

OUTSIDE THE FRAME OF THEORY

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

OVERVIEW

We are planning to organize a two-day conference on June 23-24 to reflect on the status of “theory” in literary studies today. Theory, which once dominated the field, has now, according to a building scholarly consensus, exhausted its possibilities. What are the ways in which we could advance a critique of art that does not rely on the established theoretical frameworks? This timely question motivated us to bring together some of the internationally renowned scholars to Freiburg. As the question addresses the future of the discipline, the conference is geared towards the needs of young scholars and graduate students. The conference provides a unique opportunity for academics and researchers at different departments of the Faculties of Philology and Philosophy at the University of Freiburg to present their work to their peers from other universities and receive feedback on it. This event, we believe, contributes greatly to the already established profile of the University of Freiburg as a forerunner of research in the humanities.

OBJECTIVES

An event for international exchange of ideas at the highest academic level: We aim not only to bring some of the leading intellectuals from across the Atlantic to Freiburg, but also equally, to make use of the already existing potential at the University. Therefore, two of our panels will be led by Prof. Laura Bieger and Dr. Benjamin Kohlmann from Freiburg, and two others will be led by Prof. Derek Attridge and Prof. William Rasch, from Britain and the United States respectively. Similarly, our goal is to, if possible, divide up the presentation slots between researchers from Freiburg and from other universities. This, indeed, would be contingent upon the quality of papers and the number of applicants. The conference has so far received a great amount of attention. We have received applications from different countries around the world. The academics we contacted to ask if they would be interested in being our speakers have responded promptly and with great enthusiasm. This makes us confident to say that there is a great enthusiasm for our topic and the event will be successful in terms of drawing a large audience of participants.

Publication of conference proceedings in a volume: One of our main motivations in organizing this event was the possibility of publishing the conference proceedings in a volume. We believe that this book, with respect to the topic, would be a timely publication. Indeed, the possibility of such a publication would be in accordance with how successful the event will be. Upon receiving adequate institutional support, however, we are confident that the event would be successful. Our speakers are already established names in the publishing world in this area of research. Prof. Derek Attridge, for instance, is the co-editor of *Theory After Theory* (Routledge, 2011), the most seminal collection of essays in this area of research. Therefore, we already foresee a publication. Our conference panels, for instance, would correspond neatly to chapters of a collection of essays. We have already been approached by two publishing houses (Cambridge Scholars Publishing and Vernon Press) which expressed interest in cooperation.

PROCEDURE

Before the event: We have distributed our call for papers nationwide and internationally by corresponding with universities directly and posting the call for papers on different networks designed for this purpose. We have also publicized our official website (<https://outsidetheory.jimdo.com/>). All of our official correspondence comes through the Department's administration, and our official email address is hosted by the Department's website (outsidetheory@anglistik.uni-freiburg.de). We have already confirmed the attendance of all keynote speakers and are in contact with them on organizational matters. We will decide on the submitted abstracts with the help of our plenary speakers. The deadline for submitting abstracts is April 15th. The results and the finalized conference program will be published by May 15th. In the meantime, marketing for the event will be in progress. The first phase of marketing will mainly target the potential contributors. In the second phase (from May on) we will target potential attendants. Different strategies will be adopted in each phase.

The event: The logistics of the event has been partly planned, and is being planned in a rolling process done in accordance with the administration of the English Department. The conference venue will be booked through the administration. This holds the same for accommodation and the travel for our keynote speakers. For the organizational matters on the two days, we will rely on the voluntary help of students at the Department. On the academic side, the two-day program consists of 4 panels. Each panel has a main talk which addresses the issues at stake in a large context. The talks are followed by shorter presentations which engage with the panel's topic in a more detailed and specific way. All three presentations are followed by discussions which lets all participants engage with the topic and exchange their ideas, and give feedback on the presented paper. The four panels are as follows:

- **“The Story of Theory” – Prof. William Rasch:** This panel addresses the history of theory in the context of literary studies and philosophy. Setting off with this panel will let us contextualize the status of theory today. Prof. Rasch, who himself has lived through the heyday of theory in academia, will provide the audience with a first-hand experience of this trajectory.
- **“Theory and Politics” – Dr. Benjamin Kohlmann:** One of the main ways in which theory helps us understand the work of art is by letting us contextualize it socially and politically. In reference to our leading question, we ask in this panel, how we can understand the work of art without putting it into readymade theoretical frameworks without losing the insight offered by social and political contextualization. Dr. Kohlmann, whose recent work on modernism and politics has been a breakthrough in the field, will explore how we could understand politics outside the frame of theory.
- **“Literature outside Theory” – Prof. Derek Attridge:** In this panel, we focus on the specific question of literature outside theory. The talks in this panel will investigate the new modes of such critique in literary studies. Prof. Attridge, who is the co-editor of the most seminal academic work in this area, will give us an insight into the areas in which literary studies is now proceeding such as Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's “surface reading,” Rita Felski's proposals in *The Limits of Critique*, and Charles Altieri's Wittgensteinian approach. We will discuss these new modes and methods vis-à-vis older modes and

methods of reading which are by nature a-theoretical, such as close-reading and ekphrasis.

