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International
Conference

11-13
February
2026

Uferstudios Berlin | Studio 14 | Uferstr. 23 | 13357 Berlin

Critical impulses play a central role in the development of society while they are tied, in their turn, to the normative frameworks established within social contexts. In this respect, critique is always in tension with prevailing norms; however, it may also depend on normative foundations that can go beyond what is given in a society. Against the background of this tension, the conference aims to investigate the scope and the (normative) foundations of critique, focusing on four contexts: firstly, the narrative foundations of normative critique, secondly, the interpersonal forms of relationship relevant to the realization of critique, thirdly, physicality and materiality in the emergence of resistance and fourthly, the positionality of critique.

11.02.26

18.00–20.00

Opening Reception

I Am Your Sound

A Performance by Echoes in Pieces (Ha Heres Mina, Han Guka, Kim Liyoun)

<http://www.normativitaet-kritik-wandel.de/conference>

9.30 Opening

Panel 1
Challenging Narratives

Narratives are the starting point for every form of change, at the same time they provide an essential basis for maintaining normative structures. An ever-increasing number of competing narratives are complicating the understanding not only of the so-called present, but also of the past(s) and possible futures. These sometimes challenging (in the sense of contradictory) narratives of the world open up the possibility as well as the necessity of rethinking one's own narratives along with their underlying situatedness and mediality, especially in mutual exchange. How are image and text constellated in order to challenge narratives that affirm norms (canon critique, colonialism, etc.)? The panel will focus on the plasticity of memory and the access to images that constitute or question it.

10.00–11.00

Andrea Geier

Debates on Postcolonial Studies and Anti-Semitism: A (german) controversy without conflict?

How are “postcolonialism”, “postcolonial theory”, and “postcolonial studies” discussed in public? In my lecture, I will examine the communicative dynamics within academia, in the public sphere, and in politics, focusing on the accusation that postcolonial studies are ideological and anti-Semitic. I will show which understanding of science is revealed in this discourse and what effects it has when an entire field of research is considered “controversial” and “disputed” in public media communication in this way. At the same time, I want to argue that it is not enough to reflexively fend off attacks or issue general appeals for solidarity in support of academic freedom. Rather, I want to highlight which aspects of the defamatory conflict communication in the public discourse are worthy of self-reflection and self-criticism – and I want to ask how we can make these aspects visible in public communication in the context of heated, polarized debates. How can we find common ground in this conflict communication?

11.15–12.15

Judith-Frederike Popp

Dwelling in the space of awe – Narrative constellations as constructive elements in philosophical critique

This talk examines methodological implications of philosophy—especially Critical Theory—oscillating between prosaic and poetic actualizations of language. The first half treats narrative constellations as materializations of poetic speech and as textual mediations of theory formation: theory thus appears as a practice of skilled walking on shaky foundations, both inwardly and across disciplines, drawing on affinities between philosophical and psychoanalytic approaches. The second half proposes that rooting philosophical work in poetic oscillations reveals a willingness to dwell in instability, material resistance, withdrawal, and inconceivability as epistemic tool. I argue that this practice of dwelling, enabled by narrative constellations, creates a space for critique beyond a rigid affirmation/negation split. Instead, critique emerges as a dialogical dynamic of carrying on sustained not only by explicit normative regulation but also by experiential connection and affective grip. Such an approach reframes theory-building as practice that privileges lived experience and narrative form alongside conceptual rigor.

12.30–13.30

Stephanie Graf

The Marrano as a Figure of Thought: An Experimental Reading of Adorno’s Negative Dialectics

At first sight, Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem might appear to stand at opposite poles of twentieth-century Jewish thought: the Marxist and materialist dialectician on the one hand, and the Zionist historian of Jewish mysticism on the other. However, from their first encounter, they were drawn to one another’s work by a cautious fascination. Their correspondence reveals the surprising core around which this unlikely alliance evolved: mystical antinomianism. Its structural core can be described as the Marrano dimension—that is, a retrospective theological elaboration of the experience of forced conversion: the crypto-Jewish practice of disguising opposition to the hegemonic system in the “garments” of that very order. Inspired by recent attempts to trace a Marrano epistemology in modern philosophical approaches, this paper proposes the Marrano as a figure of thought underlying Theodor W. Adorno’s own philosophical movement, namely Negative Dialectics.

13.30–15.00 Lunch Break

Panel 2
Relationalities

The panel has its focus on the in-between: on our orientations towards/to/from others as well as the relations of care in which we stand or want to stand in. How do artworks and technological developments determine and change our view of care work? What role do narratives representing alternative forms of relationships play in changing our actual understanding of them (e. g., Sophie Lewis' "Abolish the Family")? How can relationships and orientations not only be understood as objects of critique, but themselves become effective as critique? To what extent can they be understood not only as guided by normative structures, but also as a nucleus of their change or suspension? How is the conflictual nature of care work to be understood?

15.00–16.00

Jordan Troeller

Fornicating Frogs and Spurring Shafts: Ruth Asawa's Andrea (1969) as a Case Study of Antinormative Motherhood in the Arts

This talk centers on a controversial public sculpture created by the self-identified "artist-mother" Ruth Asawa. Read as a harmless mermaid fountain for some, for others it embodied a radical challenge to the norms governing sexuality in urban space. I discuss the various dimensions of the work and its reception within the larger context of mid-century America's taboo against the mother as artist and the unspoken norms governing what counted as creative labor. What Andrea demonstrates for us today, I argue, is the centrality of the question of visibility for critique; or rather, under what representational conditions can a critical gesture be read as such?

