Figuring Systems: Institutions, Infrastructures, and Ecologies in Contemporary Art and Theory

University of Applied Arts Vienna and Academy of Fine Arts Vienna
14-16 January 2027

Organizers:
Sabeth Buchmann, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna
Jakob Schillinger, University of Applied Arts Vienna
Christopher Williams-Wynn, Freie Universität Berlin

Figuring Systems: Institutions, Infrastructures, and Ecologies in Contemporary Art and Theory departs from the premise that “institution,” “infrastructure,” and “ecology” signify three significant approaches to understanding art’s social functions, as well as closely related artistic traditions and discourses. At the same time, they denote artistic and theoretical positions that are often pitted against one another. Recently, there has been a growing call to replace institutional critique with infrastructural critique. However, the canonization of institutional critique beginning in the 1970s was itself accompanied by a systematic marginalization of systemic-ecological approaches, which can be understood as an echo of the philosophical debate between critical theory and systems theory, and whose reversal under the banner of ecology is now beginning to emerge.

Figuring Systems aims to navigate a path through these debates that engages with their complex histories and legacies. It brings together speakers associated with these and other approaches and asks not only about these approaches’ respective affordances and oversights, but also—and in particular—about possible intersections, compatibilities, and convergences.

Gathering artists, curators, art historians, and art theorists, Figuring Systems includes keynote talks and discussions, as well as panels concentrated on the status of critique, methodological developments, new genealogies, interdisciplinary connections, and the relations between sites and circulation.

The conference is open to the public; no registration is required.

PROGRAM

Thursday, January 14 (University of Applied Arts Vienna)
17:00 – Doors open

17:30 – Welcome by Ulrike Kuch (Rector, University of Applied Arts Vienna)

17:40 – Introduction by Sabeth Buchmann, Jakob Schillinger, Christopher Williams-Wynn

18:00 – Artist talk with Sung Tieu (artist, Berlin) and Martin Beck (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna)
Response and moderation by Burcu Dogramaci (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

> Martin Beck is an artist living in New York and Vienna, Austria. Recent solo exhibitions include *for hours, days, and weeks at a time…*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2025), *Last Night*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2024), *echo** (with Sung Tieu) Salzburger Kunstverein, Austria (2024). Beck's publications include *for hours days, and weeks at a time…* (2025), *Last Night* (2013 and 2019), *An Organized Systems of Instructions* (2017); *rumors and murmurs* (2017); *The Aspen Complex* (2012); and *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe* (2007). His works are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Schaulager, Basel; MUMOK, Vienna; Hessel Museum of Art among others.
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> Burcu Dogramaci is Professor of Art History and director of the Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. Her research areas are modern and contemporary art with a focus on exile, migration and flight, photography, architecture, fashion. Recent publications include: *Infrastructures of Art Producing, Transporting, and Logistics from a Transnational Perspective* (Berlin: De Gruyter 2026, edited with Ursula Ströbele). Together with Manuel Gogos, she curated the exhibition "Tapetenwechsel. Migration and Furniture since 1960", on show at Ephraim-Palais/Berlin Museum in 2026.

19:30 – Reception

Friday, January 15 (University of Applied Arts Vienna)

10:00-12:00 – Panel 1: Genealogies

Luke Skrebowski (University of Manchester): The De-Institution of Critique? Andrea Fraser's *Untitled (Objects I-V*) (2024)

