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CRITICAL STANCES

A CONFERENCE BY THE DFG RESEARCH TRAINING GROUP
CULTURES OF CRITIQUE

JUNE 21 – 23,
2018

LEUPHANA UNIVERSITY OF
LÜNEBURG

HOSTED BY THE DFG RESEARCH TRAINING GROUP
CULTURES OF CRITIQUE



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CRITICAL STANCES

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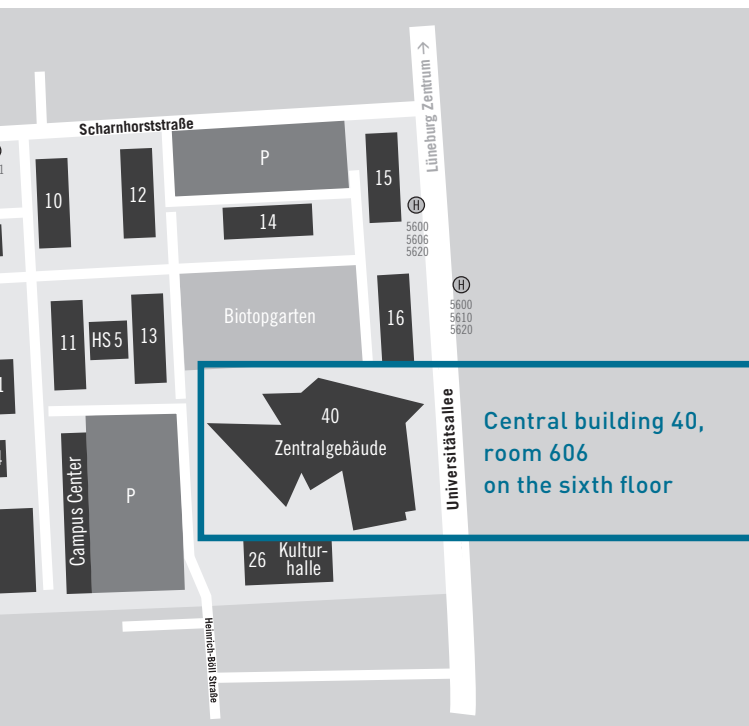
JUNE 21 – 23, 2018

VENUE

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Registration by June 10, 2018
is requested



CRITICAL STANCES

Critique is a form of thinking and acting. Each critical practice has its own setting, its own temporality and its own mode. In its situated character, critique emerges in a contradictory context of proximity and distance to its object. It is determined by its objects, yet never accesses them immediately, but always mediated through its own forms of (re)presentation.

The conference “Critical Stances” addresses the interrelation between critique and its object through an analysis of critical stances, their forms, media, and effects. It asks where, how, whereof, and when, critical practices appear, and how the interdependence of critique and object translates into critical stances. We understand stances as learnable, reproducible gestures, which bear witness to changing conditions and media of critical practice. Stances [“Haltung” in German] simultaneously condense and interrupt habitual behavior – put it “on hold” [“Halt”].

In four sections, the conference’s guiding questions concern the constitution of the object of critique, the forms of subjectivation in and through critique, as well as the possibilities and forms of critical stances in different power relations.

PANEL 1: THE STAKES OF FORM

Critique articulates itself mostly through and in the form of language. Since the end of the 18th century, there has been a dynamization and fluidization of the understanding of form, such as the topoi of the break, the marginalization, the tearing and opening, or counter-concepts such as “anti-form” (F. Schlegel) or “informe” (Bataille) indicate. However, these multifarious attempts to “build on the structure through demolition” (Benjamin) testify to the dependence of all articulation on the forms of its (re)presentation. This panel examines what this means for the understanding of critique and the constitution of its object, by means of writing practices, which neither deny their dependence on (re)presentation, nor let it obtrude, but, on the contrary, work explicitly with it. Since the 1960s, literacy practices have proliferated, which generate their critical statements less argumentatively than through the programmatic use of formal means. They take up their object in processes of mimicry, mimesis, parody, or inversion, to repel, mirror, satirize, or exaggerate it, so as to affirm, reject, reinterpret, and constitute it. At the same time, through the use of rhetorical figures and phrases, the writing self, along with its attitude, reflections, affects and instruments, visibly enters the critical scene. The panel asks for the use and effects of such critical writing practices that are aware of their modes of (re)presentation, beyond the self-reflexive apprehension of the interlacing of object, writing subject, and (re)presentation: what modes of (de)subjectivation take place in such writing practices? How do legitimating claims of critique change? Does the dominance of the form of (re)presentation invalidate or replace the argument and possibly the entire critical gesture? What forms of mediation and experience are generated by the rhetorical, poetic, and aesthetic methods used? Where and how can political effects of critical intervention be registered by and in the respective form of (re)presentation?

