

IS THEORY CRITICAL?

May 22-23, 2015 | University of California, Irvine

FIRST ANNUAL CRITICAL THEORY INSTITUTE CONFERENCE *following the 2015 WELLEK LECTURES featuring CATHERINE MALABOU. Events at Langson Library and Humanities Gateway. Free and open to the public.*

In anticipation of the 50th anniversary of the seminal Johns Hopkins conference on “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man,” better known by its published title of *The Structuralist Controversy*, as well as of the 50th anniversary of the founding of UC Irvine as an institution where “critical theory” has been key to the intellectual development and reputation of the campus, we would like to take stock of where theory has been and where it might still go. We aim, in lieu of a celebratory and inevitably nostalgic gathering for a high theory that is no more, to ask harder and indeed more relentlessly critical questions about critical theory. This is not, however, as so many such occasions have been, simply to celebrate, uncritically as it were, the legacy of theory, which as many have argued has indeed become endemic to virtually all scholarly work undertaken today in the humanities, the arts, and qualitative social sciences. In this regard, the very success of critical theory is the very source of its diffusion and disappearance into an increasingly wide array of differing critical practices and “studies.” Hence, our phrasing of the conference agenda in response to the question: is theory critical? And by “critical” we understand the adjective both in the sense of whether there is still a “need” for theory in the current historical conjuncture and in the sense of whether theory is or is even able to live up to the claim of engaging in the specific work of critique. Phrased otherwise, what are the limit conditions for a critical theory in the 21st century?

SPEAKERS INCLUDE

Geoffrey Bennington

Jonathan Culler

Robert Doran

Irving Goh

Peggy Kamuf

Ethan Kleinberg

Jacques Lezra

Lisa Lowe

David Palumbo-Liu

Steven Mailloux

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