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ABSTRACT BOOK

NORDIC SUMMER UNIVERSITY

Circle 6: What is critical about critical theory? Bridging the gap between social science and philosophy

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Andersen, Lars Erslev: Decolonizing philosophy

As the philosopher Chiara Bottici points out in a forthcoming article, even intellectuals and researchers who reject white supremacy in the study of international relations are deeply influenced by mythology that reproduces narratives about the supremacy of Western philosophy: It is the tradition of Western philosophy, with its logic, concepts, and treaties, that sets the norm for what philosophy is: If thinking does not refer to it, it is not philosophy. If non-Western traditions of thinking about the world are accepted in the Western academic strongholds, they are parked in plots such as area or hyphenated studies. 'Native American philosophy' and 'feminist philosophy' can find their way to the universities, but do not find a place in the canon of established philosophy. Bottici shows how Greek architecture in New York, evident in buildings that house federal institutions, banks, and libraries, signals that they are fruits of Western civilization and libraries contain the "Big Books" in the Western canon. According to myth, it begins under classical Greek skies, where the ideas and values of Western civilization are developed, creating an idea and mission of freedom that has taken root in the West and must be spread to the whole world.

By building on Bottici's studies as well as the theory of political myths I developed in my book, *The American Mission. Mythology and Power*, the paper examines how the myth of the white – masculine – supremacy of Western philosophy still works mythologically in today's philosophical disciplines and history of ideas departments at universities. It does so through the prioritization that takes place in the development of curricula and the prioritization of literature and traditions that are given a place in the teaching and research. I am particularly interested in following the idea of a 'Judeo-Christian tradition', which was first developed as a performance in the mid-1800s by Christian Zionists in England and the United States, but which today in Western narratives of the history of ideas is presented with roots back in ancient Greek thought. They are in themselves mythology that contribute to intellectually reinforcing white supremacy in philosophy and international politics. The notion of the Greek polis as the foundation of a universal civilization based on the values that become Western, is itself a myth created in early modern Europe. With Enlightenment thinkers and religious fundamentalists wandering across the Atlantic, bringing with them the founding western myths that end up being cemented in pillared temples in the form of elitist university libraries, which keeps the Great Books and teaches the world that the best thinking is Western in the tradition of Greece and therefore that Western civilization is superior to all others. That mythology is still at work in philosophy and must be explored if Western thinking is to be decolonized.

Bertilsson, Linus: Swedish History of Ideas and Critical Theory: Gunnar Aspelin, Sven-Eric Liedman and the Analysis of Ideology

In a recent article the Swedish historian of ideas Anton Jansson presented Swedish History of Ideas as a unique research tradition, that, since its inception in 1936, has grown into a multifaceted and popular academic subject. In my presentation, I 1) inquire into what affinities can be found with critical theory within this tradition; and 2) which resources can be found here for a critical theory of our present time.

The notion of "critical theory" used here harks back to the early Frankfurt School. I argue for a threefold concept of "critique", deriving from 1) the Marxian critique of capitalist society; 2) the critical philosophies of Immanuel Kant and the German Idealists; and 3) the diagnosis of a present crisis.

While the explicit reception of critical theory within Swedish History of Ideas is scant, I argue that clear affinities do exist within at least one strand of this tradition – the line from Gunnar Aspelin through his student Sven-Eric Liedman. I show that their interdisciplinary interest in the history of philosophy, the social determination of ideas and Marxian notions and politics brings them close to the Frankfurters, while their use of the methodological notion of "contextualization" typical to Swedish History of Ideas give their programme a more empirical bent. I present the analysis of ideology developed especially by Liedman, with concepts such as "frozen ideology", as a major achievement within the field.

In conclusion, I argue that our own present critical situation, with a tendentially globalized "public sphere", the dismantling of the welfare state and the resurgence of far-right rhetoric, calls for a renewed critical theory of ideas. The achievement of Aspelin and Liedman makes it possible to more accurately determine what's new in this situation, while their methodological approach points to further theoretical and empirical research into the social functioning of ideas today.

Bolte, Larissa: Sustainable Technology: A Natural History Account

What makes for a sustainable technology? A popular answer goes like this: A sustainable technology fulfils a set of sustainability criteria. That is, the answer lies in better technological design. Despite the popularity of this view, I want to argue that it is unconvincing from a critical perspective and, moreover, that the reasons why shed a critical light on contemporary conceptions of technology, even, to an extent, on those inspired by critical theory.

In my talk, I would like to approach “sustainable technology” through the lens of Adorno’s notion of natural history. I understand this notion as an invitation to interrogate how our ideas of the natural and the historical, the necessary and the contingent, shape our horizon of action. In the context of my talk, this will mean historicizing the notion of natural limits, but also construing technology as (also) a force of nature.

Regarding the former, I cannot come to a conclusive overview of which limits are actually natural and which ones are socially constructed, i.e., historical. This would misconstrue the point. The idea is to lay bare the social function of positing certain limits as natural, i.e. as beyond the realm of human agency and therefore beyond remedy by social reorganization. The example of Malthusianism will serve me as illustration.

Regarding the latter, I want to put a question mark next to the idea of technology as the sphere of human agency. Nevertheless, I do not want to return to essentialist conceptions of technology “with a capital T”. Instead, I would like to suggest that a focus on technological design obscures why technology can, in a real sense, not be changed on a design level. The experience of the Appropriate Technology movement as well as a Marxist argument will underpin this point.