> Andrea Fraser's *Untitled (Objects I-V)* (2024) consists of five, life-sized, microcrystalline wax sculptures of two-year old children, lying recumbent on plinths topped with glass vitrines, set in a sequential array. First shown at Marion Goodman in Paris, the work was conceived in relation to, and exhibited alongside, Fraser's earlier work *Untitled* (2003) an editioned videotape of Fraser having sex with an anonymous collector in a hotel room. Fraser has framed the sculptures comprising *Untitled (Objects I-V)* as allegories of art objects more widely but also as representing – at least symbolically – her own progeny: "You walk into the gallery, you see the video, you see these toddlers. I assumed that connection would exist in people's minds: 'Are these the offspring of the

sex with the collector?'" What, though, to make of such "illegitimate" issue? How to understand these affect-laden, commercial, sculptures? Does *Untitled (Objects I-V)* de-institute critique within Fraser's practice? In this paper, I take up Fraser's claim that *Untitled (Objects I-V)* was inspired by younger artists who were taking up "affirmation and care as a political model" and "rejecting critique". I argue that Fraser's sculptures counter-memorialise the child understood as Unmündig [meaning both "minor in age", but also "legal or civil minority"] and thus symbolise all those who were historically excluded from the public sphere and the public use of rationality upon which canonical philosophical and institutional critique depended. Here, however, I confront Fraser's work with Mierle Laderman Ukeles' "Maintenance Art Manifesto" (and its speculative proposal for an exhibition on "CARE"), addressing the arch way in which *Untitled (Objects I-V)* seeks to repudiate its own vanguardist genealogical preconditions in "development art".

Luke Skrebowski teaches in the Department of Art History and Cultural Practices at the University of Manchester. He is the co-author of *Trevor Paglen: Sites Unseen* (2018) and co-editor of *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art* (2011). He is widely published on Conceptual art and its legacies in leading journals and in catalogues for major public art institutions. His current research revisits the historicization of 1970s art, informing his latest book project, *Uncertain Ecologies: Contemporary Art After Institutional Critique*.

Mara Polgovsky Ezcurra (Birkbeck, University of London): Open Field: Argentina's Agro-Export Economy and the Rise of Ecological Critique

In this paper, I trace the genealogy of ideas of ecology and life that have gained currency in artistic practice over the last decades, highlighting the sense of locality that marked their emergence and expression in the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast to a planetary-scale vision, I explore the cultural specificity of the nature/culture divide and the local and international power imbalances that traverse it, often rooted in colonial imaginaries and the uses of land and landscape. I adopt a notion of genealogy grounded in the Foucauldian proposition that, rather than a fixed metaphysical point of origin, genealogical emergence results from relations of force, power, conflict, chance, and contingency. Genealogy is, furthermore, discontinuous and dispersed. This perspective provides a fertile ground for writing a non-US-centric and non-Eurocentric history of ecological art. My analysis focuses on the multiple references to Argentina's export-oriented farming and agricultural economy in the work of artists associated with the CAYC (Centre for Art and Communication) during the 1970s. It is through the denunciation of this economic model, its social consequences, and the limits it imposed on human, animal, and botanical life that CAYC artists began to reimagine the workings of agency, communication, and life itself. Alongside artworks by well-known members of the core, all-male CAYC group, also known as 'the Group of Thirteen', I also map the role of women artists in this genealogy of ecological art and aesthetics. Against the flattening of history characteristic of a globalised era, I argue for an approach that takes geopolitics seriously in examining conceptual and perceptual renewal.

Mara Polgovsky Ezcurra is a Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Art at Birkbeck, University of London and director of Peltz Gallery. Her research focuses on modern and contemporary Latin American Art, with an emphasis on the politics of aesthetics, the relationships between art and science, and the study of embodiment, liveness, and agency in artistic practice.

Response by Felix Vogel (University of Kassel)

Felix Vogel is an art historian and professor of Art and Knowledge at the University of Kassel and member of documenta Institute. He received his PhD in art history from the Université de Fribourg (CH) with a thesis on the Hameau de la Reine. His latest publications are the edited volumes *Bruch und Kontinuität. Kunst und Kulturpolitik nach dem Nationalsozialismus* (together with Maria Neumann) and *Conceptual Art. A Feminist Topography, c. 1970* (with Paula Stoica). Felix Vogel is currently working on a monograph on the artist group Art & Language as well as a project on infrastructures of contemporary art.

