

**History, Progress, Critique**  
***3<sup>rd</sup> Istanbul-Oldenburg Critical Theory Conference***  
**at Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg**  
**12-14 September 2019**

The relationship between historical analysis and critical social praxis has been one of the central concerns of Critical Theory since its beginnings. For critical theorists historical analysis plays a key role in identifying immanent social forces and potentials as resources for a *better society*, i.e. for social and moral progress. While it was sufficient for the first generation of critical theorists to adopt a non-vulgarized version of historical materialism – perhaps with a Nietzschean ‘genealogical proviso’ – as a method of analysis, the experiences of the Second World War and the Holocaust made it necessary to radically rethink the naive teleological assumptions inherent in the notion of progress provided by German Idealism and Marxism. Critical Theory found itself confronted with the problem of grounding historical analysis on an alternative conception of philosophy of history. The need to rethink philosophy of history found its first expression in the seminal work of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Since then, any substantial reorientation of Critical Theory has required a reassessment of the philosophy of history and its key notions.

This is perhaps the motivation behind Theodor W. Adorno's and Walter Benjamin's engagement with the concept of progress. They were questioning whether the very notion of progress presents an impediment to the *radical* transformation of society. If so, the concept would need to be transformed itself. A similar question plays a crucial role in the poststructuralist and postcolonial strands of contemporary critical theory. On the one hand, prominent theorists such as Foucault and Derrida have developed their critical perspectives on the rejection of not only rationalist but also structuralist binaries such as traditional/modern, static/dynamic, or progressive/regressive. The poststructural deconstruction of processes of knowledge and subjectivity production has generated transdisciplinary and emancipatory agendas that significantly enhance the scope of critical analysis. On the other hand, critical postcolonial theory has shown how the idea of progress has justified colonial exploitation and domination. The reassessment of the category of modernity, and the subsequent call for methodological self-reflexivity aims at transcending the sometimes narrow and eurocentrist perspective of the Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory. Feminist theory has also opened new perspectives that allow us to critique patriarchal historical narratives that obscure gender differences and promote masculine ideas of progress.

In the light of these challenges, this conference aims at discussing whether and how to

hold on to a philosophy of history and a notion of progress that enable critical theory to reflect on its own dependency on historical developments and prevent reifications. We invite all interested scholars to address the following questions:

- Does critical theory need a philosophy of history?
- How should the normative assumptions of critical theory relate to historical experience?
- What role does historical experience play or should play in transforming the theory and practice of critique?
- How should critical theory re-assess the notion of progress today?
- Can genealogy as a historical method be reconciled with a critical notion of progress?
- Do we need to de-colonize critical theory's philosophy of history? How is that possible?
- Is the notion of progress an impediment to emancipatory transformation? Is critique possible without the notion of progress?
- What understanding of temporality is necessary for a critical theory of history and progress? How do changes in temporal structures under neoliberal conditions affect our critical understanding of history and progress?
- What relationship should be established between notions of progress and contemporary political, social, economic and technological structures?

### **Keynote Speakers:**

Sonja Buckel (University of Kassel)

Estelle Ferrarese (Université de Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens)

Rahel Jaeggi (Humboldt University Berlin)

The conference language will be English. We invite interested scholars at all career levels to send proposals (maximum 400 words) to: [criticaltheoryistanbul@gmail.com](mailto:criticaltheoryistanbul@gmail.com). **Deadline: 30 April, 2019.**

### **Organizing Chairs:**

Volkan Çıdam (Boğaziçi University, Istanbul/Humboldt University Berlin)

Zeynep Gambetti, (Boğaziçi University Istanbul)

Philip Hogg (Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg)

Gaye İlhan-Demiryol (Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul)

Julia König (Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz)

\* Note: This conference is a follow-up to the "Adorno and Politics" conference organized in Istanbul at Bogazici University in June 2016 and to the one on "Arendt and Critical Theory Today" in July 2017, which had to be displaced to Oldenburg owing to the political atmosphere reigning in Turkey. Since the situation in Turkey has not improved, the conference series continues in Oldenburg.