Carleheden, Mikael: Toward a critique of the predominance of “theory-ology” in Nordic critical theory

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Theorizing can mean different things. One way of theorizing is the study of the works of theorists. It is exegesis rather than heuristics. John Levi Martin calls it “theory-ology”. Of interest for this type of theorizing is the logic of arguments, how the thinking evolved, and the relations to ancestors and contemporaries. It can further be about its significance, relevance, usefulness, and originality. This kind of theorizing has since the end of the 80s been heavily criticized. Martin even claims that today “everybody hates” it. However, this criticism has a long history in sociology. Already in the 50s, Herbert Blumer criticized social theory of this kind for comprising “a world of its own, inside of which it feeds on itself”. This kind of theorizing has without doubt also been prominent within critical theory and one may claim that in Nordic critical theory it has even been the dominating type. Walter Korpi once talked about social theorists of this kind as “Pegasus-groomers”. Nordic critical theory has largely been about introducing, commenting and explicating the work of “pegasuses” from the outside (mostly from Germany and France). There are very few examples of Nordic critical theorists who might be said to have had a significant position in international critical theory – neither through theory developments, nor through theory applications. One reason might be the predominance of theory-ology. I will in a first step take the Habermas-reception in the Nordic countries as example and then, secondly, discuss the validity of the criticism of theory-ology. Critical theory is however a special kind of theorizing and I will in a third step define critical theory in a broad and abstract sense as relying on an internal relation between theory and practice. In the final step, I will transfer my conclusions of step two on critical theory.

Cassegård, Carl: Andreas Malm, climate heroism, and eco-pessimism

This paper critically discusses the growth of climate heroism in recent climate activism, as exemplified by the Swedish eco-Marxist scholar and activism Andreas Malm. Climate heroism is a reaction to perceived ongoing climate catastrophe advocating the supreme value of the subject asserting its worth in the face of adversity through struggle and courageous action. In Malm's writings it defines itself in opposition to eco-modernism as well as the eco-pessimist position associated with melancholic withdrawal. Its opposition to the latter is of particular interest: while climate heroism and eco-pessimism appear to be diametrically opposed, they share as their point of departure a sense that the world is in a catastrophic state and that this calls on us to fundamentally rethink existing norms and beliefs. Importantly, they share a distrust against the present and the desire to step back from existing norms and beliefs, which are felt to lack truth. In this paper, I argue that the environmentalist orientations associated with climate fatalism and eco-pessimism are not as incompatible as they may seem and that they both contain ideological pitfalls that can only be avoided if they cease to be viewed as wholly separate from each other.

Daechsel, Stefano Mazzilli: The question concerning biotechnology in societies of genetic control

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The scientific and technological innovations of the past 75 years in the fields of molecular biology and genetics have given us unprecedented access to the genetic elements of life, both human and nonhuman. This molecular revolution in biology has also fueled the development of biotechnologies that harness the interactive properties of naturally occurring molecules, such as DNA and RNA, to intervene in biological systems at the molecular scale. Genetic engineering and DNA-based biosensors are but two examples of a changing biotechnological landscape that poses major political and philosophical questions for critical social theory. As my title suggests, there is a sense in which recent biotechnological advancements point to both a molecularization of the process identified by Martin Heidegger in his essay ‘The question concerning technology,’ and a technological expression of the control societies Gilles Deleuze proclaimed in his ‘Postscript on the Societies of Control.’ In this paper, I put these two major texts into dialogue to examine the implications of molecular biotechnologies for contemporary critical social theory. Drawing on the concept of general organology proposed by Bernard Stiegler, I argue that molecular biotechnologies reveal a deep connection between biology (natural organs) and technology (artificial organs) that has always been bound up with social organ-izations. Molecular biotechnologies force us to confront biology at the molecular scale as both a site of political contestation and a crucial component in the structuring and becoming of societies.

Danish Society for Marxist Studies (Members of the Executive Committee): Organising for radical scholarship in Denmark

In this presentation, we will discuss our experiences with organising a yearly conference under the banner of Marxism, critical theory, and radical scholarship in Denmark over the past decade. First, we will briefly present how we have organised it, including reflections on securing a stable, long-term volunteer-based structure, and the various choices we have made during the course of the conference's existence. Second, we will consider some of the lessons we have learned from tackling (with varying success) issues of inclusivity in terms of gender, race, and class, but also age, disciplinary traditions, international diversity, and institutional affiliation. In light of the discussion of the international diversity at our conferences, we will also reflect on how we have handled the expansion of what began as a local Danish event into an international one with a special focus on our efforts to connect Danish scholars with peers in the other Nordic countries. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we will point to what we believe - based on 10 years of conference organising - characterises Nordic critical theorising today. What topics are radical scholars in the Nordics interested in? Which traditions do they come from, and how do these traditions intersect and interact? Especially pertinent to us as organisers is, of course, the standing of Marx and Marxian modes of theorising, and especially the ways in which this tradition learns (and must lean!) from other traditions of critical scholarship such as postcolonial theory, feminist and queer theory, disability studies, poststructuralism, and critical race theory.

