In Morrow, R.A. *Critical theory and methodology*. pp.2-26. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kincheloe, J. L. & McLaren, P. (2002). Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research. In Zou, Y, & Trueba, E.T. (eds.) *Ethnography and Schools*. Roman and Littlefield. pp. 87-96.

Femina, J. (1975). Hegemony and consciousness in the thought of Antonio Gramsci. *Political Studies*. 23(1), 29-48.

This introductory class defines critical theory from its development to more contemporary inceptions. Influential sociological and philosophical thinkers are briefly reviewed as well as historical movements which have been identified as influential in demonstrating the need for a critical social theory. The Morrow chapter outlines the development of critical theory and its sociological role. The author highlights challenges to positivist and interpretive approaches in favour of inquiry grounded in human action, seeking to identify and challenge the oppressive role of domination and resulting social struggles. Morrow also includes a discussion of the development of critical theory stemming from, but critiquing, classic Marxism and the redevelopment of Marxist traditions beyond economic aspects to include subjectivity, social life, and state power. The section of the Kincheloe & McLaren chapter selected builds on this introduction describing the uses of critical theory as an evolving methodological tool. This chapter provides a particularly relevant discussion of the dialectical, social construction of experience and the “discourse of possibility” which focuses on the reconstruction of social science in pursuit of more egalitarian and democratic social order. This chapter also provides a helpful discussion of the difficulties in defining critical theory based on its lack of unilateral beliefs or processes, while providing a set of conceptions within

which to work and areas of concern in which critical social theory is applied (power, justice, economy, race, class, gender, ideology, discourse, education, religion, social institutions, cultural dynamics). I have also included the Femina article as a review and in-depth discussion of Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Femina shows Gramsci's extension of this Marxist theory highlighting the distinction between state domination and this exercise of power in civil society. Hegemony, is demonstrated as important to critical theory based on its focus on questioning the status quo and the acceptance of domination in popular society through the imposition of ideology, the manufacturing of consent and production of ways of thinking, and the exclusion of alternative visions.

### ***Week 2: The Frankfurt School to Contemporary Critical Theory***

Text: Rush, F. (2005). Conceptual foundations of early Critical Theory. In *The Cambridge companion to Critical Theory*. pp. 6-39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lewis, J. (2002). Marxism and the formation of cultural ideology. In *Cultural studies: The basics*. pp.75-108. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Kellner, D. (1993) Critical theory today: Revisiting the classics. *Theory, culture and society*. 10, 43-60. Available from *Illuminations*. <http://www.uta.edu/buma/illuminations/kell10.htm>

Agger, B. (1991). Theorizing the decline of discourse or the decline of theoretical discourse? In Wexler, P (ed.), *Critical theory now*. pp. 118-144. London: Falmer Press.

This week centres on the development of the Frankfurt School and its thinkers, widely acknowledged as the creators of critical theory as a paradigm. The Rush chapter outlines the development of critical theory by the Frankfurt School and the separation of critical from traditional theory. This chapter provides an overview of the important works and contributions of Frankfurt School theorists Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse related to dialectic, praxis, materialism, and idealism. The Lewis chapter gives an introduction to Marxism and the connections of Marxist theory with the study of culture. The chapter brings an accessible introduction to the concepts of ideology

and super-structure, critiques of capitalism and the highly influential role of Marxist theory. This chapter though very general, gives readers a contextual description including connections to Hegel's dialectic, the Frankfurt School, hegemony, the development of Post Modern Marxism, and the future directions of Marxism. Demonstrating the continued importance of critical theory, the Kellner article outlines the relevance of classic Frankfurt School thinking in relation to contemporary issues. The Agger chapter, analyzes the failure of classic critical theorists to provide their stated objective of emancipation beyond the realm of academic rhetoric. Citing the failure of critical theory to uphold its premise of praxis, Agger identifies the future of this paradigm with Freire's concept of conscientization, calling for more widespread dissemination and practical implementation of theories along with the democratization of expertise.