Moderated by Noit Banai (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna)

Dr. Noit Banai is Professor of Diaspora Aesthetics at the Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. An art historian and critic specializing in modern and contemporary art, her research explores the visual and material cultures of migration, exile, diaspora, border regimes, and statelessness. She is the author of *Yves Klein* (Reaktion Books, 2014) and *Being a Border* (Paper Visual Arts, 2021), and has published widely in journals including *Third Text*, *Stedelijk Studies*, *Public Culture*, *Performing Arts Journal*, *Filozofski Vestnik*, and the *Journal of Jewish Latin American Studies*.

12:00-13:00 – Lunch break

13:00:15:30 – Panel 2: Method

Alena Williams (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna): The Rippling Wave: Method in Context

In her book *Intimacies on Four Continents*, scholar Lisa Lowe reminds us in her discussion of the materialist circulation of in European imperial systems, how one might read the fetishism of colonial commodities and artifacts “symptomatically” “with attention to what they say about lost histories, and the layers of occlusion, which have resulted in a forgetting of the ‘intimacies of four continents.’” Looking into this idea transhistorically, this talk explores how conceptions of energetic transfer might be productive for reexamining the interrelation of aesthetics, experimental thinking, and radical politics today, and approaches this field as a question of method. While thermodynamic theories undercut vitalism and its energy theories in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-

century discourses in Europe, the ethics of work encompasses a broad spectrum of relations, subjectivities, and bodies. Although work, following the work-energy theorem, is the measurement of the displacement of an object subjected to a force, how might we account for states of nature or vectors of force which evade capture in scientific and aesthetic forms of representation? Examining where techniques of visualization in the physical sciences meet capitalist speculation, resource extraction, and the historic sites of ecological exploitation, this talk traces the intimacies of empire in the critique of the electrical horizon in contemporary art and film.

Alena Williams is Professor for Theory and Mediation of Contemporary Art in the Department for Art Theory and Cultural Studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Previously, she was Associate Professor with tenure in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of California, San Diego, where she was Associate Director of the Environmental Studies Program. Williams received her Ph.D. in Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University in New York.

Colby Chamberlain (Cleveland Institute of Art): Sharp Legal Things: The Case of Letty Lou Eisenhauer and the Typewriter

The study of art's interaction with the law has been anchored primarily to the topic of copyright and to the episodic logic of the casebook. In the United States, this conjunction has yielded a body of scholarship that returns incessantly to court cases featuring a patriarchal lineage of appropriation artists—Warhol, Prince, Koons—even as lawyers and critics alike acknowledge that these disputes bear little resemblance to how most artists experience the state's regulation of their intellectual property. Departing from a 1970 description of the law as an "abrasive interface," this paper argues for a media-theoretical approach that reads copyright through the friction precipitated by its specific material instantiations. The primary "case study" will be the founding of two publishing apparatuses, George Maciunas's "Fluxus system" and Dick Higgins's Something Else Press, both of which were organized around the typing skills of the artist and performer Letty Lou Eisenhauer.

Colby Chamberlain is the author of *Fluxus Administration: George Maciunas and the Art of Paperwork* (University of Chicago Press, 2024) and an associate professor of art history at the Cleveland Institute of Art. His research and criticism have appeared in publications including *Artforum*, *Art Journal*, *ARTMargins*, *Cabinet*, *Grey Room*, *October*, and *Triple Canopy*.

Sam Lewitt (artist and writer, Berlin): The No-Core Method

The word "method" conjures, at a minimum, a procedure according to principle. With it comes a stable picture: an inquiring subject, procedurally equipped in advance, approaching a world of determinate objects. One well-known strand of Conceptual art famously prescribed that "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art"; planning and

decisions come first, execution being perfunctory. However idealized this protocol, as with any strong methodological scheme, the question of its reversibility remains. What if method were an account arrived at after the fact, formed through the material practice of dismantling the machine? What might be left (and according to what desire) after the decomposition of an automated idea? According to what criteria does an order of practical activity merit the name “method”, and freighted with what interests? In this talk, I consider what such idea machines—from artworks to institutional forms—become in being dismantled, and what that makes of those doing the dismantling. Where classical analysis vivisects forms of experience in a search of first principles, I will focus on procedures in art that stop at the parts, with no hypothesis that some ideational core will be revealed, but focus on the possibility of putting elements into motion differently.