Deland, Mats: Some thoughts on recent developments within attitude research on authoritarianism and right wing extremism with examples from the German *Mitte* studies

Probably the most impressive empirical works done by the first generation of critical theorists were the different studies of authoritarian attitudes among the working class conducted by Erich Fromm in the early 1930s (partly published in *Autorität und Familie* in 1936). by Friedrich Pollock, Leo Löwenthal et al in 1943-1944 (Antisemitism within the US Labor force; never published) and the seminal *The Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno et al (1950). In these studies, attitude scales were combined with psychological tests and interviews. In later studies, conducted after re-establishing the centre in Frankfurt after the war, particularly the scales were further developed.

After giving a short introduction as to what characterizes this tradition, I will talk about how the tradition was picked up by the "Mitte" study groups in Leipzig and Bielefeld in the early 2000s and give an orientation on recent developments within this field.

Engstam, Anna: How to Put Theory under the Microscope? A comparative analysis of three anti-positivist methods for studying theoretical knowledge, constructed Joachim Israel, Carl-Göran Heidegren, and Thomas Brante (respectively).

I samhällen där vetenskaplig kunskap generellt hålls för den högsta kunskapen och vetenskapare generellt tillmäts den största epistemiska auktoriteten kan gränsdragningar mellan vetenskap och ovetenskap ha långtgående sociala och samhälleliga konsekvenser. Mot bakgrund därav är det föga förvånande att kritiska teoretiker intresserat sig för kunskaps- och vetenskapsteori och därtill ifrågasatt den gängse bilden av vetenskapen såsom ”vår” kungsväg till framsteg, tack vare rationell och politiskt neutral produktion av säker, allmännyttig och således oproblematiserad kunskap – en vetenskapsbild som positivistiskt och empiristiskt orienterade vetenskapare deltar i att upprätthålla. Att undersöka på vilka grunder – explicita och implicita, deskriptiva och normativa – som vetenskap i praktiken bedrivs kan rentav ses som en av den kritiska teorins centrala uppgifter. I denna anda har sociologen och marxisten Michael Burawoy lyft fram två frågor vilka i princip alltid kan och bör ställas då teoretisk och/eller empirisk kunskap kollektivt höjs över alternativ kunskap: ”För vem?” (”For Whom?”) och ”Till vad?” (”For What?”). Frågan är dock hur vi kan bilda oss djupare kunskaper om objekt av detta slag; till exempel anges i regel vare sig tilltänkt publik eller bakomliggande kunskapsintressen i konventionella vetenskapliga alster. Vi tycks behöva något slags metod! Min presentation tar sin början i 60- och 70-talets ”uppror” mot positivismen, där jag fångar upp lundasociologen Joachim Israels positivismkritik. Denna rymmer en vetenskapsteori om det ofrånkomliga genomslaget av förvetenskapliga och i regel outtalade teorier om människans natur, samhällets natur och förhållandet mellan människor och samhälle (till exempel människors möjligheter att skapa sin framtid). Vidare uppmärksammar jag kunskaps-/vetenskapsteoretiska bidrag formulerade av två andra, lite senare lundaprofiler, nämligen Carl-Göran Heidegren och Thomas Brante. Jag vill mena att Heidegren, i inledningen till sin bok *Antropologi, samhällsteori och politik*, konstruerar en representativ modell, till synes i Israels efterföljd, och att han därigenom skapar ett fönster för att se på teori på ett nytt sätt; tilläggas kan att detta tilltag på många sätt (förvånande nog) ligger i linje med Brantes idé om riktig vetenskaplighet. Var för sig har de tre konstruerat vad som kan beskrivas som antipositivistiska mikroskop för att studera och analysera socialteori och samhällsteori. Dessa är intressanta att se närmare på!

Enquist Källgren, Karolina: Constellation capitalism: on social form and the new as praxis

The development of capitalism since the between-the-wars period can best be described in terms of constellation capitalism. The concept has been coined by Davis Harvey (2010) and I use it as a diagnosis of the configuration of contemporary capitalism (Enquist Källgren, forthcoming, 2026). Drawing on the economic analysis of Ernst Mandel (1975) and Anwar Shaikh (2016) I argue that constellation capitalism has developed in parallel with the Neo-liberal thought complex and that it has been strengthened by the expansion since the 1950s of private equity and venture capital. Constellation capitalism describes a state of capitalism in which the commodity form dominates other social forms, but does not fully determine them. Further, constellation capitalism not only contains inner tensions between social forms, it is dependent on and survives through them. In constellation capitalism, relatively autonomous social forms are what makes the promise of an ever-expanding market possible. I argue that the concept can explain current political polarization in radicalized but short-lived counter-movements. It can further be used to develop new kinds of praxis to actualize ideals for the future. Such a praxis entails identifying points of tensions within the social form – visible in what I call aesthetic objects – but also working with aesthetic objects to clarify future goals and imaginaries. I develop the argument by engaging with several authors in a broad tradition of critical theory, including the otherwise largely overlooked Mexican author Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez. From the perspective of constellation capitalism, I reinterpret the concept of social form (Alfred Sohn-Rethel and Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez), aesthetic objects (Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin) and praxis (Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez).

Gammelgaard, Signe Leth: Abstract

This paper is part of a larger project that cross-reads the interwar dystopia with concurrent developments in economic thinking and economic theory. The project at large explores why these kinds of narratives, and the forms of critique they invoke, were so prevalent during this period, and connects it with the early thoughts on the welfare state. It thereby examines some historical premises for critical thinking, centered on the Scandinavian version of the welfare state.

