

Critique beyond criticism: Crisis and potentials of critique in critical times

Special issue editors

Sverre Raffnsøe, Copenhagen Business School

Daniele Lorenzini, University of Pennsylvania

Dorthe Staunæs, University of Aarhus

Martina Tazzioli, University of Bologna

Submission deadlines:

Abstract: January 1st, 2025

Article: July 1st, 2025

Foucault's critical approach to critique

Recognizing its omnipresence and importance but also possible deleterious effects, Foucault had a longstanding and decisive, but also complex and ambiguous relationship to critique.

When stating that “it is amazing how people like judging” and that “judgment is being passed everywhere, all the time”, Foucault vents his reticence to the dangerous effects the propagation of petty destructive criticisms (Foucault 1980/1994: 106; Foucault 1980/1988: 325). Nevertheless, Foucault's also perceives the activity of critique as essential for cultivating a “critical attitude”, both individual and collective (Lorenzini 2016; Lorenzini & Tazzioli 2020), that plays a crucial role for his conception of the practice of philosophy itself (Foucault 1978; Raffnsøe, Thaning, Gudmand-Høyer 2018). Asserting that this “curious activity of critique” “is “underpinned by [*soustendue par*]” an imperative even more general “than that of eradicating errors”, Foucault underlines that there is something in this critical attitude “which is akin to virtue [*qui s'apparente à la vertu*]”, or to a principle of being that he could be willing to adhere to and further develop (Foucault 1978: 36; Foucault 2024: 42; Butler 2001/2004).

Consequently, Foucault also emphasizes that he cannot “help but dream about” developing and articulating a different, more affirmative kind of critique: “a kind of criticism that would try not to judge but to bring an *œuvre*, a book, a sentence, an idea to life. [...] It would multiply not judgments but signs of existence” (Foucault 1980/1994: 106; Foucault 1980/1988: 325).

Critique in the age of criticism

Foucault's claims are still relevant insofar as critique remains an activity of overarching and decisive importance, but also a permanently unsettled and complicated issue.

Since Kant defined his own time as the "age of criticism" where everything must "be subjected" to critique and anyone seeking to elude criticism becomes the subject of "just suspicion" (Kant 1781/1976: 13), critique has continued to play an overarching and determining role. Critique has been construed as crucial for the self-understanding of modernity (Kolb 1986; Touraine 1995), as well as for the conception of public and private modern life (Habermas 1987: 40; Taylor 2003; Koopman 2010). Likewise, a critical approach is habitually regarded as essential for theory and thinking (Cook 2013; Butler 2012; Celikates 2009; Jaeggi & Wesche 2009; Honneth 1994; McCarthy 1978; Callinicos 2006; Horkheimer & Schmidt 1968; Fassin & Harcourt 2019; Harcourt 2022; Lorenzini 2023), literary evaluation (Johnson 1981; Jameson 2008) and science (Popper 1959).

Presently, critique is thus not only widely disseminated but considered a crucial aspect of the present, an unavoidable and essential activity (Sedgwick 2003; Raffnsøe 2017, Fassin & Harcourt 2019). While the refusal to measure up to critique has become self-incriminating, the sheer attempt to avoid critique awakens legitimate misgivings (Ricoeur 1965; Felski 2012). In short, as critique has become a ubiquitous activity, the requirement to measure up to and respond to it has become a self-evident irrefutable norm (Raffnsøe, Staunæs, Bank 2022).

Concurrently, however, the present moment in which critique plays such an overarching role can also be regarded as a time where critique becomes increasingly problematic and problematized. Across the political and theoretical spectrum, critique may often be offered as a negative knee-jerk reaction (Latour 2004), or take the form of a destructive habit (Haraway 2016), where the evaluators first and foremost confirm their own auspicious existence, situated over and above the rest of society (Deleuze 1993: 50), while risking to destroy everything on their way (Sedgwick 2003).

Nietzsche already noted the deleterious eroding effects of an all-encompassing critique as a reactive repetitive activity when he quipped: "Immediately the echo resounds: but always as 'criticism [*Kritik*]'. [...] Nowhere an effect [*Wirkung*] is brought about, only 'criticism' is achieved over and over again; and criticism itself in turn has no influence [*Wirkung*] but is only further criticized [*erfährt nur Kritik*]" (Nietzsche 1874/1999: 284-285).

At the same time, new forms of critique are suggested that differ from those developed by the Enlightenment tradition (MacLure 2015). They ask how one might become able to know otherwise and create alternative figurations (Butler 1992; Haraway 2008). Which counter-historical and postfoundational critical maneuvers are possible? Which new archives and materials can be opened or invented? How may we attend to and attune differently to archives, voices, data? How can speculative fabulation (Haraway 2008; NourbeSe Philip 2008) draw upon or differ from Foucault's critical 'dream work'? What are the ethico-political ambitions and the response-ability (Barad 2007; Haraway 2008) if one seeks to voice forms of critique that not only *word* but also *world* differently

(Haraway 2016)? How can critique help one to know about that which is not written down or documented and become a practice of the social otherwise (Hartman 2019)?

Critique and the crisis of criticism: potential topics

In its supposedly own age, critique thus seems to be a decisive, problematic and promising activity. If our time is also to be regarded as a time of crisis of critique, maybe inaugurating a new turning point for an activity of critique that remains essential (Koselleck 1973; Beistegui 2022), it becomes a matter of urgency to reopen and address the question: “What is it to offer a critique?” (Butler 2001/2004: 304). Today, critique can no longer be regarded as a simple solution; it has equally become a problem that raises new questions and holds great potential. In this special issue of *Foucault Studies*, to be published in 2026 (the 100th anniversary of Foucault’s birth), we propose to newly address this crucial question: What is it to offer a critique today, with and beyond Foucault?

More specifically, we are looking for papers that address the following (and related) topics:

- How can one be critical today? What are the forms and styles of contemporary critique? What counts as a truly critical attitude? What traditional and/or new roles does critique play?
- Is it right to claim that critique has “run out of steam” and that “critique has not been critical enough” (Latour 2004)? How can a critique of critique be voiced? And how can responses to this criticism of critique be developed?
- How can we develop new forms of critique that respond to and are on par with the present situation and its challenges? Is it possible and productive to distinguish between forms of negative criticism and affirmative critique?
- What is the relationship between critique, praxis and action? How are critical deliberation and freedom related to one another? What is the relationship between critique and self-criticism?

Submitting your paper

The deadline for the submission of your abstract (750-1,000 words) is January 1st, 2025. You will receive feedback from the editors by February 1st, 2025. Your full article must be sent to the journal by July 1st, 2025.

Please submit your abstract by sending it as attachment to submission.foucaultstudies@gmail.com, specifying that it is submitted for the special issue *Critique beyond criticism*.

Final submission of articles must include: title of the paper; short abstract (150-250 words); 5 keywords; full article (between 8,000 and 12,000 words, footnotes included); brief bio of the author(s); e-mail address of the corresponding author.

Please note that manuscripts should be in English. They should be typed in Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced with 1-inch margins and justified paragraphs. The journal uses an adaptation of the Chicago Manual of Style: see [Foucault Studies Author Guidelines: footnote references and bibliography](#).

Procedure of evaluation

The Special Issue editors handle all manuscripts following the journal's policies and procedures. After a first selection made by the editors on the basis of the abstracts submitted, the selected contributions (full articles) will undergo a double-blind review evaluation. Authors will be notified of the outcome of the peer-review process by October 1st, 2025 at the latest.

Publication of the special issue: Spring and/or Fall 2026.

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