Sam Lewitt is an artist and writer based in Berlin. Lewitt’s work has been exhibited in solo exhibitions at Pavilion 13, Kyiv; Z33 House of Contemporary Art, Hasselt; Swiss Institute, New York; Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland; Wattis Institute of Contemporary Art, San Francisco; Galerie Buchholz, Cologne/Berlin, Germany; Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. His writing has appeared in publications such as *Artforum*, *Collapse*, *CURA*, *Kunstforum International*, *October* and *Texte zur Kunst*.

Response by Ursula Ströbele (Braunschweig University of Art)

Ursula Ströbele is professor for art history at Braunschweig University of Art (HBK), writer and curator. She holds a PhD at Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf about the sculptural reception pieces of the French Royal Academy (1700-1730) and was habilitated about non-human living sculptures since the 1960s, especially by Hans Haacke and Pierre Huyghe. This year she co-edited *Infrastructures of Art Producing, Transporting, and Logistics from a Transnational Perspective* with Burcu Dogramaci. In 2025 she started *Ecologies of Sculpture*, a cooperation project of the HBK and Sprengel Museum Hannover. Her research focus is on sculpture and sculpture theory of the 20th and 21st century, art and ecologies, and infrastructural studies of production and transport.

Moderated by Sophia Rohwetter (University of Vienna)

Sophia Rohwetter is a university assistant and doctoral student in the Department of Art History at the University of Vienna. Her research focuses on the history and theory of modern and contemporary art, avantgarde and experimental film, and psychoanalytic and materialist aesthetics. She is the recipient of the Prize for Young Art Criticism awarded by AICA-Germany and regularly contributes to Texte zur Kunst.

15:30-16:00 – Coffee break

16:00-18:00 – Panel 3: Circulation, Site, and Scale

James Nisbet (University of California, Irvine): No Chemical Romance: Nicolás García Uriburu, Flourescein, and Green Waters

> On June 19, 1968, Argentine artist Nicolás Garcia Uriburu dyed the Venice Grand Canal green to create the work *Green Venice* using an organic compound called Fluorescein. His action was undertaken in response to the 34th Venice Biennale, but not an invited or otherwise official part of that exhibition. Uriburu would go on to dye other rivers and bodies of water, developing a practice that morphed from experimental formal aesthetics to environmental protest. Today, his legacy has taken on new dimensions, after the exact same coloration in Venice was undertaken by Extinction Rebellion in 2023 in response to inaction from the UN Climate Change Conference COP28, and, again, in 2025 in concert with Greta Thunberg, in similar response to COP30. Uriburu himself is an understudied figure in English-language histories of contemporary art, as is Flourescein as a material. This paper will reconsider the chemical interventions of Uriburu in light of the longer history of modern organic dye compounds, seeking to critically examine the field of chemistry within discourses of systems theory in contemporary art.
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> James Nisbet is Professor in the Department of Art History and PhD Program in Visual Studies at the University of California, Irvine. He has published widely on the history and theory of modern and contemporary art, with special interests in ecocritical visual art and the history of photography. Nisbet's research has been supported by institutions including Cornell University's Society for the Humanities, Georgia O'Keeffe Research Center, Dumbarton Oaks, and Getty Research Institute.