The present paper will examine the patterns and regulation of consumption in Ayn Rand's *Anthem* (1938), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and Karin Boye's *Kallocain* (1940). It will compare the importance of material goods for happiness in *Anthem* to socialist ideas on consumption and asceticism in the 1920s USSR, and juxtapose to Huxley's view of consumption as a dulling of the mind, contextualized by regulation of consumption through standard of living budgets in the UK in the period. Lastly, Boye's vision of regulated consumer patterns will be cross-read with the regulation proposed in *Kris i befolkningsfrågan* by Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, as well as efforts to educate consumers to make rational choices in part through the consumer's co-operatives. The three literary works thereby facilitate a comparative discussion on the role of consumption patterns in relation to new social models during these decades, and explores the ideas about human freedom, development, and contentment related to such regulation.

Garcia, Armando: Exploring Police-Minority Relations in the Nordics through a critical ethnographic approach

This paper examines research on police-minority relations in the Nordic countries, with a particular focus on Iceland, addressing underexplored themes in ethnic minorities' encounters with law enforcement. As part of an early-stage research project grounded in a phenomenological ethnographic framework, it presents a systematic review of literature on systemic biases, procedural justice, police gaze, and the intersectionality of identities in shaping perceptions of policing. Special attention is given to the interplay of race, class (e.g., social status), and gender (e.g., masculinities) in Iceland, situating local perceptions within broader Nordic and global conjunctures, and considering the possibility of a critical triangulation of these perceptions.

While the Nordic countries are renowned for egalitarian values, critical scholarship reveals significant disparities in the policing of ethnic minorities. This review explores racial profiling, over-policing, the criminalization of migrants and refugees, and the influence of migration histories (e.g., colonial legacies), securitization policies, and political discourse in shaping societal perceptions of minority groups and racialized policing practices. Early preliminary findings indicate that factors such as residency status, class, and resources significantly shape policing perceptions in Iceland and other Nordic countries. Using an intersectional lens and postcolonial insights, this paper examines policing as an embodiment of state power, exploring how authority is enacted and negotiated in everyday encounters. It stresses the importance of centering minority perspectives and fostering equitable, community-engaged policing strategies. This work lays the foundation for future research on governance, identity, and power relations in multi-ethnic societies, advancing critical discussions on policing and proposing possible theoretical frameworks for this line of inquiry.

Grahn, Jonas: The Johnson-Forest Tendency, radicalising Gunnar Myrdal's American Dilemma

One of the studies that influenced US policies on race and integration the most after the second world war is Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* from 1944. At the time of publication, it received much praise from leading intellectuals, including W. E. B. Du Bois and the novelist Richard Wright. In this article, however, the author explores a neglected Marxist critique of Myrdal's work by Raya Dunayevskaya, who then worked closely with C. L. R. James and Grace Lee Boggs in the Johnson-Forest Tendency (JFT). In addition to criticising Myrdal's liberal position, the JFT developed a critique of class reductionist Marxists. Hence, this article examines the JFT's critique of Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* as a resource to advance further Marxist debates on the relationship between race and class today.

Granberg, Magnus & Hammer, Tor: Gender and value form: Revisiting Gullvåg Holter on gender as forms of value

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The paper revisits a particular juncture in the Nordic reception of the “new reading” of Marx’s critique of political economy and the independent contribution by radical Nordic scholars to this reading and adjacent theoretical fields. In particular, we reconstruct the analysis of “gender as forms of value” developed by Østein Gullvåg Holter in the eighties and nineties. The existence of a Nordic reception of the new reading is little known today, even less so the Nordic value form analysis of gender and the “marriage market”. But from the perspective of the contemporary revival of Marxist feminism, which has made significant contributions to analyzing the interrelations between gender oppression and capitalism, Gullvåg Holter can be seen as a pioneer. Indeed, we argue that Marxist feminism in important ways still lags the Nordic value form analysis of gender, which went further in its effort to correlate different gender frames and value forms to the social relations of commodity production. This comparative analysis by Nordic critical theorists yielded a finely grained account of gender as a mode of exchange, distinct from but interrelated with the social relations of commodity exchange, which could significantly contribute to contemporary Marxist feminism. More generally, this discussion indicates how a reconstructed Nordic tradition of critical theory may contribute to developing new social analyses and new vistas of political emancipation.

Hallström, Ina: Endo Politics: How Identity Obstructs the Recognition of Endometriosis

A key moment in many illness experiences is reaching a diagnosis. A diagnosis provides both medical intelligibility and recognition of medical needs. For those with endometriosis (“endo”), a chronic disease characterized by pain and infertility, the journey to diagnosis often involves significant struggles. Endo is commonly dismissed and normalized as mere menstrual pain, leading to substantial delays in diagnosis. In this paper, based on interviews with 15 individuals diagnosed with endometriosis in Sweden, I examine the difficulties these individuals face in their pursuit of diagnosis. More specifically, I explore how their quest for diagnosis and treatment leads to a struggle for recognition on both the individual and collective levels, which I refer to as “endo politics.”