Concept: Holger Kuhn, Isabel Mehl, Nadine Schiel, Beate Söntgen, Heiko Stubenrauch

PANEL 2: CRITIQUE OF THE POSTCOLONIAL

Colonial rule was and is the prerequisite for the global assertion of capitalism. Its material effects are articulated not only politically and economically, but also discursively. Although the materiality of the discursive is not identical with that of the economic, those discourses are also permeated by economic forms and power relations. They not only determine who can speak and can be heard, but also what can be said at all, which topics will be visible and to what extent. Thus, the question of the possibility of critique also appears as a question of the interweaving of economic relations with the conditions of visibility and effectiveness. The section "Critique of the Postcolonial" asks about the reciprocal relation between critique and political strategies that are aimed at changing postcolonial power relations. Is it, for example, more promising to deconstruct Western representational regimes (provincialization), or should rather, in radical renunciation from Western concepts, distinct discourses be developed (decolonization)? How can such a renunciation look like? Or is a renunciation impossible, because the reciprocal conditioning of Western and non-Western does not allow such a distinction? Does the distinction between the Western and the non-Western even reproduce the regime of representation that it wanted to criticize? How is a decentralization of hegemonic discourses possible if a submission to the discursive conditions is a prerequisite for any participation? Is the representation of subordinate positions by non-subordinate actors always a continuation of the postcolonial rule, or is it therefore indispensable to make subaltern positions heard at all? In what way or at what sites and scenes become postcolonial strategies of critique concrete? How, then, does a critique of the postcolonial work, that aims at changing the conditions of postcolonial rule while itself being shaped by those conditions.

Concept: Susanne Leeb, Liza Mattutat, Nelly Y. Pinkrah

PANEL 3: CRITIQUE AND THE DIGITAL

Critical stances, which differentiate the “art of not being governed like that” (Foucault), have developed in modern power-knowledge fields and under the specific technical-medial conditions of imagination and presentation. With the advent of digital technologies, the modern constituting conditions of critique have now begun to shift. In the digital, in particular, the relationships between the critical subject, its possibilities of critical practice and its object were transformed fundamentally. For the production of knowledge is genuinely determined by new logics.

The central cultural techniques of the critical subject have at least since the Enlightenment been those of reading and writing, and they have characterized the transcendental physiognomy of the critical subject as such. The question of its agency arises at the moment, when these cultural techniques are at risk to lose their supremacy, and it is as radically different as the question of critique in the digital as such: which power-knowledge fields are constituted in digital cultures and to what extent and in what manner is critique subsequently transformed? What concept of critique is formed when the alphabetical subject is inserted into algorithmic environments, and which forms might a critical stance take on in such environments? In order to answer these questions, we invite in the section “Critique and the Digital” to examine the processes of transformation, to which critical subjectivity, the problem of critique and the concept of critique are subjected to under digital conditions. The forms, that critique can take on in the digital, play as much of a central role in this discussion as the question of critique as such.

Concept: Erich Hörl, Nelly Y. Pinkrah, Lotte Warnsholdt

PANEL 4: WHAT'S LEGIT? CRITIQUE OF LAW BETWEEN LEGALITY AND LEGITIMACY

In modern societies, the constitutional state is the form of legitimate power. The „rule of law“ is intended to dissolve every form of direct rule from some people over others, by democratically enabling for everyone to participate. In this way, all legal relations are coagulated violent relations, that is, violent power relations translated into forms of law. The force of law, the state monopoly of power and the institutional management of power relations provide legal stability. But the law itself is historical and changeable. In order to confront this tension between permanence and changeability, the law provides ways and means to further its development. Legality thus becomes the primary criterion for the legitimacy of interventions into the law and thereby into the established social order. Critical practices that seek to change the law, which also applies to themselves, challenge precisely this precarious equation of legality and legitimacy. Not every legal means is considered legitimate, and not every legitimate critique finds its legal means. Critical practices must therefore always be located simultaneously within and outside of law. If they limit themselves to the sphere of law, that is, if they pursue their objectives solely by taking legal action, their demands are de-politicized. If, on the other hand, critical practices locate themselves outside the sphere of law, that is, if they resort exclusively to militant means, they are disqualified as violent and unintegratable. In the section „What's legit? Critique of Law between Legality and Legitimacy“, critical practices are to be taken into consideration given this tense relation between legality and legitimacy. What is the relation between power and legal relations? What distinguishes critical strategies in their use of democratic methods, counter-hegemonic interventions into the law, and militant actions? What are their potentials and weaknesses? What reach do they have? Above all, how do these strategies relate to one another? Are they mutually exclusive, do they go along with each other, or are they each appropriate for different situations?