Jörn Etzold (Ruhr University Bochum): Wastelands in the former core: A walk through the Zollverein World Heritage Site in Essen

> Against the backdrop of current geopolitical shifts, this talk examines the transformation of former commodity extraction sites in the Ruhr area into cultural venues during and after the International Building Exhibition Emscher Park (1989–1999). OMA/Rem Koolhaas refurbished the Zollverein mine according to Koolhaas's concept of "Bigness" within the "post-industrial turn", which, according to Charity Scribner, "was also a cultural turn". OMA's concept in the age of "globalisation" was promoted with photos zooming in on Zollverein from space. Today, Zollverein is home to institutions such as the Red Dot Design Museum, the Ruhr Museum and PACT Zollverein. However, amid fallow land and impoverished neighbourhoods, what message do the remnants of the extraction era convey to visitors today? Scholarship has probed the "proximity of art and capitalism" (Bojana Kunst) and the role of "artistic critique" (Boltanski/Chiapello) in stabilising neoliberal economies. Artists and independent theatre workers, who are often project-funded and intrinsically motivated, must navigate competitive systems while contributing their emotional labour. However, the importance of neoliberal subjectivation has declined since the 1990s, and art, especially independent theatre, holds less appeal for policymakers. In the age of large language models, techno- feudalism and militarised

politics, there may be less demand for creative, entrepreneurial individuals. This talk will guide the audience through a former mining site and explore its layered history within a changing world system (Immanuel Wallerstein).

Jörn Etzold has been Professor of Theater Studies at the Ruhr University Bochum since 2017 and spokesperson of the Research Unit Infrastructure: Aesthetics and Supply, funded by the German Research Foundation. He is currently researching infrastructure and aesthetics, theater and performance in post-industrial environments and theater and legal criticism. He has also been active as a theater maker and translator.

Response by Sebastian Egenhofer (University of Vienna)

Sebastian Egenhofer has been Professor of Modern Art History at the University of Vienna since 2016, after positions in Basel and Zurich. His work centers on the relationship between modern art and the capitalist mode of production (*Abstraktion – Kapitalismus – Subjektivität*, 2008; *Produktionsästhetik*, 2010, Engl. *Towards an Aesthetics of Production*, 2017). More recently he has turned to the ecological turn in contemporary art and its history, asking how artistic representation relates to other technical mediations of nature. His NOMIS-funded project Site Complexes traces the transformation of site-specific art since the 1970s from this angle.

Moderated by Jenni Tischer (University of Applied Arts)

Jenni Tischer is an artist and theorist based in Vienna. Her practice integrates conceptual research with installations, sculptures, and drawings from a feminist perspective, focusing on social, institutional, and spatial structures, particularly the infrastructures of reproductive labor and social reproduction. She is co-editor of *Backyard Economy* (2023) and *Abstraction and Economy: Myths of Growth* (2024), and regularly contributes to publications. Since 2019, Tischer has taught in the Department of Art and Knowledge Transfer at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Her work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions at Galerie Krobath, Kunstforum Baloise, mumok, MAK, MAK Center Los Angeles, Kunsthalle Wien, Kunsthalle Tübingen, and other international institutions.

Saturday, January 16 (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna)

10:00 – Welcome: Johan Hartle (Rector, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna)

10:10 – Discussion

10:30-12:30 – Panel 4: Coordinates

Eric de Bruyn (Freie Universität Berlin): Drawing the Measure of Infrastructure

Following the prompt for this panel to engage with the complex genealogy of the "respective notions of institution, infrastructure, and ecology," I shall focus in on the mutual relationship between the notions of infrastructure and environmentality. In other words, what techniques of governmentality or "forms of life" are immanent to, superintended by, or (con-)tested within historically specific, infrastructural complexes and their logistic operations of extraction, securitization, expropriation and accumulation. More specifically, I will inquire how we might diagram the dynamic relations of reliance, correspondence, appropriation as well as possible disruption between large-scale infrastructural regimes of power and specific artistic practices. To this end, my approach will only slightly overlap with the new thematizations of an "infrastructural" or "logistics" art, which has benefited, among others, from a previous infrastructural turn in science and technology studies as well as anthropology as well as recent efforts to transforms the framework of institutional critique (and systems esthetics) in terms of "organizational" or "transversal" aesthetics. While not by-passing such discussions, I will, to speak with Brian Larkin, conduct a "categorical act" of cutting into infrastructural networks. In light of a recent prompt (Halpern, Mitchell and Schnidgen) to periodize a three-fold emergence of an infrastructural regime of "planetary experiment" – geoterritorial surveying, cybernetic control, generative management – I shall consider two possible routes of inquiry, ranging from the counter-metrics of Stanley Brouwn and Sung Tieu, to artistic contestations (Oiticica, Zabala) of a Cold War, environmental politics of the shelter and its fear of "insurgent infrastructures."