### ***Week 3: Paradigms & Ideologies***

Text: Roberts, Julian (2005). The dialectic of enlightenment. In *The Cambridge companion to Critical Theory*. pp. 57-73. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keat, R. & Urry, J. (1982). Positivist philosophy of science. In Keat, R. & Urry J. *Social theory as science*. pp. 9-22. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.

Radford, J.P. (1994). Intellectual disability and the heritage of modernity. In Rioux, M.H. & Bach, M. *Disability is not measles: New research paradigms in disability*. pp. 9-28. North York ON: Roehrer Institute.

Davis, L.J. (2006). Constructing Normalcy: The bell curve, the novel and the invention of the disabled body in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In *The disability studies reader* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. pp. 3-26. New York: Routledge.

Oliver, M., J. (1999). Disabled people and the inclusive society or the times they really are changing. *Public Lecture*, Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research.

Week three looks at social conditions and ideologies which have been influential in the formation of critical theory, namely, positivism, modernity, and forces of industrialization. The Roberts chapter describes Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a reaction to the

Enlightenment and consequent societal understandings. This essay explores themes of alienation, relationships with genuine reality, equivalence and exchange and the role of morality and remorse. The chapter highlights the theorists call for release from “false enlightenment” through reflection and dialogical exchange. The remaining readings are not necessarily situated within a critical theory perspective but outline the social situations which have brought about this standpoint. Keat and Urry’s older chapter provides an excellent overview of positivism through the twentieth century and the role of universal statements and systematic observation and their applicability to theoretical laws in the social sciences. Radford’s chapter highlights features of modernity relevant to intellectual disability, and especially conceptions of the asylum. Many of the ideas discussed appear in future readings linking course content from week to week. Davis talks about an additionally detrimental aspect of modernity in relation to disability describing the incessant pursuit of progress, the creation of a statistical norm and attempts at its human replication and identifies these understandings as they are reflected in novels of the time. Oliver’s article specifically focuses on the role of productivity and wage labour which have accompanied industrialization and the associated negation of employment roles for people with disabilities. These readings set the historical context from which critical theory developed and highlight a variety of points raised in the Roberts chapter.

***Week 4: The Role of Theory in the Study of Disability***

Gleeson, B. (1999). Social Science and Disability. In Gleeson, B. *Geographies of Disability*. pp.15-27. London; New York: Routledge.

Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (2010). Theories of Disability. In *Exploring disability*. Unpublished manuscript.

Devlin & Pothier, (2005) Introduction. *Critical Disability Theory*. pp. 1-24. Vancouver, UBC Press.

This week's readings identify the ways in which theory has been applied in the study of disability.

Noting the discrepancies in definitions of critical theory, ranging from the identification of Marxism as *the critical theory of capitalist society*, to the recognition of this paradigm based on neo-Marxist or post-Marxist discourse, the application of critical theory in disability can be viewed through a variety of lenses. Gleeson's chapter points out the widespread lack of theoretical development in this area of study, and outlines what he considers the inadequate theoretical approaches (structuralism, humanism, idealism & normalization). Gleeson's alternative approach, and embodied materialism, provides opportunity for discussion as to the place of materialism in critical theory, especially in light of Gleeson's critique of Oliver's critical social theory as too grounded in cultural factors. Barnes and Mercer's chapter, reviews approaches applied in the study of disability outlining strengths and weaknesses of theoretical stances including disability as social oppression, materialist theories, multiple oppression theories and post-modern and post-structural approaches. The Devlin and Pothier chapter calls for the application of critical theory in disability studies. This is an important book to address, as it exists as one of the few volumes in which the title includes both disability and critical theory and is likely to come up in any library search of this topic. The materials contained in this book however, need to be explored in their application of critical theory. The introductory chapter focuses on citizenship, language and liberalism, encompassing discussion of social policy and court decisions. This chapter describes the contents of the book which reflect general areas of interest in disability studies as a whole. The book's assertion of itself as a critical disability theory text however is unsubstantiated, some chapters use a critical theoretical perspectives, but the book as a whole lacks an encompassing application of this standpoint.