Concept: Liza Mattutat, Roberto Nigro, Lotte Warnsholdt

THURSDAY, JUNE 21	
3 PM	WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION Beate Söntgen
3.15 PM	PANEL 1: THE STAKES OF FORM Chair: Holger Kuhn, Oona Lochner, Isabel Mehl
3.30–4.45 PM	FORMS OF CRITIQUE, MODES OF COMBAT Birgit M. Kaiser / Kathrin Thiele
COFFEE BREAK	
5.15–6.30 PM	GESTURE, INTERRUPTION, QUOTABILITY: CRITIQUE AND THEATER Bettine Menke
6.30–7.45 PM	UNTITLED Lynne Tillman
RECEPTION / DINNER	
FRIDAY, JUNE 22	
9.15 AM	PANEL 2: CRITIQUE OF THE POSTCOLONIAL Chair: Sami Khatib, Alia Rayyan
9.30–10.45 AM	ALTHUSSER, MEHDI AMEL, AND THE COLONIAL MODE OF PRODUCTION Nadia Bou Ali
COFFEE BREAK	
11.15–12.30 PM	COLONIAL BIOPOLITICS: NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION TODAY Kalindi Vora
12.30–1.45 PM	ODARODLE: SHOWING WITHOUT REVEALING Ashkan Sepahvand
LUNCH BREAK	

2.45 PM	PANEL 3: CRITIQUE AND THE DIGITAL Chair: Nelly Y. Pinkrah, Lotte Warnsholdt
3–4.15 PM	THE CRITIQUE OF MACHINIC REASON Mark B. N. Hansen
COFFEE BREAK	
4.45–6 PM	RETHINKING CRITIQUE AND CRITICAL LEGAL STUDIES IN A CIVILIZATION OF DIGITAL SIGNALS AND ALGORITHMS Antoinette Rouvroy
6–7.15 PM	AUTOMATION AND CRITIQUE Luciana Parisi
DINNER	
SATURDAY, JUNE 23	
9.30 AM	PANEL 4: WHAT'S LEGIT? CRITIQUE OF LAW BETWEEN LEGALITY AND LEGITIMACY Chair: Holger Kuhn, Boaz Levin, Liza Mattutat
9.45–11 AM	BEYOND THE INSTITUTION-PERSON: FOR A MATERIALISTIC CRITIQUE OF INSTITUTION Paolo Napoli
COFFEE BREAK	
11.30–12.45 PM	FEMINIST POLITICS AND THE CREATION OF THE LIBERAL LEGAL SUBJECT Daniel Loick
LUNCH BREAK	
2–3.15 PM	WHO IS THE SUBJECT OF INTERNATIONAL LAW? OR WHAT PUNISHMENT FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TELLS US ABOUT THE LAW – AND OURSELVES Susanne Krasmann
3.15–4.30 PM	HANGMAN'S PERSPECTIVE Itamar Mann

THE CRITIQUE OF MACHINIC REASON

At the interface of Gilbert Simondon's two great, but as of yet unsynthesized projects – one on physical and vital individuation, the other on technical individualization – lies the potential for articulating a new unit of cultural agency, or better, a new ecology of cultural actants, that thoroughly integrates humans and machines without entirely de-differentiating them. In my paper, I will try to sketch out a synthesis of Simondon's two projects, contrasting them favorably against other recent efforts to think cultural agency as an ecology (mainly Latour's work on modes of existence), and describing the role that data gathering and analysis play in an expanded understanding of what Simondon calls the "operative (or 'allagmatic') analogy" between the individuation of the real and the individuation of the knowledge of (the individuation of) the real. I will argue in particular that Simondon's understanding of how machines operate must be updated in relation to recent research on machine learning and artificial intelligence (particularly automated machine learning, or machine learning where machines are taught by other machines), and that what results is a shift in the characterization of machines from "concretization" to "individualization". The payoff of this reading is that machines become liberated by humans and become capable of discovering forms through their own operability. They then become a true partner in a technically distributed form of reason, which requires a dual critique: on the one hand, of the pretention of humans to exceed their cognitive and sensory limitations; and on the other, of the notion that liberated machine operability simply leaves the human behind.