Eric C. H. de Bruyn is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Freie Universität Berlin. He is co-organizer of the conference, "Situated Screens: Pedagogy and Projection in Brazil since 1964" in Paris (October 2026). Among his recent publications are "A Proposal: Must We Ecologize?" and "On Environmentalities" (with Luke Skrebowski) in *Grey Room* 77 and 97.

Katrin Köppert (Offenbach University of Art and Design): Sweatbox AI: Thermal Violence and Metabolic Media Aesthetics of Heat

In this talk, I will first develop the term Sweatbox AI, drawing on Nicole Starosielski (2021), to capture the thermal violence of AI-based infrastructures. Taking as my starting point "Colossus," Elon Musk's supercomputer—which trains the AI model behind the Grok chatbot on a site the size of 13 soccer fields south of Memphis—I examine the racializing effects of thermal violence. I then draw on the aesthetics of operative images—using thermal imaging technology as an example—to explore critical ways of perceiving heat that do not remain confined to the radiographic episteme of surveillance (Parks 2017). Finally, drawing on Black media theories (Ferreira da Silva 2018, Bradley 2023, Berry 2025) and in contrast to Hito Steyerl's "medium hot" approach (2025), I propose the concept of thermal participativity: an alternative media theory that understands heat not as a disturbance that must be cooled, but as transformative energy.

Katrin Köppert is an art and media scholar whose work focuses on media theories of digital colonialism, critical theories of computation at the intersection of art, design, and visual cultures, digital memory studies, queer media studies. She is professor for AI and Media Theory at University of Art and Design Offenbach. Previously, she held the Chair of Media Theory at Humboldt University in Berlin and was an assistant professor of art history and popular cultures at the Academy of Fine Arts in Leipzig. Her most recent co-edited publication is *Digitale Gewalt. Politisierungen affektiver Öffentlichkeit* (meson press, 2026), which includes the chapter “Hologrammatics of Violence: Digital Memory and Computational Blackface.”

Response by Christoph Chwatal (University of Vienna)

Christoph Chwatal is a Postdoctoral Researcher on the project Site Complexes: Responsive Practices for the 21st Century, based at the University of Vienna and the Berlin University of the Arts and funded by the NOMIS Foundation. His research focuses on contemporary art and theory in dialogue with political theory, with particular interests in theories of organization as well as institutional and infrastructural critique. Publications include *Art and Organizational Form: Surviving in Common*, co-edited with Timon Beyes and Sven Lütticken and forthcoming from Bristol University Press.

Moderated by Barbara Reisinger (University of Applied Arts Vienna)

Barbara Reisinger is a visiting professor in art history at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna. She holds a PhD from the Universities of Basel and Vienna and has published on Andy Warhol's queer interiors, the drawing practices of Robert Morris and Maria Lassnig, and the critical accessibility tactics of Park McArthur. Her work focuses on queerness and (dis)ability in art history, histories of domesticity and interior design, exhibition histories and the provincializing of Euro-American art historiography.

