

Radical Thought in the Anthropocene – Theories and Concepts of Critical Theory

International Conference, 26-28 June 2025, University of Graz

CALL FOR PAPERS

What is critique? What can Critical Theory do for society? Which forms of critique may claim any relevance in late capitalism? How can a critical public opinion manifest itself in the 21st century? How can we distinguish critique from political ideologies and conspiracy theories? (see Fridays for Future, *Querdenker*, etc.) What characterises critical thinking? How can radical thought be rendered practically relevant?

The conference *Theories and Concepts of Critical Theory* takes place between 26 and 28 June 2025 at the University of Graz, and it approaches its main theme from various theoretical and practical perspectives. Based at the Faculty of Humanities, this interdisciplinary conference constitutes the second stage of the interdepartmental research project *Radical Thought in the Anthropocene*. The conference follows on from a first event that took place in 2023 and which was dedicated to different disciplinary approaches to Critical Theory.

We will bring the concept and idea of *critique* into productive constellations with a variety of concepts and categories pertaining to social and cultural theory. In doing so, and by highlighting fundamental societal and existential challenges of the 21st century, we will reflect upon the possibilities and potentials of a *productive critique of society*, especially concerning its implications for academic theory and lived practice. In view of the great global, societal, ecological and economic challenges, we will put to the test the social significance and practical relevance of cultural and social theory in the 21st century.

Keynotes

- Rodrigo Duarte,
Belo Horizonte, Brazil
- Lydia Goehr,
New York City, USA
- Sven Kramer,
Lüneburg, Germany
- Michael Thompson,
New York City, USA

Conference Board (University of Graz)

- Stefan Baumgarten,
Department of Translation Studies
- Stefan Brandt,
Department of American Studies
- Juliane Jarke,
BANDAS Center & Department of
Sociology
- Susanne Kogler,
Department of Art and Musicology
- Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl,
Department of Philosophy

Format

The conference is held in a workshop format. Incoming abstracts will be assigned to the following three corresponding themes:

- **Workshop I: Language, Translation, Society**

This workshop compares and contrasts diverse forms and concepts of *critique* and *communication*, examining their viability in view of current societal challenges such as multiculturalism, multilingualism, migration and modern communication technologies. Amongst other things, we will address cultural readings and language-specific receptions of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, especially concerning their historicity, timeliness and their ‘afterlife’. We will also pay special attention to ideology critique and to critical approaches on technology. Further relevant categories include phenomena such as inter- and transculturality, deconstruction and text, medialisation and multimodality, globalisation and (digital) cultures as well as gender-specific issues.

- **Workshop II: Materialism, Aesthetics, Politics**

The question surrounding (artistic) ‘material’ concerns one of the key themes associated with Theodor W. Adorno’s aesthetic theory. It is also of central importance regarding the current reception of Critical Theory. Such questions surrounding the status, nature and conceptualisation of the material world not only challenge the Marxist origins of Critical Theory but also its concrete political and practical relevance. In this workshop, we will compare and contrast approaches in Critical Philosophy and Critical Social Theory, as well as approaches pertaining to (Historical) Materialism and (Neo-)Idealism. Of particular interest here is the relationship between New Materialisms and Critical Theory. Further relevant topics include (world) literature, digitalization and mediatisation, art and freedom (from ideology), (artistic) activism and politics.

- **Workshop III: Humans, Spirit, World Relation**

This workshop deals with the relationship between science and critique. Here, the role of the Humanities for critical thinking and the role of lived practice with positive future implications will be debated from self-reflexive and self-critical standpoints. Among other things, we will discuss in what ways scientific and academic thought echoes conceptualisations, theories and arguments from Critical Theory, and how science might be able to adapt them for a better life, for a radical “wild thinking” that may generate alternative realities, art worlds, even anarchist constellations. Dichotomous thinking, post- and transhumanist ontologies as well as Anthropology and History are further possible themes. The relationship between critique, reason and unreason, as well as between critique, indignation and resistance about the state of (world) social affairs will also be up for discussion.

We look forward to receiving abstracts (max. 300 words) for 20-minute presentations on the above-mentioned topics and themes by **20 February 2024** under **radikalesdenken(at)uni-graz.at**. We are particularly looking forward to receiving contributions from doctoral candidates and early-career researchers! The abstracts must be submitted in anonymised form **in English** including a mini-biography (approx. 100 words).

The Conference Board will accept abstracts based on an anonymous selection procedure. Acceptance letters will be sent out **in spring 2024**. The conference will be streamed online. Selected contributions are expected to be published in English by Palgrave Macmillan.