Understanding endo politics as a struggle for recognition raises important questions about the role of identity in this struggle. Endo is a gendered condition and feminist concern, but does this imply that identity, specifically gender, is the “object” of recognition? A recent debate between Judith Butler and Axel Honneth regarding the theorization of recognition, identity, and their roles in social movements provides a useful starting point for this discussion. Honneth proposes a distinction between “recognition” in a cognitive sense and a normative sense, while Butler introduces the concept of “recognizability” to explain how intelligibility impacts recognition.

Drawing from this debate and the experiences shared by interviewees, I argue that while identity may not be the primary object of recognition, it motivates the struggle by obstructing the recognition of their needs for diagnosis and treatment. This is illustrated by highlighting three key moments that lead to political mobilization for the interviewees: (I) *Developing a fighting spirit*, (II) *Becoming a “we,”* and (III) *Struggling to be included*.

Hamnell, Bruno: Historizing the Cultural Wars: The Reception of the Far Right's "Usual Suspects" in Sweden

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A key strategy of the contemporary far right is polarization through demonization. The far right portrays its opponents as a unified group comprising "mainstream media," government officials, educators, and scholars in the humanities and social sciences. The ideology attributed to this diverse group is often labeled as political correctness, wokeism, liberal leftism, or cultural Marxism. According to the far right, this ideology—allegedly highly influential and accused of shifting from traditional Marxist socioeconomic issues to cultural concerns—is said to aim at destroying Western society. The alleged architects of this project are typically a small, disparate group of leftist intellectuals, such as Georg Lukács, the Frankfurt School, Antonio Gramsci, Rudi Dutschke, and Saul Alinsky.

Rather than dismissing the far right's narrative as a conspiracy theory (which it is), I propose turning it into a historiographic investigation. If this small group of leftist thinkers has indeed had a profound influence on society, their impact should be empirically traceable. My presentation will explore this possibility, focusing on a preliminary study of the far right's "usual suspects" in Sweden. I hypothesize that the Swedish far right has imported its understanding of the cultural wars' philosophical foundations from American ideologues such as Pat Buchanan, Paul Weyrich, and William Lind, mediated through Breitbart News. If this hypothesis holds, it warrants a future investigation of the reception of these figures within the Swedish far right.

Hörnqvist, Magnus: A critical theory of desire and the self-clarification of struggles

As part of a larger project on desire, I want to discuss the emancipatory claim of critical theory. Which criteria should a critical theory of desire satisfy to be critical? Marx suggested that critical theory should contribute to the self-clarification of struggles and wishes of the age. That is what set critical theory apart from critical social science: the affirmative move and the linkage to struggles broadly conceived. Transferred to my particular topic, a critical theory of desire would play along with existing movements and identify the conditions under which desire liberates from rather than reinforces power and inequality. Here, I will take the opportunity to discuss different approaches to the affirmative, transcending move – what that crucial criteria might mean.

Loman, M.: Positive positivist possibilities within Nordic Critical Theory?

It is almost impossible to address the Nordic countries without at some point mentioning the welfare state. A project made possible by some combination of realpolitik, class collaboration, exclusion, and general trust in the potential of technology (Kaijser et.al, 2024). Recognition of different interests, the immense complexity of societal affairs, and the precarity of social arrangements may lie at the heart of the relative successes of this project.

Can we reconstruct the more utopian strands of theory from within the history of Nordic democratic socialism? Concepts such as Funktionssocialism or Löntagarfonder may be re-imagined and updated with the technological developments, particularly regarding computational power that has occurred since they were last relevant in mind.

This would not only be a technological question, but one contingent on convincing theoretical frameworks. Multiple strategies are conceivable, either bottom-up initiatives where the micro level is prioritized (Härdin, 2021). Alternatively governing models where the (re)construction of synergies between social projects with redistributive aims and capital that is directed from above may also be considered. This techno-theoretical development may find good ground within Nordic critical theory. The relative technological and democratic literacy in the nordics coupled with insights from scholars in fields such as systems theory, futures studies, and critical theory could yield benefits both for social and ecological sustainability. Theorisation regarding these questions would also be needed in relation to the impact of technologies could have on different spheres of everyday life.

Introducing a social analysis that shines a light on where the possibilities for experimenting with new computationally intensive models of resource allocation is hence suggested. NCT can possibly take up the challenge of providing both vision and facilitating learning processes and dissemination of new models of resource allocation through theorisation.

Keywords: Funktionssocialism, Cybernetic systems, Machine learning, Democratic socialism, futures

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Molin, Emma: On experience as the object of critique

Recent years has witnessed a return to Frankfurt-oriented critical theory in the face of climate change. Lauri Lahikainen's *Individual Responsibility for Climate Change: a Social Structural Account* and Carl Cassegård's *Toward a Critical Theory of Nature* are two (very different) Nordic examples of such a return. A third example is my own dissertation-in-becoming, which situates itself in a critical theoretical context and explores Hegel's critique of ordinary consciousness—particularly his critique of soritical thinking as an expression of ordinary consciousness—as resource for critiquing the way in which climate change is represented as a moral problem.

For this particular workshop, I would like to explore two, at times, overlooked areas in traditional critical theory and contemporary critical-theoretical work on climate change alike: namely decolonial thought and experience as something also in need of critical attention. More specifically, I seek to mobilize the work of Aimé Césaire along with Hegel's critique of the immediate as the commonsensical to direct the critical gaze toward experience itself. The question motivating the inquiry is whether there is a tendency to forget that the bourgeoisie, too, experience? And if an all too uncritical endorsement of 'our' experience runs the risk of obscuring whose experience is being theorized—something which in turn risks reproducing privilege rather than resisting it? To concretize the discussion, I will focus on the experience of surprise or sense of newness before ecological destruction.