12:30-13:30 – Lunch break

13:30-15:30 – Panel 5: Critique

Irit Rogoff (Goldsmiths, University of London): Spectral Infrastructures of Study

“Spectral Infrastructure” alludes to the hidden and invisible textures that sustain an undefinable and disruptive quality in an otherwise efficient seeming organism. The university is one such example – the spirit, the glue that holds it together cannot be captured by any assessment or monitoring system that ensures that activities happen and protocols are adhered to. The excitements, the potentialities, the gestures of comfort, the constant banter, a buzz made by an enthralled audience, a hush when someone has said something important without staging its importance – are some of building blocks of this ghostly infrastructure. Just as important is the weariness that

creeps into a system that knows that it is not valued and supported, that knows it must carry on regardless of not having a supportive and understanding foundation. What Abdul Maliq Simone has called ‘Rhythms of Endurance’ in his study of ‘just keeping things going’ in the global south. Spectral Infrastructures are both the frisson of excitement and the drag of dispiriting responsibility – that pervade as an alternative index of measure of something’s value. Equally “study,” the acts of getting together in shared attention, become other forms of endurance: of the hardships of experience, of the resistance to a dominant mode, of sharing a moment of being in thrall to a work or a performance or an apparition. Spectral Infrastructure enacts paying attention to that we are not supposed to value – to the unmarketable, unconsumable and incomparable.

Irit Rogoff is one of the initiators of the transdisciplinary field of Visual Culture and founder of the Visual Culture department at Goldsmiths. Her initiatives to establish this new field are led by a belief that we must work beyond bodies of inherited disciplinary knowledge and find motivation for knowledge production in the current conditions we are living out. These concerns have led to research that has expanded the study of participatory practices and tracked the emergence of the curatorial as events of knowledge in the so-called “Educational Turn.” Another strand of her work concerns geography, counter cartography and questions of Globalization. Across her work, she has explored how critical perspectives and emergent subjectivities form the basis for alternative understandings of the relations between subjects, places and spaces. Her writing has appeared in publications including *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*, *Museum Culture: Histories, Theories, Spectacles*, *Competing Choreographies*, and *The Disenchanted: Contending with Practice Based Research*.

KJ Abudu (curator, writer, and scholar-critic, New York/London/Lagos): Breaking The Aesthetic Contract: Notes on Infra/Intra-structural Critique

This presentation departs from the axiomatic recognition, following Toni Cade Bambara, that we—those subjected to the accumulative law of capital and its constitutive racial, colonial, and imperial drives—are at war, and have been for the last half millennium. This “we” includes, by necessity, the cultural worker, specifically the worker who labors and in turn reproduces the institutional sub-sphere of cultural production, exhibition, and distribution categorized as contemporary art. Situating “global contemporary art” historically as a planetarily extended network of cultural activity inexorably tethered to the disciplinary, counterrevolutionary infrastructures of neoliberal financial capital—a Janus-faced liberal/imperial economic and geopolitical architecture formed in response to the world-systemic challenge posed by communist regimes and decolonization movements—this presentation articulates scholarly insights from Marxist and anti-colonial traditions into a constellation to make sense of recent fascistic institutional tendencies as well as identify the limits of certain forms of aesthetic and ideological critique. In particular, drawing on Marina Vishmidt (her notion of “infrastructural critique), Denise Ferreira da Silva (her conception of “intrastructure”), Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas (their revolutionary proposition of Third Cinema) and Sylvia Wynter

and Clyde R. Taylor (their related arguments on the function of the Aesthetic in stabilizing and cohering the Western-dominated capitalist world system), this presentation tarries with historical and ongoing black radical and anti-imperial struggles—waged via their simultaneous re-rhythmings of grammars of thought, action, and aesthesis—to map the contours of the current historical conjuncture and propose speculative modes of de/re-composing the infrastructural determinations of contemporary artistic practice.

