

Joint Sessions in Feminist Theory

Winter Term 2021-22

This series of events takes place as part of the seminar »Theory and Figurations of Gender Relations« (Freie Universität Berlin) and the doctoral program in Gender, Culture and Society (University of Helsinki). It is a cooperation between Esther von der Osten (Peter Szondi Institute of Comparative Literature, Freie Universität Berlin), Susanne Lettow (Margherita von Brentano Center for Gender Studies, Freie Universität Berlin) and Tuija Pulkkinen (Department of Cultures, Director doctoral program Gender, Culture and Society (SKY), University of Helsinki).

Tuesday, November 23rd, 2021, 4-6 pm (CET)

Françoise Vergès (Paris): *A feminist theory of violence*

In her talk, Françoise Vergès will develop a critique of the current police-judicial system and explore what could be a politics of protection that does not rely on the state, and thus on the police, the army, the court. Instead of protecting people from harm and violence, societies reproduce violent patterns, in particular with regard to certain segments of the population. Françoise Vergès proposes a critique of a certain universalist and carceral feminism and shows to what extent it is complicit in the perpetuation of patriarchal violence. She analyses the institutional structures that produce violence and constantly re-establish boundaries between those who have the right to be protected and those who do not have this right. It is therefore necessary to develop an autonomous politics of protection.

Françoise Vergès is a political scientist and an anti-racist feminist and the president of the association »Décoloniser les arts«. She was a member of the Center for Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths University College of London (2000-2007), head of the scientific and cultural team for a museum in Reunion Island (a »museum without objects«), Chair Global South(s) at Collège d'études mondiales, Paris and the chair of the French National Committee for the Memory and History of Slavery (2008-2012). She is interested in south-south artistic, cultural and political circulations, and currently in the neoliberal economy of predation and extractivism. She contributed to conversations on the decolonization of public space, reparation and museums, and is author of thirteen books, including *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, *Colonial Family Romance* and »*Metissage*« (1999). *Une théorie féministe de la violence* (2020), *Resolutely Black. Conversations with Aimé Césaire* (2020, french 2005), *Un féminisme décolonial* (2019, german translation 2021), *The wombs of women. Race, capitalism, feminism* (2020, french 2017), *Ruptures postcoloniales. Avec Nicolas Bancel, Florence Bernault, Pascal Blanchard, Ahmed Boubakeur et Achille Mbembe* (2010).

Join via: <https://zoom.us/j/94853621819?pwd=VUt0UkxzVUd4NHk2TzdldlljSlpXdz09>

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Tuesday, December 7th, 2021, 4-6 pm (CET)

Kelly Oliver (Vanderbilt University): *Affective Gaslighting*

Most feminist philosophers writing about gaslighting maintain that it is a type of epistemic injustice. That is to say, gaslighting undermines its target's status as a knower by making them question what they believe they know. In this chapter, I argue that limiting gaslighting to a form of epistemic injustice cannot adequately explain either unintentional gaslighting or the ways in which the targets of

gaslighting accept their deficit status as knowers and become complicit with their own gaslighting. Some feminist philosophers argue that there is a moral dimension to gaslighting whereby the target is made to feel immoral for questioning the reality of the perpetrator. Here, I argue that in addition to epistemic or moral dimensions, there is an affective dimension of gaslighting. The affective dimension is essential to its functioning, including the ways in which gaslighting undermines knowledge claims or moral standing. In other words, for gaslighting to work on either the epistemic or moral levels, it must be working on an affective level too. In addition, if gaslighting is unintentional, then there are unconscious dimensions to gaslighting that influence the beliefs and actions of both the perpetrators and the targets. Yet, to date, the gaslighting literature does not account for either the affective or unconscious dimensions of gaslighting, which are essential to understanding how gaslighting works.