Mark B. N. Hansen

is the James B. Duke Professor in the Program in Literature and in the Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies, as well as co-founder of the Program in Computational Media Arts & Cultures, at Duke University. His research focuses on the role played by technology in human agency, environmental process, and social life, and in the philosophy of human-machine individuation. Hansen is the author of *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with New Media*, *New Philosophy for New Media*, and *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing*. His most recent book, *Feed-Forward: On the Future of Twenty-First-Century Media* (Chicago 2015) explores the role of computational processes in contemporary culture and their diffuse, nonperceptual impact on human experience. Current projects include *Designing Consciousness*, *Logics of Futurity*, and *Topology of Sensibility: Towards a Speculative Phenomenology*.

FORMS OF CRITIQUE, MODES OF COMBAT

Terra Critica's engagement with practices of critique and critical thinking began with two concerns regarding form. Namely, how must conceptual registers of critique *transform* if they are to respond to today's planetary – implicated, entangled and on so many levels precarious – condition? And how do embodied practices of critical engagement, both intellectual and activist, need to be *reformed*, i.e. “overturned” (Wynter), in light of the multiple contestations of who “we” as humans are? These two questions regarding forms of critique quickly opened our work then to another set of questions: How does critique's hegemonic European tradition (famously instantiated in Kant's three critiques and tied to the European Enlightenment), continue to inform critical gestures? And what forms could practices of critique take if they are envisioned as situated and entangled with/in planetary life, i.e. as immanent to it, as opposed to judging a situation from above, or dissecting an object from an unquestioned distance? In our collaborative presentation we will attempt to chart these intertwining matters by retracing some of the corporeal-conceptual moves that *Terra Critica* has experimented with since its foundation in 2012. We will return to two exemplary theoretico-poetical texts, Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) and Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* (1989). With/in their horizon we will ask which limit-attitudes might be required for our poetic and existential practices to take critical form, if the key to critical engagement lies in bringing into existence by combat instead of dissecting by judgment.

Birgit Mara Kaiser

is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Transcultural Aesthetics at Utrecht University. Her research spans literature in English, French and German from the 19th to 21st century, with particular focus on poetic knowledge production; the relation of literature, aesthetics and affect; and writing subjectivity in transcultural and post/colonial constellations of power, for which questions of un/translatability, multilingual writing and the materiality of language are especially important.

Kathrin Thiele

is Associate Professor of Gender Studies and Critical Theory at Utrecht University. Trained trans-disciplinarily in Gender Studies, Sociology, Literary Studies and Critical Theory, her research focuses on questions of ethics and politics from queer feminist, decolonial and posthuman(ist) perspectives. Her published work intervenes in contemporary feminist debates around (sexual) differences, de/coloniality and new materialism/posthumanisms, with specific attention to questions of relationality, implicatedness and entanglements.

Together they coordinate *Terra Critica: Interdisciplinary Network for the Critical Humanities*.

WHO IS THE SUBJECT OF INTERNATIONAL LAW? OR WHAT PUNISHMENT FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TELLS US ABOUT THE LAW – AND OURSELVES

In September 2016, the International Criminal Court (ICC) passed a judgement that was perceived internationally as a landmark decision. The Malian citizen Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi was found guilty of the war crime of intentionally attacking historic and religious buildings in Timbuktu, and sentenced to nine years of imprisonment. This was the first time that a person was tried in the ICC on the sole grounds of destroying cultural heritage. The verdict was not without controversy however. Some people voiced worry about “serious crimes” such as murder, rape or torture of civilians receiving comparatively limited attention, while for others the decision did not go far enough. Cultural heritage, they argued, should be protected independent of human suffering, and be considered valuable in and of itself. In these opposing arguments, the integrity of human beings was being played off against the symbolic value of cultural property. This paper takes the reactions to this decision as a point of departure for a broader critique of law and its focus on the legal person. It explores to what extent the law might be able to rethink its subject – and to what extent “we” might be able to rethink the idea of humanity in international law.