KJ Abudu is a curator, writer, and scholar-critic based between New York, London, and Lagos. Informed by anti-colonial/imperial critique, black radical thought, and indigenous philosophies, his writings and exhibitions focus on critical art and discursive practices that respond to the world-historical conditions produced by racial/colonial-capitalist modernity. Abudu recently curated *Traces of Ecstasy* at the fourth edition of the Lagos Biennial and the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond (2024). He is co-artistic director of *Combat Breathing Vol II: A Symposium on Aesthetics and Politics*, a multi-site platform that took place throughout October 2026 at Anthology Film Archives, New York University, and Wendy's Subway. Abudu is currently Associate Curator at Swiss Institute (SI), New York, where he oversees the public programs and has curated exhibitions by Nolan Oswald Dennis, Deborah-Joyce Holman, Kobby Adi, and Tiran Willemse.

Response by Lisa Stuckey (University of Vienna)

Dr. Lisa Stuckey is an art and cultural theorist. Since 2026, she works as a postdoc on her research project "TRIBUNALIZATION. Theory and Aesthetics of Tribunal Address" at the University of Vienna (funded by the FWF). She is the author of the book *Forensische Verfahren in den zeitgenössischen Künsten* (De Gruyter, 2022), and co-edited with Alexander Damianisc, *Uncertain Curiosity in Artistic Research, Philosophy, Media and Cultural Studies* (Springer, 2025).

Moderated by Hannes Loichinger (University of Applied Arts Vienna)

Hannes Loichinger is an art historian working at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. His recent work includes a German translation of Craig Owens' "From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life After 'The Death of the Author'" (S*I*G, 2021), the co-organization of the conference "The Practice of Criticism" with Helmut Draxler (2023), and the exhibition "A Conceptual Diagram" (Tiny Mutual Admiration Societies, 2026), developed with students and addressing the relationship between institutions and infrastructure.

15:30-16:00 – Coffee break

16:00-17:00 – Artist talk with The Feral and Q&A

The Feral (Fabien Giraud and Ida Soulard): A Thousand-Year Infancy: *The Feral* as Infrastructure

> *The Feral* is a one-thousand-year-long film created by a learning machine across thirty-two human generations on a hill in central France. Initiated in 2025 by artist Fabien Giraud, it is a collective artwork at the scale of a landscape: in successive "Epochs", guest artists produce works on the site not for the human gaze but as lessons for an inhuman learner, co-authoring a "concrete fiction" that gradually transforms the land.
> In this talk, Fabien Giraud (co-founder) and Ida Soulard (director of *The Feral* Institute) read the project through the conference's three keywords. As infrastructure, *The Feral* is driven by the Feral Engine, a situated AI system that generates operational instructions from live capture and environmental data. It powers the artwork and structures the Institute's research, so that the technical chain from forest and granite to data becomes a matter of authorship. As for ecology, it starts from a simple premise: what matters is less the machine itself than the way its training transforms us and our environment. To teach the machine what a world is, a world must be built: by replanting forests and restoring wetlands, the project makes the landscape both the machine's training ground and the outcome of its education. As an institution, it faces a problem of duration: what forms of governance, transmission and care can sustain a work across a millennium? *The Feral* is thus an artwork that takes the form of its own infrastructure, and an institution conceived as the long infancy of an inhuman learner.
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> Fabien Giraud is a French artist based in the Limousin, whose work explores the entanglement of technology, time and territory. With Raphaël Siboni, he authored the acclaimed series *The Unmanned*, exhibited internationally. He is the co-founder and co-artistic director of *The Feral*, a thousand-year film directed by a situated artificial intelligence and raised on the depth of a single place: a hill in central France where, since 2025, the land itself becomes both the machine's training ground and the work's material.
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> Ida Soulard is an art historian, writer and curator based in France, whose work examines how ecological, nuclear and technological transformations shape artistic practice, with a particular focus on textile forms and the anthropological dimensions of artificial intelligence. She directs *The Feral* Institute, a research and education platform at the intersection of art, technology and ecology. She previously directed Fieldwork: Marfa (2013–2020), co-founded Glass Bead, and is the author of *Anni Albers, Abstractions Concrètes* (shortlisted for the Prix Pierre Daix 2025); she currently teaches at the École nationale supérieure d'art de Bourges.

17:00-18:00 – Closing remarks and discussion