In the wider context of developing and reflecting on the possibility of a Nordic critical theory, which I think is exciting, my hope is that such an inquiry may contribute to building a critical context that is sensitive toward who represents this North and 'our' experiences and oriented toward reflection on the self as a crucial aspect of emancipation.

Nyström, Anna: How can the ethical concept of reparation contribute to a critique of repressive penal policies? / Hur kan det etiska begreppet reparation bidra till en kritik av repressiv kriminalpolitik?

I argue that Judith Butler's philosophy of the subject, which views the subject as interdependent and capable of reparation, provides a critical alternative to our conventional understanding of punishment and imprisonment. For Butler, reparation serves as an ethical stance that the subject can practice to manage ambivalence and regulate destructive impulses, including the desire to punish and inflict suffering in response to harm. To support my argument, I first outline Butler's critique of the subject as sovereign and provide an overview of their philosophical discussion of the legal subject, which is typically modelled on an economic understanding of human relations. I then provide a brief description of Butler's critique of the prison system as supporting and giving vent to human destructiveness by causing suffering through punishment. Next, I highlight how Butler draws on Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theory to conceptualize the subject as interdependent rather than sovereign and ambivalent rather than economic. In my interpretation, Klein's theory enables Butler to articulate an ethical stance centred on repair that helps the subject manage the ambivalence between love and hate, care and destructiveness, in social bonds. Finally, I raise some questions regarding whether and, if so, how Butler's concept of reparation could be applied in practice, at both the subjective and institutional levels, as an alternative to current governmental policies in Sweden that prioritize increased punitive measures.

Mitt argument är att Judith Butlers filosofi om subjektet som ömsesidigt beroende och förmöget till reparation utgör ett kritiskt alternativ till hur vi vanligtvis tänker kring straff och fängelse. Reparation, menar jag, utgör hos Butler en etisk inställning som subjektet kan praktisera för att hantera ambivalens och reglera sina impulser till destruktivitet – inklusive lusten att straffa och orsaka lidande för skada gjord. För att underbygga mitt argument presenterar jag först kortfattat Butlers kritik av subjektet som suveränt, samt ger en översikt över hans filosofiska diskussion av rättssubjektet som modellerat på en ekonomisk modell för mänskliga relationer. Sedan beskriver jag (översiktligt) hur Butler kritiserar fängelsesystemet för att understödja och ge utlopp för mänsklig destruktivitet genom att med straff orsaka lidande. Därefter lyfter jag fram hur Butler använder sig av Melanie Kleins psykoanalytiska teori för att artikulera subjektet som ömsesidigt beroende istället för suveränt samt ambivalent istället för ekonomiskt. Enligt min tolkning hjälper Kleins teori Butler att artikulera en etisk inställning i form av reparation som hjälper subjektet att hantera sin ambivalens mellan kärlek och hat, omsorg och destruktivitet, i sociala band. Avslutningsvis reser jag några frågor kring om och i så fall hur Butlers reparationsbegrepp skulle kunna få en funktion i praktiken, på både subjekts- och institutionsnivå, som alternativ till nuvarande regeringspolitik i Sverige för straffskärpningar.

Phillips, Kim Pedersen: Attention As A Concept For Critical Theory In The Nordics

Iris Murdoch's notion of a caring and loving attention, which she borrows from Simone Weil (Murdoch 1970), has gained new interest in the Nordics. It is appealed to as a normative ideal to strive towards, often as part of a defense of certain forms of literature which are argued to be conducive to achieving such attention, and as a starting point for a critique of current social practices, which are taken to hinder the achievement of such attention (Bordsgård et al. 2024, Moi 2017, Mollerin 2016). This paper takes this development as a starting point, but extends it in several ways. First, it connects Murdoch's notion to the critical theory of the Frankfurt school, particularly to the work of Theodor W. Adorno. Murdoch's notion of attention is broadly individualistic (Mole 2024), and she does not properly address the ways in which our mental lives, including our attention, is shaped by social forces, particularly those present in capitalist society which Adorno highlights (e.g. Adorno 1994). I support the claim that caring and loving attention must be achieved largely through social means, and not primarily individualistically through e.g. engagement with works of art, as Murdoch suggests. Second, it connects Murdoch's notion recent work in analytic philosophy on the connection between attention and value (Gardiner 2022, Nguyen 2024), which highlights how our attention is shaped by techno-social systems, and how attention in turn shape our values. With these extensions in hand, the paper argues that the combination of Iris Murdoch's moral philosophy and Adorno's critical theory provides a good starting point for critical theory in the Nordics.

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Plesner, Åsa: Time to care? How Temporal Control Practices Shape Care Work.

Critical accounting studies have documented how control tools are implicated in the conflict between capital and labor. Through purportedly historical shifts and across purportedly different settings, the dynamic seems similar. Managerialism keeps being excessive and intrusive, triggering continued ambivalence from workers: simultaneous compliance and resistance. This paper offers a new critical perspective on control in organizations, drawing on an ethnography investigating the control of care workers' time-use during shifts. The case organization delivers home care to elderly people in a small Scandinavian municipality. The central research question for this study is: How are temporal conditions for care work controlled, by whom, and with what consequences for care quality?