Kelly Oliver is W. Alton Jones Professor of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University. She is the author of fifteen scholarly books, including, *Response Ethics* (Roman & Littlefield 2018), *Carceral Humanitarianism: The Logic of Refugee Detention* (University of Minnesota 2017); *Hunting Girls: Sexual Violence from The Hunger Games to Campus Rape*, (Columbia 2016); *Earth and World: Philosophy After the Apollo Missions*, (Columbia 2015). *Animal Lessons: How They Teach us to be Human* (Columbia 2009). She has also published three novels in *The Jessica James, Cowgirl Philosopher, Mystery Series*.

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Tuesday, January 18, 2022, 6-8 pm (CET)

Leticia Sabsay (London School of Economics): *Vulnerability, cruelty and the politics of hope*

In a political present marked by the ascendance of neo-authoritarianism, we seem to be witnessing a renewed political aesthetics of cruelty and hatred. Vulnerability, in this context, has oftentimes been weaponised to justify violence against some feminist organising that, in turn, has mobilised critical notions of vulnerability to stake a demand for justice. Vulnerability does not have a distinct political orientation; rather, it is the object of political dispute. In this talk, Leticia Sabsay proposes to examine myriad claims to vulnerability, focusing on the political aesthetics they evoke. She argues that when vulnerability is put to serve a political aesthetics of cruelty, it might point to the activation of a death drive that not only gets attached to otherwise life affirming ideals such as self-determination, freedom or integrity, but also propels the questioning of basic democratic principles. In light of these deadly times, many are filled with resignation, weariness and pessimism, while for others pessimism is a luxury they cannot afford. Either way –even if in the negative or as a constant present absence– hope haunts those fighting for their right to life, against destitution, violence, or countering what bell hooks calls “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.” The question remains, however, whether (and which) hopes might a feminist politics of vulnerability open up.

Leticia Sabsay is associate professor of gender and contemporary culture in the Department of Gender Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She is the author of *The Political Imaginary of Sexual Freedom* (2016), and, with Judith Butler and Zeynep Gambetti, she coedited *Vulnerability in Resistance* (2016). In Spanish, she has authored the books *Las normas del deseo: Imaginario sexual y comunicación* (2009) and *Fronteras sexuales: Espacio urbano, cuerpos y ciudadanía* (2011) and coedited, with Patricia Soley-Beltrán, *Judith Butler en disputa: Lecturas sobre la performatividad* (2012). She is coeditor, with Victoria Collis-Buthelezi and Natalia Brizuela, the *Critical South Book Series* (Polity); and with Sadie Wearing and Sumi Madhok, the book series *Thinking Gender in Transnational Times* (Palgrave).

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Tuesday, February 1st, 2022, 4-6 pm (CET)

Isabell Lorey (Academy of Media Arts, Cologne): *Democracy in the Present Tense. A Theory of the Political Present*

In the midst of the crises and threats to liberal democracy, Isabell Lorey develops a democracy in the present tense; one which breaks open political certainties and linear concepts of progress and growth. Her queer feminist political theory formulates a fundamental critique of masculinist concepts of the people, representation, institutions, and the multitude. In doing so, she unfolds an original concept of a presentist democracy based on care and interrelatedness, on the irreducibility of responsibilities—one which cannot be conceived of without social movements' past struggles and current practices.

Isabell Lorey is a Queer Studies Professor at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne and works for transversal (transversal.at), the publication platform of the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp). Among her publications are: *State of insecurity. Government of the precarious*, Verso, London/New York 2015; *Figuren des Immunen. Elemente einer politischen Theorie*. Diaphanes, Zürich 2011 and *Immer Ärger mit dem Subjekt. Theoretische und politische Konsequenzen eines juristischen Machtmodells: Judith Butler*. Edition diskord, Tübingen 1996. Her most recent book is *Democracy in the Present Tense. A Theory of the Political Present* (London: Verso 2021, German edition 2020). The Spanish translation will appear in 2022 (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limon and Malaga: subtextos).

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