Susanne Krasmann

is Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Criminological Research, University of Hamburg. She was Fellow of the Straus Institute, New York University School of Law. Her research and teaching interests are in the areas of Law and its Knowledge, Sociology of Security, Epistemologies of Control, Vulnerability & Political Theory, and the Force of Truth. She is co-editor of *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges* (Routledge, 2010) and has published articles on “the force of law”, “drones and the practice targeted killing”, “the torture debate and the rule of law”, “enemy penology”, and “visual citizenship” in international journals like the *Interdisciplines*, *Leiden Journal of International Law*, *Punishment & Society*, *Surveillance & Society*, *Theoretical Criminology*, *Foucault Studies*. Her current work is on the politics of truth and practices of secrecy, and on situational awareness as a new paradigm of governing security.

FEMINIST POLITICS AND THE CREATION OF THE LIBERAL LEGAL SUBJECT

Feminist legal criticism has long pointed out the masculinism inherent in modern law: Legal interpellation produces subjects who are independent, individualistic, interest-oriented and mutually repellent. At the same time, the law has sometimes served as an important tool in feminist struggles for gender equality. Wendy Brown has called this fundamental ambivalence the “paradox of rights”. While rights are something that we “cannot not want”, they also never fully satisfy our demand and desire for social emancipation. My talk will explore this problem further by investigating the use of the category of “consent” within the current #metoo debate. On the one hand, the concept of consent can empower women in sexual interactions, while on the other hand enforcing the liberal notion of contractual subjects who can freely dispose over their actions. I will argue that a feminist politics must be based on social criticism and rooted in an ethics of non-violence, instead of reproducing contractualist legal categories and thus precarious forms of subjecthood.

Daniel Loick

is currently research fellow at the Max-Weber-Kolleg in Erfurt. After receiving his PhD in 2010, he was junior faculty member of the Philosophy Department at Goethe-University, Postdoctoral Fellow at Harvard University, Visiting Professor at Humboldt-University Berlin, Theodor Heuss Lecturer at the New School for Social Research in New York, and Visiting Professor for Critical Social Theory at Goethe-University Frankfurt. His main research interests are in political, legal and social philosophy, especially Critical Theory and poststructuralism. Among his publications are four books, *Kritik der Souveränität* (Frankfurt 2012, English translation forthcoming as *A Critique of Sovereignty* in 2018), *Der Missbrauch des Eigentums* (Berlin 2016), *Anarchismus zur Einführung* (Hamburg 2017), and most recently *Juridismus. Konturen einer kritischen Theorie des Rechts* (Berlin 2017).

HANGMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

The judgement of Adolf Eichmann remains one of the most iconic precedents in 20th century law. And yet its iconic status goes hand in hand with ambivalence about its contemporary relevance. For some it is an archaic example of international criminal adjudication, one in which what we now think of as justice is tainted by revenge. For others, the *Eichmann* trial represents a certain kind of *avant-garde*, reflecting an early version of a “progressive” international criminal procedure focused on empowering victims. These two dominant legacies overshadow a third, one that emphasizes the ways in which adjudication often depends on a form of sacrifice. My paper introduces this third legacy, and articulates its significance for a critical theory of law. I take my cue from *The Hangman* (2010), a film by Avigail Sperber and Netalie Braun that tells the story of Shalom Nagar, a Jewish Israeli of Yemeni descent, who carried out Eichmann’s execution. A close reading of the film raises two important questions: (1) what kinds of injustice can be generated by a rule of law oriented towards international criminal justice, i.e., by the construction of punishment as *distinct* from revenge?; and (2) what kinds of injustice can a focus on the voice of the victim and their *catharsis* generate?

Itamar Mann

is a senior lecturer at the University of Haifa, Faculty of Law, where he teaches and does research in the areas of public international law, political theory, human rights, migration and refugee law, and environmental law. He is the author of the book *Humanity at Sea: Maritime Migration and the Foundations of International Law* (Cambridge University Press 2016). Alongside his academic work, Mann is a practitioner in the area of transnational human rights law, and is a legal advisor for the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN).

ALTHUSSER, MEHDI AMEL, AND THE COLONIAL MODE OF PRODUCTION

This talk critically assesses Mahdi Amel's claim that what he calls "the colonial mode of production" (CMP) constitutes a "differential" form of global capitalism; one that is linked to the capitalist mode of production by "structural causality." Amel accepts Althusser's definition of a mode of production as a relational unity of means and relations of production. But Amel characterizes the CMP as singular because of 1) the "impeded history" of its structural formation, which is not a consequence of cultural regression but rather of a "repetition structure" of the politics of authenticity and particularism; and 2) the "non-differentiated class formation" by which bourgeois domination is instantiated through an ideological sectarian state apparatus that is perpetually in crisis. Unlike Althusser, Amel insists on the political as the ultimate determinant (in the last instance). This insistence brings to fore what we could call the question of historical modes of politics, or the question of how modes of political practice can also determine a mode of production. My aim is to show that while the CMP cannot be grasped concretely but only understood as an abstract particularity that does not harbour the potential for the determinate negation of capital, Amel's formulation allows us to reconsider both the modes through which politics have been and continue to be enacted in this particular context, and the limitations of those modes.