- **“The Future of Theory” – Prof. Laura Bieger:** Our last panel addresses the ways in which literary studies may (or should) develop in this particular area of academic research. Prof. Bieger, who specializes in aesthetic theory and is a descendant of the reader-response criticism, will address the philosophical question of whether it is possible to step completely outside theory. Other talks will explore (and suggest) new ways in which critique could proceed.

After the event: Our project will continue by compiling and organizing the papers for publication. We will ask the presenters to modify their papers, if they want to, based on the feedback they receive during the conference in a period of two weeks. We will then compile all the papers in a manuscript which prepares it for preliminary editing. At this stage, we may ask for other contributions (in the form of papers/editing/preface) by other academics who have expressed an interest in participating in the event but could not afford to do that because of other commitments, like Prof. Rita Felski and Prof. Henry Staten. The manuscript will then be edited by two of the academic contributors. By October 15, we aim to submit the final manuscript to the best offer we receive from one of the internationally renowned publishers in the field (Routledge, Oxford UP, Palgrave, and others).

TIMETABLE	
Preliminary planning and organization	December 2016- January 2017
Call for Papers and website published	February 15
Fundraising and marketing	March, April, May
Deadline for application	April 25
Blind review process	First two weeks of May
Results and conference program out	May 15
Conference	June 23-24
Preliminary editing for publication	July, August, September
Manuscript ready	October 15
Publication out	February/March 2018

FINANCING

The estimated budget for the event would be approximately 3300-3800€. This includes hosting the keynote speakers from abroad (2250-2500€), a small bursary (250-300€) for the best graduate applicant (decided by our plenary speakers), conference reception including coffee breaks and a

dinner (600-750€), conference marketing including posters and flyers (200-250€). The event is free for everyone to attend. We estimate a budget for publication to be around 4000-4500€. We are planning to secure all the funds we need (7500-9000€) from the contributions of funding bodies within the University of Freiburg and private/public institutions across the state of Baden-Württemberg. A more detailed account of our estimated expenses and current revenues can be found in our financial plan.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

- **Derek Attridge** (University of York) is the author or editor of twenty-five books on poetic form, literary theory, South African literature, and the writing of James Joyce. Among his recent books are *The Work of Literature* (Oxford, 2015), *The Craft of Poetry: Dialogues on Minimal Interpretation* (with Henry Staten; Routledge, 2015), and *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry* (Oxford, 2013). His current work in progress is *Poetry in Performance: Homer to Shakespeare*. He is Emeritus Professor in the Department of English and Related Literature and a Fellow of the British Academy.
- **Laura Bieger** (University of Freiburg) is Professor for British and American Cultural Studies at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg. She held teaching and research positions at Freie Universität Berlin, UC Berkeley, Universität Wien and IFK Wien. She is the author of *Ästhetik der Immersion*, which looks at urban spaces that stage the perceptual conjunction of world and image with an interest in the epistemological function of aesthetic experience. Her current book *Belonging and Narrative* develops a narrative theory based on the human need to belong and applies it to American novels from the late Eighteenth to the Twenty-first century.
- **Benjamin Kohlmann** (University of Freiburg) is assistant professor of English Literature at the University of Freiburg. He has held fellowships and visiting positions at Columbia University, at the University of Cambridge, and at the University of East Anglia. His first monograph *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left-Wing Literature* was published by Oxford UP in 2014. His recent articles have been published in *PMLA*, *Novel*, and *Textual Practice*. He is currently co-editing *A History of 1930s British Literature* for Cambridge UP.
- **William Rasch** (Indiana University) is Professor of German Studies and Director of the Center for Theoretical Inquiry in the Humanities at the Indiana University. He is the author of *Niklas Luhmann's Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2000) and *Sovereignty and Its Discontents* (Birkbeck Law Press, 2004), editor of a collection of essays by Luhmann called *Theories of Distinction* (Stanford University Press, 2002) as well as editor or co-editor of numerous volumes and special issues on Luhmann, Carl Schmitt, German film and the bombing war during the Second World War. His current research centres on political and legal theory.

ORGANIZERS

- **Mir Ali Hosseini** (mir.ali.hosseini@outlook.com) is an MLitt candidate in Philosophy at the University of St. Andrews and a final-year graduate student in the Master of "English Literatures and Literary Theory" Programme at the University of Freiburg. His current

research addresses the relationship of philosophy and writing. His MA thesis explore the role of “style” in the works of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Derrida.

- **Anirudh Sridhar** (ansridha@syr.edu) is a DPhil candidate in English at the University of Oxford for the Michaelmas term in 2017. He recently completed his Master in “English Literature and Literary Theory” at the University of Freiburg with a specialization in modernist poetry. He taught a course on aesthetics at the English Department, and held two research assistantships with Prof. Dr. Laura Bieger and Prof. Dr. Monika Fludernik.

REFERENCES

- **Academic**

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Outside the Frame of Theory

c/o Sekretariat der Geschäftsführung

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