

The Power of/in Academia: Critical Interventions in Knowledge Production and Society

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Knowledge production and social transformation are closely intertwined. Academic scholarship plays a crucial role in analyzing and critiquing social, economic, ecological, and political developments, while simultaneously, however, being inextricably linked to its social context and its inherent relations of power and domination. Scrutinizing the link between social critique and scholarship also entails the critical examination of the tools applied in analyzing social phenomena, which in turn lay the basis for academic social critique. Scientific methods of gaining knowledge not only co-constitute and shape the object of research, but also the kind of knowledge that is produced. The ontological and epistemic structure of knowledge production is, therefore, never given, but shaped by power relations.

Consequently, we ask: in what forms and on which normative basis can academia criticize society and can society criticize academia? How can critical perspectives on the role of academia in social processes be facilitated? What role does the methodological and ethical reflection of one’s procedures and practices play? Are research ethics the appropriate tool to challenge historically anchored and normalized relations of power and domination?

We invite you to consider these questions together and through an interdisciplinary gaze, focusing on the theory and practice of knowledge production. We also challenge the format of the academic conference as a performative form of knowledge dissemination and encourage alternative forms of presentation. There will also be the opportunity to discuss collectively generated questions of common concern in an open-space format.

The conference, which is co-organized by the PhD group ‘*Ethics and (Self-)Reflexivity in Qualitative Research*’, is geared towards young scholars from all disciplines, who want to discuss and reflect on critical research. In the interest of a shared basis for communication, we encourage you to prepare your contributions in English. Presentations can focus on empirical phenomena and (meta-)theoretical reflection, but we also welcome artistic performances that engage with knowledge production and social critique.

Possible topics for contributions are:

Models of critical theory construction

Besides the various strands of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, there are numerous other strands of critical theory, such as post-structuralist approaches, actor-network theory and postcolonial studies. How can these distinct schools of thought enter into a dialogue? Where are commonalities, where are differences?

Research ethics in theory and practice

Research practice continuously confronts researchers with ethical and methodological challenges. How can these be critically reflected on, and how does reflexivity affect the configuration of research processes? How can power relations and inequalities in research be identified and conceptualized; how can they be dealt with? What does (self-)critical and emancipatory research signify? Conversely, how can the ethical reflection of scientific practice be confronted with its shortcomings?

Power in research

Scholarship produces knowledge and concomitantly power effects. This implies, on the one hand, the hegemony of certain forms and practices of knowledge production in academia. On the other hand, academic scholarship produces power effects in relation to its environment. How can the relation between knowledge and power in academia be scrutinized theoretically and empirically? How do the power dynamics of knowledge production shape the processes of knowledge creation?

(De-)legitimizing forms of social critique

The hegemonic language of academia potentially excludes other forms and articulations of critique. How is academic social critique authorized? What practices of articulation, appropriation, and intervention in public debate can be observed, and how do they relate to academic social critique? What mechanisms of legitimation and delegitimation prevail?

The historicity of critical scholarship

The complexities of critical knowledge production and social relations are not merely part of the present, but a marker of human social organization in general. Laying the focus on this very historicity results in at least two pertinent questions. On the one hand, what new perspectives on current constellations can be gained through the comparison with past configurations of identity and alterity? On the other hand, what insights can be gained through diachronic analysis, or the situating of current discourses, actors, and their interrelations in changing historical contexts, thus emphasizing their historical constructedness?

Scholarship and the arts

Art is often portrayed as the 'Other' of academia. Departing from this commonplace, questions of mutual constitution arise. What does the aesthetic critique of academic knowledge production look like? Can the difference between artistic practice and academia be stabilized, where does it dissolve, and where does hybridity become productive? In what sense do aesthetic practices performatively challenge the logics of institutionalized academia?

We anticipate your abstracts of max. 350 words, keywords, and a short bio-note by 1 July 2015 at graduateconference@normativeorders.net.

Childcare will be available during the conference. Authors of accepted papers can apply for a travel grant. Further details will be given in future correspondence. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at graduateconference@normativeorders.net.