## Week 5: Emancipatory and Critical Models

Text: Guess, R. (2005). Dialectics and the revolutionary impulse. In *The Cambridge companion to Critical Theory*. pp. 103-38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oliver, M. (1992). Changing the social relations of research production. *Disability, handicap and society*. 7(2).

Abberly, P. (1998). The spectre at the feast: Disabled people and social theory. In Shakespeare, T. (ed.) *The disability reader: Social science perspectives* . pp. 79-93. London: Continuum .

Mercer, G. (2002). Emancipatory disability research. In Barnes, C., Oliver, M.J., and Barton, L. (eds.). *Disability studies today*. pp. 228-249. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers.

Readings for week five look at emancipatory approaches that have been used or called for in the field of disability studies encouraging an assessment of the degree to which critical social theory has been used to-date in this context. The Guess chapter identifies the possibility of large scale social change through revolutionary and political upheaval. Distinguishing between revolution and reform, the chapter explores the power of the status quo to influence beliefs and attitudes, the role of positivism in hindering social change, and attempts to discredit conceptions of the “good life” as counter revolutionary. Noting these forces, emancipatory disability research is explored through its existence within the precepts of critical theory in its rejection of positivism, its aim to expose social oppression, and to facilitate political action. Oliver’s article, influenced by Habermas calls for the implementation of an emancipatory paradigm committed to political change and empowerment which he roots in the social model. The Abberly chapter identifies a link between disability and other social identities and the basis of disability oppression in material and ideological forces. Mercer outlines prominent research methods including positivism, interpretive approaches, and critical social theory and highlights the capacity of this type of research in both theory and action.

## **Week 6: Post-modern & Post-structural approaches**

Smith, P. & Riley, A. (2009). Post-modern and post-structuralist critical theory. in *Cultural theory: An introduction 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* pp.228-240. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Corker, M, & Shakespeare, T. (2002). Mapping the terrain. In Corker, M. & T. Shakespeare (eds.) *disability/postmodernity.* pp. 1-17. London; New York: Continuum.

Hughes, B. (2005). What can a Foucauldian analysis contribute to disability theory? In Tremain, S. (ed.). *Foucault and the government of disability* pp. 78-92. University of Michigan Press.

This week, post-modern and post-structural approaches are looked in their contestable space within critical theory. Smith & Riley provide an excellent introduction to these approaches and current movement and development in this area including critiques of modernity, the role of science, grand narratives, identity and difference, and cultural theory, all areas which highlight critical theory's challenges to assumed knowledge. Corker and Shakespeare's introductory chapter gives an approachable overview of postmodern theoreticians and their relevance to disability studies within a critical context. Noting the widespread use of Foucauldian analysis, Hughes chapter questions its applicability to disability theory upholding the relevance of some aspects of this line of inquiry, but questions the docile body in light of the progress of the disability rights movement, preferring instead Habermas' dialectic of freedom.

## **Week 7: Critical Feminist Theory**

Fraser, N. (2005). Mapping the feminist imagination: From redistribution to recognition to representation. *Constellations*.12(3), 295-307.

Thomson, R.G. (1997). Theorizing disability. In *Extraordinary bodies: Figuring physical disability in American culture and literature.* pp. 19-54. New York: Columbia University Press.

Morris, J. (1993). Feminism and disability. *Feminist Review.* 43, 57-70.

Schriempf, A. (2001). (Re)fusing the amputated body: An interactionalist bridge for feminism and disability. *Hypatia.* 16(4). 53-73.

The application of feminist theory has demonstrated itself to be extremely influential in the field of disability. Fraser, a prominent critical feminist, reviews the stages of second wave feminism and the increased role of globalization which she cites as needing to be added to previous concerns of redistribution and recognition. Thomson, reflecting feminism of the third wave, questions essential definitions of femininity and resulting social roles, and their relation to disability and reflection in American culture. The Morris article decries the often missing or inadequate analysis of disability within a feminist framework. The author identifies the need for disabled women's voices to represent both the oppressive and politicized nature of being female and disabled. Schriempf, applies an embodied analysis using the stories of two women. The author identifies the body as a site for radical meaning, and the inseparability of the social and the biological as a part of critical feminist scholarship.