Nadia Bou Ali

is Assistant Professor at the Civilization Studies Program at the American University of Beirut and co-founder of the Beirut Institute for Critical Analysis and Research (BICAR). She is currently completing a book entitled "Hall of Mirrors: psychoanalysis and Shidyaq's untold history of modernity" forthcoming with Edinburgh University Press, and has recently co-edited the volume "Lacan contra Foucault: subjectivity, sex, and politics" forthcoming with Bloomsbury Press. Her research and teaching interests revolve around critical social theory, intellectual history, and Psychoanalysis.

GESTURE, INTERRUPTION, QUOTABILITY: CRITIQUE AND THEATER

Several of the considerations found in the abstract to the “Critical Stances” conference refer directly to concepts from Benjamin’s essays on Brecht’s theater (“What is Epic Theater” 1 and 2), notably the notions of “gesture”, “interruption” and “quotability.” These terms mark central tenets of Benjamin’s philosophy and readings, and they have a particular relevance for theater, and not only that of Brecht. Benjamin explicitly distinguishes what he sees Brecht’s theater to achieve – it being an interruption (also within itself), a doubling of showing and the exposition of showing—from the very concept of ironic romanticist self-distancing as well as the critique (of form). For Benjamin it would be thus “erroneous” to recognize the “old Tieckian dramaturgy of reflection” within it. As one that is “gestural”, Brecht’s theater for him is characterized by “a different distancing modus of presentation”.

Bettine Menke

is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Erfurt. Her research interests include literature and theatre, rhetoric and deconstruction, mediality of theatre, scripturality of texts, concepts of media and cultural techniques, Walter Benjamin, Franz Kafka, Heinrich von Kleist and others. Selected publications: *Sprachfiguren. Name – Allegorie – Bild nach Walter Benjamin* (1991 Korr. Neuaufl. 2001); *Literatur als Philosophie. Philosophie als Literatur* (2006, coeditor with Eva Horn, Christoph Menke); *Tragödie. Trauerspiel. Spektakel* (2007, coeditor with Christoph Menke); *Das Trauerspiel-Buch. Der Souverän – das Trauerspiel – Konstellationen – Ruinen* (2010); „Suspendierung des Auftretts“ and „On/Off“, in: *Auftreten. Wege auf die Bühne*, 2014, ed. by Juliane Vogel, Christopher Wild; „im auftreten /verschwinden – auf dem Schauplatz und anderswo“, in *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* (2016); *Flucht und Szene* (2018, coeditor with Juliane Vogel).

BEYOND THE INSTITUTION-PERSON: FOR A MATERIALISTIC CRITIQUE OF INSTITUTION

I would like to show how a materialistic critical assessment of the concept of institution has to first and foremost refute two models: that of the “person-institution” and that of the “katechon-institution”. The former is well encapsulated in the Weberian notion of “Anstalt”: a social group whose orders are enforced rather successfully on people. According to the “katechon-model” the institution is conceived of as a hierarchical filter and as a negative power. This paper examines two approaches that help us take a step forward: In *De la critique* (2005), the French sociologist Boltanski focuses on ways of institutionalization rather than on a hypothetical institutional identity. The paper also turns to the work of the French jurist Hauriou, who in 1925 described the institution not only as a person but also as a thing. The “thing-institution”, like legal norms, is a nomadic agent virtually able to lend its “services” to any corporate subject. The problem then lies in the effort to avoid the incorporation of norms into the person-institution, by permanently calling into question this subsumption movement – not by capital, but by the person – of immanence specific to legal norms.

Paolo Napoli

is Directeur d'étude at the EHESS (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales) in Paris. His research interests include the formation and application of administrative devices in occidental law. He analyses the emergence of normative categories and their relation to the practices by which they were caused. He is the author of *Naissance de la police moderne. Pouvoir, normes, société* (La Découverte 2003) and *Le arti del vero. Storia, diritto e politica in Michel Foucault* (La città del sole 2002). *La souveraineté mutilée* is forthcoming from Lextenso.