The study finds that care workers act to control care based on a sophisticated understanding of temporal requirements for care work, whereas digital control tools and decision-makers who are distanced from the daily work operate on more reductive understandings of time and temporal requirements. While digital control tools automate the assurance of time for preparation and physical assistance, care workers and planners add considerations for continuity and flexibility. These additions, the study argues, improve the quality of care.

This leads the study to conclude that care workers perform significant, if invisibilized and overlooked, control work. Acknowledging workers as controllers suggests a reconceptualization of control in some forms of work. Control is not only a managerial activity, but a process where workers and their knowledges 'make up the difference' between management and production. The article addresses two implications. For critical control research, it proposes new lines of inquiry into the role of control in non-alienating work. For critical control researchers, it suggests the challenging task of articulating an alternative to naive functionalism and cynical rejection.

Ramsay, Anders: The presence-absence of utilitarianism in classical critical theory. Toward a critical theory of contemporary ethics

In the Nordic countries, as elsewhere, medical ethics are from time to time intensely debated. Research programs are launched on medical ethics and different philosophical schemes are competing on offering practical solutions for the ethical problems of modern medicine. In modern, highly developed secular states it seems as if utilitarianism (or utilitarian consequentialism) has become a salient and maybe even dominant trend in medical ethics. The debate about the Swedish policy in the pandemics 2020 is one of the last examples. Here, a utilitarian politics were put into practice, according to several researchers and to Swedish moral philosophers of medical ethics themselves.

Utilitarianism of course is criticized from various camps, such as Kantian deontology and classical Aristotelian virtue ethics. In this paper I want look at what classical critical theory has to offer a critique on contemporary ethics and what explanation it has on the dominance of utilitarianism. My point of departure is that when it comes to moral philosophy, there are some gaps in classical critical theory ("the Frankfurt School") that need to be filled:

First, none of the foremost representatives developed a moral philosophy. Adorno planned one, as his "third critique", but did not accomplish it. What we have is his lecture series from 1963, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, which, read together with his other works, (particularly *Negative Dialectics* and *Minima Moralia*) gives a good insight to his thinking about moral philosophy. There are also Adorno scholars that have picked up and followed this attempt, often centering on the new moral imperative formulated by Adorno to act in such a way that Auschwitz should not be repeated.

Second, classical critical theory does not explicitly talk about the dominant trend in contemporary ethics, utilitarianism. In his lectures, Adorno is mainly preoccupied with Kant and Hegel. Horkheimer, in an early text, talks about utilitarianism as a psychology, but not as an ethics. However, in texts like *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Horkheimers *Eclipse of Reason* it is repeatedly emphasized how reason is becoming calculating and directed towards utilitarian goals, without reference to actual utilitarian philosophy. It looks as if utilitarianism is, in an odd way, both present and absent in critical theory. In my paper I want to investigate this peculiar presence-absence.

Rekola, Juho: Reception and history of Theodor W. Adorno's texts in Finland

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My presentation offers a historical overview of the academic reception of Theodor W. Adorno's texts and books in Finland. I will also present a historical timeline of translations of his texts into Finnish. With this overview it is possible to assess the reception of Adorno's thoughts and his legacy for critical theory in Finland.

In Finland interest on Adorno has been on the rise in recent years even though still a handful of people from different academic disciplines research him. When looking at the academic reception of Adorno certain aspects of his thought stand out. Researchers and students have been especially interested on the aesthetic, philosophical and cultural critical texts by Adorno for example *Ästhetische Theorie* and *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (translated in 2006 and 2008). Unfortunately, the political, sociological and social theoretical aspects of his thought have been somewhat ignored until recently even though Jussi Kotkavirta translated one of Adorno's texts called *Soziologie und Empirische Forschung* already in 1991.

Probably the earliest translations of Adorno's texts were translated excerpts by Kotkavirta and Esa Sironen from the book *Ästhetische Theorie*, released in a collection called *Moderni/Postmoderni* (Modern/Postmodern) in 1989 by the publisher Tutkijaliitto. After this year there have been handful of translations Adorno's texts, books and lectures published by publishers such as Tutkijaliitto, Vastapaino and Niin & Näin -magazine. When looking at the history of different translations of Adorno's texts and research on them a certain university and a group of names stand out and that is University of Jyväskylä. Some important names are Kotkavirta and Sironen but also Ilona Reiners and Erkki Vainikkala. In recent years there has been new upsurge of new translations. For example, one of Adorno's major titles called *Minima Moralia* was translated and published this year and a collection of lectures will be published next year.

Keywords: Theodor W. Adorno, Finland, Translations, Reception, History.

Röhle, Theo: From DEMOS to UTOPIA: Critical theory and the politics of computation

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The presentation focuses on a specific trajectory of the labour process debate in the late 1970s that sought to question the status of the computer as an ally of management in its quest for efficiency and optimisation. Through initiatives that later became known as the “Collective Resource Approach”, Scandinavian trade unions advocated for an alternative understanding of software design. These initiatives renounced the notion of workers as objectified, programmable entities that many software models were based upon at the time. Instead, a key demand was to treat workers as active subjects, both in the sense that their various faculties should be adequately represented in software models, and in the sense that their practical knowledge of the labour process should be involved in the construction of these models.