16.15–17.15

Liza Mattutat

Archive and Autofiction: Writing Care in Times of Crisis

I will present work-in-progress from my project „Care in Crisis“, which examines historical shifts in the reproduction regime through case studies and draws implications for today's care crisis. The book combines archival research, interviews, and auto-theoretical essays. From letters, diaries, and memoirs I construct narratives about protagonists in utopian communities, cooperative housekeeping, feminist campaigns, and women's strikes. These narratives, paired with autofictional material, voice participants' frustrations, hopes, and political strategies. They raise philosophical questions that I address using literature from philosophy, sociology, and psychology. To demonstrate the method, I will read an excerpt on the gender-stabilizing power of pregnancy and motherhood—asking what makes motherhood feminizing. I will close by reflecting on the critical potential of auto-theory as a performative writing practice by discussing Anna Kornbluh's polemic against it. Overall, the project links empirical and theoretical work to surface political implications and to suggest concrete avenues for action.

17.30–18.30

Anna Lena Göttsche

Doing Family in times of increasing right-wing conservative and authoritarian attitudes

The question of the "family as a constructive achievement," which underlies the concept of ‚doing family‘ (Jurczyk) is not a new one. However, it deserves recurring attention and raises new follow-up questions: In times of resurgent (right-wing) conservative family and social ideals, who is considered ‚family‘ and who is not? Which (legal) norms have already been changed by lived family realities, and where are achievements (once again) up for discussion? Examples will be used to illustrate the extent to which lived family realities have, by their very nature, exercised or continue to exercise criticism of the law as a norm, thus shaping the law. But also, how the law is in turn used as a constructive means of power to challenge traditional societal notions of family.

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Panel 3
Movement & Resistance

The panel deals with the role concrete physicality plays in the realization of critique, not least from the perspective of minoritized bodies. How do more or less conditioned and abled bodies unite as a movement? How can critique be understood as embodied between collective action and resistance, rejection, passivity and depression? Particularly with regard to an increasingly mediated, mirror-like form of experiencing the self, the question of interruptions and withdrawal takes on a new turn. What role do cultural narratives play in the construction of norms and, in particular, fantasies of a healthy body? In contrast, can a critique of this construction be produced by adaptation or disruption?

11.15–12.15

Quill Kukla

Spatial Agency and the Choreography of Resistance

Spatial agency is our ability to express ourselves, be self-determining, pursue pleasure and fulfillment, and act with appropriate authority in space and through our use of space. Full spatial agency requires not just the ability to adeptly navigate spaces and their choreographies, but also the ability to resist, critique, and change the possibilities for identity and action that spaces make available to us. This requires that we be able to re-choreograph space. I will explore our need for this kind of resistant spatial agency and the conditions under which we have it and fail to have it, through a series of concrete examples: political protest; squatting and occupation; crip activism and the “radical rest” movement; and drag.

12.30–13.30

Priya S. Gupta

The University Cannot Hold

Can the University fulfill its promise as a public good and a space for critical thought? (Has it ever?) This project considers three destructive dimensions of the current university: corporatization, the treatment of diverse bodies and temperaments, and the suppression of dissent. It examines their mutual reinforcement and argues that together they push the university into a conformist, sterile, ‘neutral’ space constructed in furtherance of market ideals while also pulling the core norms of the University apart. It then asks what happens to critique and emancipatory and utopian imagination in the shadow of the neoliberal university, with reference to student movements and occupations of university spaces in Spring 2024.

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13.30–15.00 Lunch Break

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Panel 4

Movement & Resistance

The panel brings into view strategies of positioning, as they are located, for instance, in the way of writing, in the access to canonical sources or in the deliberate staging of polyphony. Following on from discourses on situatedness, identity politics and relevance in the face of austerity measures, we will examine the position from which knowledge emerges. How do these manoeuvres of positioning relate to existing norms of expression in science and art and to what extent can they be understood as critical? Do these strategies address a different audience, and if so, do they reach it? What is the relationship of these speaking positions to history, and how do they locate themselves in the present?

15.00–16.00

Ruth Sonderegger

Ensemble. Towards affirmative forms of (aesthetic) critique

Especially under conditions of current forms of authoritarianism and the increasing fascisation of society critique is becoming ever less effective. This is primarily because the hegemony-based government by consensus is increasingly giving way to governance by brute force (of the strongest). Under these circumstances, critical appeals to shared foundations or drawing attention to contradictions are fading into emptiness. This makes what I call affirmative critique all the more important: the praxis of alternatives in the here and now, however marginal, minoritarian or provisional they may be. Engaging with such practices makes it clear that they have always been the most obvious form of critique for marginalised and oppressed groups. Moreover, the concept of prefigurative politics, which is related to affirmative critique and has recently arrived in the more privileged parts of the society, only illustrates that tyranny is spreading to new places. On the other hand, lived practices of affirmative critique bring diverse aesthetics into play; aesthetics, however, that have little to do with the field of art. In my attempt to think with and along such practices of affirmative critique, I take inspiration from, among others, the late Foucault, Jacques Rancière, and Fred Moten.

16.15–17.15

Chris Tedjasukmana

From ICE Raids to #DeportationTok: Media Witnessing as Embodied Critique in the Age of AI Authoritarianism

Taking as its starting point the global rise of authoritarianism, the expansion of the military-industrial complex (epitomized in collaborations between ICE and Palantir in the U.S.), and the unreliable production of knowledge in digital infrastructures (from TikTok to ChatGPT), the talk observes a fundamental shift in media practices of witnessing. It discusses the difficult role of media witnessing as critical positioning and embodied knowledge. Based on a case analysis of witness videos of recent ICE raids in the U.S. and hashtags such as #DeportationTok, the talk examines the increasingly complex knowledge formations, distributed processuality, and multi-layered human-machine relations in contemporary acts of witnessing.