AUTOMATION AND CRITIQUE

In the age of sovereign computation, algorithmic decisionism is said to have replaced the binary logic of the digital with the neural networks of automated learning that compress infinity. The automation of decision-making therefore no longer coincides with the cybernetic metaphysics of preprogrammed probabilities, but with the indeterminacy of finding patterns. If the digital technology of the 1990s became central to the possibilities of reinventing critique through the post-representational dimension of human-machine assemblages, the explosion of machine learning knowledge systems in AI research seems rather to re-direct the task of critique towards the internal thinking of the machine. Current scholarship however sees this thinking in terms of a mindless form of ratio or as a form of non-conscious cognition. Automation here is taken as a symptom of a crisis of critique, or the self-limiting process of apprehension, because it demarcates the evaporation of logic and reasoning all together. My talk will revisit this position and propose a nuanced reading of logic in machines as an attempt to re-address the role of critique in the age of sovereign computation.

Luciana Parisi

researches the philosophical consequences of technology in culture, aesthetics and politics. She is a Reader in Critical and Cultural Theory at Goldsmiths University of London and co-director of the Digital Culture Unit. She is currently a Visiting Professor at the Department of Rhetoric at UC Berkeley, California. She is the author of *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Biotechnology and the Mutations of Desire* (Continuum Press 2004) and *Contagious Architecture. Computation, Aesthetics and Space* (MIT Press 2013). She is now writing on the history of automated reason and the transformation of logical thinking in machines.

RETHINKING CRITIQUE AND CRITICAL LEGAL STUDIES IN A CIVILIZATION OF DIGITAL SIGNALS AND ALGORITHMS

Relying on the constant and massive proliferation of digital pheromones transpiring from behaviors, algorithmic (ir-)rationality is gradually colonizing all sectors of activity and government, including the police and justice sectors. Whereas, according to Alain Supiot, western law, resulting from a long and slow linguistic sedimentation in a civilization of signs and texts, bears the anthropologic function of connecting the symbolic and biological dimensions of human beings this computational turn propels us into a civilization of a-semantic but calculable signals and algorithms, in a revived cybernetic paradigm in which both the biological and the symbolic dimensions of human existence are apprehended exclusively in terms of quantifiable data flows actualized in real time. The law and the algorithms of “digitized society” presuppose and generate radically different (legal) relations or (algorithmic) non-relations to the world, radically different regimes of (legal) truth/or (algorithmic) reliability, and radically different (legal) normative metabolisms or (algorithmic) (com-)pulsions of optimization. Reappraising the respective epistemic presuppositions and ambitions of legal vs. algorithmic regimes is thus an inescapable task today and a condition to revitalize critique and critical legal studies in a context of algorithmic governmentality. The hypothesis I will suggest is that this distinction between the rule of law and algorithmic governmentality may be portrayed, in Derridean terms, as an opposition between a legal/juridical metaphysics of *différance* and a digital/algorithmic metaphysics of pure presence.

Antoinette Rouvroy

is a permanent research associate at the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research (FNRS) and senior researcher at the Research Centre Information, Law and Society of the University of Namur (Belgium). She is member of the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS)’s Ethical Advisory Board (EAB) and of the French CNIL (Commission Informatique et Libertés)’s Foresight committee. In her writings, she has addressed issues of privacy, data protection, non-discrimination, equality of opportunities, due process in the context of “data-rich” environments. Her current research interests revolve around algorithmic governmentality. Under this Foucauldian neologism, she explores the semiotic-epistemic, political, legal and philosophical implications of the computational turn, and the impact on the modalities of critique, resistance and recalcitrance.

ODARODLE: SHOWING WITHOUT REVEALING

The artistic research exhibition *Odarodle – an imaginary their_story of naturepeoples, 1535 – 2017* took place at the Schwules Museum* in Berlin from July 21st to October 16th, 2017. Originally proposed by the institution as a self-reflexive inquiry that would cast a “postcolonial perspective” onto the museum’s history and collection, the project questioned the (im)possibility of such an endeavor. Considering the Museum’s long focus on presenting informative, accessible exhibitions focusing on the histories of white gay men, the desire to expand its subjects towards a more diverse LGBTQ* direction is – in theory – a good thing. What does this mean in practice, however? *Odarodle* suggested a simple yet troubling observation: the Schwules Museum’s approach to representing homosexualit(ies) bears associations with the ethnological display formats developed over the course of European colonialism to show “Others”. Indeed, this questions the very *raison d’être* of a “gay museum.” Nevertheless, the project developed ways to reclaim the future of a possible not-yet institution – a “queer theater” perhaps – one based on complicating and concealing the representation of existences, instead of merely exposing these to capture. This presentation will reflect on how *Odarodle* staged a performative intervention that not only challenged liberal notions of “post-colonialism,” but also made the Museum strange to itself – a gesture that has had provocative implications for assessing the viability of complex critique to transform practice.

