

FACING REALITY: BETWEEN DOOM AND CRUEL OPTIMISM

SUBJECT

Through a deep hermeneutical analysis of the public discourse on climate catastrophe, I examine how it is represented in the political unconscious. Standing in the tradition of historical materialism, I investigate newspaper images, memes, media-practices like doom-scrolling and figures such as the “Klima Kleber” or the “Flood Idiots”. I take these contemporary surface-phenomena as points of departure to discuss how the end of progress is negotiated in everyday culture and to address other questions concerning philosophy of history in the Anthropocene.

RESEARCH QUESTION

WHICH FORMS AND METHODS OF CRITIQUE ARE ADEQUATE FOR A CATASTROPHIC PRESENT?

HOW SHOULD WE NOT TALK ABOUT THE FUTURE IF WE WANT TO HAVE ONE?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- From climate catastrophe to artificial intelligence, ideas about the future increasingly oscillate between apocalypse and official optimism.
- This neurotic pattern clouds the political imagination and distracts from political possibilities existing in the present.
- To approach the present, critique must mediate between everyday experiences and abstract categories.
- Central to successful mediations are questions of language, with the approaches of early critical theory (Walter Benjamin’s “Denkbilder” or Siegfried Kracauer’s phenomenological explorations) offering particular guidance.



The pixelated Picture shows a graffiti that was taken during the pandemic. In its ambiguity, it opens up the question of the work.
Photo: Aren Aizura