

Call for Papers

From Artistic Critique to Criticising Creativity

Subjectification in Research and Activism

Interdisciplinary conference at the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI)

12-14 October 2017

Conference: 'From Artistic Critique to Criticising Creativity'

Venue: Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Essen (KWI)
Goethestraße 31
45128 Essen

12-14 October 2017

CfP ends: 31 May 2017

Feedback: End of July 2017

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Based on their analysis of the artistic critique of the 1960s, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello published their account on how originally oppositional demands have been turned into strategies in the “new spirit of capitalism” (2005 [fr. 1999]). One of the key concepts of artistic critique, namely ›creativity‹, has undergone the very development from an instrument of critique to a guiding principle in neoliberal economic systems. Like no other concept, ›creativity‹ has been researched from different perspectives during the last decades and finally became an object of criticism itself. Since the late 1990s, Angela McRobbie has analysed creativity as a regime of power and regulation in neoliberal economies, with regard to gender or popular culture, for instance, and discusses these relations as “*creativity dispositif*” in her most recent book (2015). This term has gained attention from a German-speaking research community mainly due to the study by the cultural sociologist Andreas Reckwitz (2012, engl. 2017). He examines the effects of the *creativity dispositif* both as a subjective desire and as a social imperative to be creative, which he finds to be characteristic of the present. Focusing on subjectification, Ulrich Bröckling’s (2007, engl. 2016) analysis of the “entrepreneurial self” describes a discursive formation subjugating individuals to constant self-optimisation in the fields of creativity, flexibility and projectification. Many empirical researchers, too, have shown an interest in the lives of cultural and creative workers, as has sociologist Alexandra Manske (e.g. 2016) against the background of inequality studies. Creative workers and their working conditions are also discussed on both theoretical and practical grounds: Bojana Kunst (2015) looks into specific time-structures and subjectivities in artists’ project-based work and Marion von Osten studies – at the interface of art and academia – the conditions of cultural production, their politics and technologies of the self in various projects like “kleines postfordistisches Drama” (kpD).

Hence, while some studies focus on the tremendous changes in the world of work from a genealogic or narratologic perspective, others analyse the living and working conditions within the framework of empirical research. Considering the very broad field of approaches to and positions on creativity and creativity research, the conference provides a platform for exchange and discussion between researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds and cultural workers.

Processes of subjectification in the creative sector are one initial starting point to discuss creativity as apparent paradigm determining life and work in “new capitalism”. Accordingly, conditions of contemporary creative labour are often held to be a model for the erosion of standard employment relationships. By the same token, creative subjects are considered to be ‘pioneers’ for the neoliberal society. Whether this is true and in how far the concept of creativity is thereby losing its critical potential or if the latter can be interpreted anew are major questions the conference wishes to address.

We welcome approaches from various disciplines and methodological backgrounds as well as application-oriented criticism (e.g. by organisations, initiatives or in form of activist and artistic positions). We invite to discuss along the following potential topics

- *“New capitalism”*: Which processes of subjectification – within and outside creative and knowledge sectors – are contributing to a further erosion of standard employment relationships? In how far can the standard employment relationship itself be understood as a discursive construction – especially if opposed to creativity and projectification? How can ideas like ‘work as the meaning of life’ and the creativity *dispositif* explain the interplay between deregulation, flexibilisation and precarity?
- *Reactions and alternatives to the creativity dispositif*: Can we imagine concepts of life, work and practices of subjectification beyond an imperative of voluntarily ‘being constantly creative’? Which meanings can we assign in this context to notions like non-work, unemployment and escapism? What role do traditional concepts of solidarity (e.g. representation by unions) have in opposition to newer forms of (temporary) organisation in networks? And how effective are they? In how far and by which means can the original intention of artistic critique be sustained?
- *Narratives and representations in media*: How do media narratives negotiate, criticise or construct subjects of creative labour and underlying structures? How do literature, film, television, popular culture etc. broach dramatic changes like flexibilisation, projectification or the blurring of boundaries between leisure and work by means of their very own ‘language’? Finally, how are they used for subversive strategies?
- *Creative writing of the self and its consequences*: In how far does creativity play a role as a resource for social recognition? Are there different facets of constructing identity and the way it is presented for instance in biographic story-telling, talent shows, social media or computer games? Can we find a relation between the creative writing of the self, social inclusion and health/well-being?
- *Creativity as a privilege? Intersectional approaches*: How do perspectives on race, class and gender play into analysing conditions of work and exploitation in the creative economy? Who can actually make use of creativity as a marker of distinction and means of expression? Do the creativity *dispositif* and its subjectifying practices affect women*, POC and ‘the working classes’ to different extents? How is reproduction work and work done by political activists affected by the rise of project work and the blurring of leisure and labour? Have race, class and gender eventually become productive categories of creativity themselves (for instance under the label of ‘diversity’)?

The time for presentations is limited to maximum 30 minutes, followed by a short debate. Please submit an abstract (300-400 words) and a short biographical note (max. 150 words) by 31 May 2017 to the organisation team: kritik-und-kreativitaet@uni-due.de. The general conference language is German. However, presentations in English are very welcomed. We are planning to publish a conference anthology. For further information please visit our website: https://www.uni-due.de/promotionskolleg_arbeit/konferenz_kreativitaet#English.

There is no conference registration fee. In case support for travel expenses and accommodation is needed, please do not hesitate to contact us. Although financial assistance cannot be guaranteed, we will try our best to provide individual solutions.