Ashkan Sepahvand

is an artistic researcher. His performative discourse practice engages with how knowledge-forms are sensorially translated and experienced, taking shape as publications, installations, exhibitions, and interdisciplinary collaborations. He has worked as a research fellow at the Schwules Museum* and Haus der Kulturen der Welt. Since 2013 he co-organizes the technosexual reading circle, an informal platform for self-organized study. His work and writings have been exhibited at dOCUMENTA(13), Sharjah Biennials X and 13, Gwangju Biennale 11, and ICA London, amongst others. He is currently a Guest Lecturer at the Hochschule für Künste Bremen. He lives and works in Berlin.

UNTITLED

Lynne Tillman will read from *Men and Apparitions*, her first novel in twelve years. Its protagonist, 38-year-old ethnographer Ezekiel Stark, has a special interest in family photographs and researches the New Man who grew up under the sign of feminism. Stark, as most everyone today, belongs to the “Picture People”. Resonating with the “Pictures” show at Artists Space in 1977 curated by Douglas Crimp, *Men and Apparitions* revisits questions of representation and identity in times of social media, smartphones and sexting. How does being surrounded by, communicating with, and basing identity upon images alter how we understand our culture and our position in it? Tillman will also present passages from her *Madame Realism* fiction/essays about visual art. In the early 1980s, Tillman invented the fictional art critic Madame Realism – a cipher that couldn’t feel more contemporary in a time where oppositions between fact and fiction no longer hold (if they ever did). Tillman will discuss words as images, and writing about pictures with words.

Lynne Tillman

is a novelist, short story writer, and cultural critic. Tillman has published numerous books, including *Weird Fucks*, *Motion Sickness and No Lease on Life* – a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award as well as *What Would Lynne Tillman Do?* – a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in Criticism. “The Complete Madame Realism and Other Stories” was reissued in 2016 at Semiotext(e). Her newest novel *Men and Apparitions* was published by Softskull Press earlier this year. She was a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and of a Creative Capital/Warhol Foundation Award in Arts Writing. Tillman is Professor/Writer-in-Residence in the Department of English at the University at Albany and teaches at the School of Visual Arts’ Art Criticism and Writing MFA Program. She was the Fiction Editor at FENCE magazine and writes a bi-monthly column “In These Intemperate Times” for Frieze. Distrusting dualisms, Tillman addresses our culture – often taking the arts as a starting point – without ever losing the coolness necessary to “not jump to conclusions”. She lives in New York.

COLONIAL BIOPOLITICS: NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION TODAY


Taking up the intersection of new technologies and colonial legacies of transnational labor, this paper will address the outsourcing and automation of reproductive labor and other forms of affective investments. As bodies, labor, work and even genetic material continue to move across borders from formerly colonized nations to former metropolises, how do we understand the ongoing legacies of colonialism? The work of reproducing lives and society in the Global North, service work, is increasingly outsourced and automated. For example, gestational surrogacy and artificial reproduction technologies can lead to new social forms which have far reaching effects on kinship structures, even as the notion of “family” shifts to conserve outdated models of patriarchy and the nuclear family. How can we understand the importance of both service work and the erasure of this necessary service work as part of the colonial legacies of labor in contemporary capitalist society? This paper examines these effects as well as the new coalitional possibilities that arise from them.

Kalindi Vora

is Associate Professor of Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies at UC Davis, and Director of the Feminist Research Institute. Her current research includes ongoing writing on legal and social justice concerns connected to assisted reproductive technologies in the transnational commercial surrogacy, on autoimmunity and patient self-tracking and self-treatment, and on establishing models for “feminist science shops” at UC Universities. She has also just completed a co-edited book project on the racial and gendered politics informing contemporary robotics and artificial intelligence design with Neda Atanasoski for a book entitled *Surrogate Humanity* (Duke University Press, forthcoming). She has a PhD in History of Consciousness from UC Santa Cruz (Feminist Studies) and an MA in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Hawai’i Manoa, and a BA in Music/Religion from Wesleyan University. She held the UC President’s Postdoctoral Fellowship at UC Berkeley Anthropology.

NOTES





JUNE 21 – 23, 2018

VENUE

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