

CALL FOR PAPERS

Reckoning with October 7: Israel, Hamas, and the Problem of Critical Theory

November 8–9, 2024

New York City

The Telos-Paul Piccone Institute welcomes paper proposals for a conference that reckons with the response, both within higher education at large and especially from the precincts of critical theory, to the atrocities perpetrated by Hamas on October 7, 2023. The conference will cap a year of webinars, podcasts, blog posts, and publications about the topic, and will form the basis of a special memorial issue of the journal *Telos*. Full papers intended for that special issue will also be considered at this time.

Beginning in the immediate, politicized aftermath of the Hamas atrocities, theory has been present—in ways that should give us pause. It was present in sublimated ways, as widespread presuppositions and “narratives” infused with charismatic authority by a popularized postcolonial jargon. It was there in kinetic, emotionally charged, intellectually unsophisticated responses, in “mass” demonstrations, public statements by groups and institutions, and individual social media campaigns. It was there in “intersectional” ideology. Yet above all, it was manifest in considered, open, intentional ways within universities, as well as among educated elites taught and credentialed by them. The college campus, the traditional home of critical theory—which emerged in the twentieth century most powerfully as a response to fascism and Nazism—has become a nodal point for the dramatic unfolding of a cognitively, morally, and politically deficient discourse about a present-day *Kristallnacht*.

What can this dismaying state of affairs tell us about higher education, both in America and internationally? What does it reveal about the fate of “theory” itself, in concrete, practical, and abstract terms? How does the ritual deployment of certain theoretical vocabularies in response to the attacks help obscure the interests and power of the New Class of managers, information workers, social engineers, and therapeutic organizers, against which the *Telos* circle has launched a sustained critique since 1968? What does it signify that many members of the Professional Managerial Class seem to have learned to conceive of justice and injustice almost entirely in terms of ascribed membership in reified castes, arranged in a hierarchy of victimhood, such that racial, ethnic, national, religious, sexual, and/or gender identities largely substitute for individual responsibility, culpability, or innocence? In short, how have *theories* critical of symbolic violence turned into *justifications* for actual violence? And how is it that this “legitimation” of violence, of radical change “by any means necessary,” has emancipated so many—on campus and off—from any visible ethical constraint? And how do macro-level geopolitical concerns provide a larger context for understanding the place of critical theory in the response to October 7?

We seek proposals for 15-minute presentations about any aspect of this topic. Proposals for longer presentations will also be considered. Please submit an abstract of 250 words, along with your name, institutional affiliation, and curriculum vita, to october7conference@telosinstitute.net. Proposals are due **June 1, 2024**. Our conference will result in a special issue of the journal *Telos*, for which we are also presently soliciting papers. Please inquire or send your paper directly to the conference email address. For information about the Telos-Paul Piccone Institute’s Israel initiative, see telosinstitute.net/israel-initiative/.