However, putting these objectives into practice posed a range of challenges. Early projects focused on identifying the demands of workers when confronted with processes of automation and rationalisation at their particular workplace. Translating these demands into formal parameters and categories that could be included in computational models was not a trivial task. Also, ways had to be found to negotiate the details of such models – e.g. specifics of the division of labour and of time measurement – with management representatives (Bjernes et al., 1987; Sandberg, 1979).

This historical trajectory can be seen as one form of regional practices of critique and resistance that are strongly related to the winter session’s focus on the relationship between theory and lived experiences. While the Collective Resource Approach enjoys a certain prominence in participatory (software) design, its wider importance in terms of a contemporary “politics of formalism” (Bowers, 1992) has largely escaped the attention of commentators outside of these communities. More specifically, the presentation seeks to discuss how the recent project of a critical political epistemology of Artificial Intelligence (Pasquinelli, 2023) could benefit from an engagement with this Nordic tradition of practically incorporating worker agency in the design of software systems.

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Sjöstedt, Johanna: On the limits of “facts”. Beauvoir, ethics and the problems of the post-truth debate

Johanna Sjöstedt is a lecturer in the department of Social and Psychological Studies at Karlstad University in Sweden. She holds degrees in the history of ideas and gender studies from the University of Gothenburg, specializing in the history of feminist philosophy and theory. Her work has appeared in journals such as *NORA*, *Slagmark*, and *Ideas in history*. She is the editor of *Vad är en kvinna? Språk, materialitet, situation* (Daidalos 2021) and *Feminist philosophy: Time, history, and the transformation of thought* (Södertörn studies in intellectual and cultural history 2023).

“[I]f ethics became aware of its essential significance, we would realize that...there is no domain that should not be subject to it” (Beauvoir 2004: 188).

Over recent years, notions such as “post-truth”, “alternative facts”, and “resistance to knowledge” have been mobilized to discuss the relationship between scientific knowledge, politics, and society. The debate has revived intellectual positions from the science wars of the mid-1990s, typically understood as a dispute between natural scientists who defended a positivist idea of scientific realism and scholars in cultural studies and science studies department who claimed post-modern, social constructivist, and relativist positions.

It is striking how the current debate has generated calls for a return to realism, including from those previously found in the post-modern camp (Latour 2004). “Fact checking” has become an influential method in journalism; similar methods are also taught to children in schools (Wikforss 2020). Whatever their differences, these initiatives frame the question of critique in epistemological terms. The presumption is that if we can agree on the facts, we will agree on a political project. Parallel to this debate, scholars working in feminist theory have made efforts to reformulate the epistemological foundations of critique. Affect theorists of various stripes have emphasized the non-rational aspects of politics (Leys 2011). Scholars working on post-critique have drawn on Austin, Wittgenstein, and Cavell to call for a return to the ordinary realm of human affairs (Felski 2015, Moi 2017, Zerilli 2016).

I want to make an intervention into these debates based on a reading of French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir. I will focus on Beauvoir’s understanding of the relationship between ethics, politics and critique in the philosophical essays she published in the 1940s. For Beauvoir, ethics was the primary category of philosophy: “if ethics became aware of its essential significance, we would realize that...there is no domain that should not be subject to it” (Beauvoir 2004: 188). Her formulations can be read as a response to neo-Kantianism, which was strong at French universities in the 1920s and which emphasized epistemology, rationalism and the natural sciences. I can also be read in relation to the tradition of phenomenology and the debate between Heidegger and Sartre in the 1940s, regarding the possibility of deriving an ethics based on notions such as Dasein and authenticity.

I will present a chapter that is to be submitted to the volume *Beauvoir and Post-Truth*, edited by Erika Ruonakoski from Helsinki University and published by Brill.

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Sørensen, Asger: Critical Theory in Contemporary North. Rosa's turn from Critique of Ideology, Political Economy and Democracy to Pedagogics

Restricting Critical Theory to the Frankfurt tradition, Scandinavian reception has demonstrated both diversity and development. In Denmark in the 1960s, Marcuse was published and widely studied, in the 1970 and 80s it was Habermas, Adorno and Horkheimer, and in the 1990s Honneth. In the 21st century, Critical Theory experienced a recession, at least in Denmark. Habermas and Honneth were no longer studied at the universities, but still taught at the vocational colleges. Today, however, Hartmut Rosa has great success, also in greater civil society and its organizations. Rosa acknowledges explicitly his roots in Critical Theory from Marx to Adorno, emphasizing experiences of pathological alienation in advanced and accelerated capitalism, and offering the idea of resonance as the positive, but exceptional counter experience. As I argue, however, Rosa represents a worrying turn away from the achievement of the mature Habermas, namely an affirmative approach to politics and political philosophy. In my presentation, I will argue that Rosa's approach to real-life politics in terms of alienation makes politics as such, including political philosophy, undesirable. As he describes politics, nothing positive is likely to be achieved from that side, neither can we expect any resonance, and he does not propose any normative direction for political relations. Nor does he discuss law or human rights; in fact, it is emphasized that resonance is apolitical. Instead, Rosa has turned to the pedagogical sphere where resonance is given much more normative significance, becoming the general solution and sometimes even the aim for educational efforts. This I cannot but see an unfortunate ideological turn in Critical Theory, where both critique of society and the solutions are formulated in terms of individual experiences rather than political economy and democracy.