### **Week 8: Social Policy and Critical Legal Theory**

Tushnet, M.V. (2005). Critical legal theory. In Golding, M.P. & Edmundson, W.A. (eds.) *The Blackwell guide to the philosophy of law and legal theory*. pp. 80-89. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Rioux, M. & Valentine, F. (2005). Does theory matter? Exploring the nexus between disability, human rights and public policy In Pothier, D, and R Devlin. *Critical disability theory*. p. 47-69. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Campbell, F.A.K. (2001). Inciting legal fictions: "Disability's" date with ontology and the ableist body of the law. *Griffith Law Review*, 10, 42-62.

This week's class examines critical legal theory and role of oppression and representation in legal frameworks and social policy. Tushnet's chapter, though brief, is dense and explains the development, evolution and key ideas of the leftist branch of critical legal theory. This chapter identifies the law as inherently political, reflecting the interests of the wealthy and powerful, as intrinsically contradictory, and subject to multiple interpretations. An interesting discussion,

especially related to the disability field, is the description of the “critique of rights”, which questions the value of rights based legal claims bringing a controversial perspective to disability rights standpoints. This chapter also provides an introduction to critical race theory, which will be covered in more depth the following week. Rioux and Valentine’s chapter provides a critical analysis of theoretical conceptions of disability in relation to citizenship and equality (civil, charitable, citizenship). This breakdown reflects the issues of legal and social power, the underlying role of neo-liberalism and resulting outcomes both internationally and in Canada. This chapter calls for the acknowledgment of a politicized view of disability which questions conventional understandings of equality and citizenship calling for change reflective of critical theory’s pursuit of what “ought” to be rather than what “is”. Campbell’s article, under the pretext of critical theory, identifies the negative beliefs surrounding disability which are reflected in legal address of disability issues. This article questions the outcomes of legal process as justice considering social and judicial power structures and ideology. Of particular relevance is the discussion of US distinctions of immutable and elective disabilities and resulting legal decisions representative of unquestioned ableist ideals.

### **Week 9: Critical Race Theory**

Campbell, F.A.K. (2008). Exploring internalized abelism using critical race theory. *Disability and Society*, 23(2), 151-162.

Dossa, Parin (2008). Creating alternative and demedicalized Spaces: Testimonial narrative on disability, culture, and racialization Available at:  
<http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/May08/Parin.pdf>

Ghai, A. (2002). Disability in the Indian Context: Post-colonial perspectives. In Corker, M, & Shakespeare, T. (eds.). *disability/postmodernity*. London; New York: Continuum.

Stuart O. (1993) *Double oppression: An appropriate starting point?* In, J. Swain, V. Finkelstein, S. French & M. Oliver (Eds) .), *Disabling barriers-- enabling environments* (pp. 101-106). London ; Newbury Park, Calif: Open University.

Providing a brief overview of the basis of critical race theory, week nine's content focuses to a great degree on the way in which this theoretical base has been used in the study of disability. The Campbell article frames critical race theory and the use of internalized racism as comparative to internalized ableism. The author's identification of current critical theory's focus on marginality should provide for provocative discussion based on her call for the recognition of the margins as a site of power. Dossa recounts the experience of an immigrant woman with two children with disabilities. This experience is discussed in relation to Western systems identified as structured to marginalize and to create a hegemonic narrative of race. Citing personal experience as reflective of culture, collective and historical social practice, this individual experience is explored as systematic displacement, disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by racialized immigrant women with disabilities, or who have families with disabilities. Ghai's article introduces post colonial theory and identifies this critical approach as more relative to contexts such as those of people with disabilities in India, outside of totalizing Western discourses. Ghai argues that a post colonial analysis is better equipped to recognize multiple political, social, economic and cultural realities. Stuart's call for a distinct, black, disability identity based on this specific experience calls into question the seeking of a single disability identity and the role of multiple oppression in the seeking of emancipation.

### **Week 10: Critical Theory and Cultural Studies (part 1)**

Barker, C. (2003). Questions of culture and ideology. In *Cultural studies: Theory and practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. pp. 57-87. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Barnes, C. & Mercer, G. (2001?). Disability Culture: Assimilation or inclusion? In Albrecht, G. M. Bury, & K. Seelman. *The Handbook of Disability Studies*. 515-534.

Abbas, J., Church, K., Frazee, C., & Panitch, M. (2004). *Lights...camera...attitude! Introducing disability arts and culture*. Toronto: Ryerson RCB Institute for Disability Studies Research and Education. Available at: <http://www.ryerson.ca/ds/files/ArtsReport.pdf>

Two weeks of this course have been devoted to the role of cultural as it relates to disability and the application of critical theory. This first week introduces cultural studies and the role of disability arts in this context and the important link between theory and practice. The Barker chapter describes the development of cultural theory with specific attention to Raymond Williams' *cultural materialism*, and distinctions between high art and popular culture and the role of mass culture in capitalist society. The Barnes and Mercer chapter relates culture and society and the material base. Noting the tensions between post-modern conceptions of multiplicity and the pursuit of disability culture as a common identity, the authors look to disability arts as a space for critical reflection and the pursuit of empowerment. The Abbas et al. report gives a snapshot of the disability arts movement in Canada, requiring students to consider disability arts within a critical and liberatory framework.

### **Week 11: Critical Theory and Cultural Studies (part 2)**

Held, D. (1980). The culture industry: Critical theory and aesthetics In *Introduction to critical theory*. pp. 77-110. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Mitchell, D.T., & Snyder, S.L. (2001). Representations and its discontents: The uneasy home of disability in literature and film In G. L. Albrecht, K. D. Seelman & M. Bury (Eds.), *Handbook of disability studies* (pp. 195-218). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications

Franks, B. (2001). Gutting the golden goose: Disability in Grimms' fairy tales. In J. C. Wilson, & C. Lewiecki-Wilson (Eds.), *Embodied rhetorics : Disability in language and culture* (pp. 244-260). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

This week looks at presentations of disability in cultural formats as powerful points of critical inquiry. Returning to the roots of critical theory, Held's chapter describes Horkheimer & Adorno's theory of mass culture addressing the role of the "culture industry" in upholding the status quo. Mitchell and Snyder's chapter challenges tradition approaches to disability representation calling for a transgressive resignification of meaning. Frank's chapter provides a final reminder of the necessity

of actively re-enforcing the need for critical theory through this description of her student's assumptions and reactions to characters with disabilities in fairytales.

### **Week 12: Summary/Futures of Critical Theory**

Text: Honneth, A. (2005). A social pathology of reason: on the intellectual legacy of Critical Theory. In *The Cambridge companion to Critical Theory*. pp. 103-38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bronner, S.E. (2002). Points of departure: Sketches of critical theory with public aims. In *Of critical theory and its theorists*. pp231-258. Available at <http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/bron4a.htm>

This final class reviews the major issues and theoretical underpinnings of critical theory and the need for this paradigm to re-establish commitments to the defense of hope and freedom within practical terms and public spheres. Honneth identifies the continued relevance of critical social science. Noting classic critical theory as outdated, he identifies previous contributions as part of a process of development, and the need for conceptual reformulation to bring this paradigm to continued relevance. Bronner reviews and re-works classic critical theory premises in more contemporary terms, in an attempt to bring forth emancipatory theories in less elitist and more meaningful ways. Bronner uses categories of solidarity, accountability and autonomy to reflect new movement in the fading arena of critical theory suggesting the revival of this framework through the rejection of strict foundations and recognition of the need for adaptation to differing realities and contexts. This class will allow for discussion of the future potential of critical theory, its application in disability studies, as well as serving as a review of established bases and challenges.