

death | text | resonance

Simone Weil and Writing To(wards) Death

July 1st – July 4th, 2020

Max-Weber-Kolleg Erfurt

diffrakt | zentrum für theoretische peripherie Berlin

Call for Papers

Confronted with situations of imminent extinction, prominent and philosophers and readers, ranging from Maurice Blanchot, Samuel Beckett, Martin Heidegger, Joan Didion, Virginia Woolf, Alejandra Pizarnik and many others, have articulated death in manifold ways: as the *other* night, the impossibility of ending, being-toward-death, experience of loss and grieving, existential premise of modernist melancholia, and poetics of silence and nothingness. In this context, Simone Weil (1909–1943) has become particularly significant. Through her philosophical writing and political activism, Weil radicalized the instant of death as a focal point through which the vulnerable beauty of human existence asks to be considered in a new light. Weil's handwritten notebooks document literary practices between excess and deprivation, producing visual assemblages of decreation, anorexia, and various forms of textual kenosis.

In discussing the possible ways to articulate the ungraspable from different disciplinary backgrounds and theoretical traditions, our workshop will discuss literary, philosophical and theological forms of writing to(wards) death.

Together with Simone Kotva (University of Cambridge) and Hartmut Rosa (University of Jena/Max-Weber-Kolleg), we will trace the movements of textual experiments that search for and attempt to approach that which we cannot understand but sometimes experience, that is, the infinite, the numinous, and the ineffable. Simone Weil's texts will provide our workshop with a constant reference point, amid participants' differing approaches of writing (to)wards death, darkness and existential uncertainty. Join us in our efforts to forge ahead on this errand on the edge.

Against this backdrop, we will confront and challenge contemporary questions raised by scholars in philosophy, sociology, economics and psychology about the nature of the proverbial "good life." We will do this by entering into a transdisciplinary dialogue with Hartmut Rosa's 'Sociology of Our Relationship to the World,' which raises questions about how far it is possible to 'resonate' with death and what particular functions literary practices assume in this context. In addition, we will attend to the role of the attention and will in such endeavors, aided by Simone Kotva's work on 'Effort and Grace.'

We invite submissions from all fields of study, including, but not limited to, literary studies, theology, philosophy, critical theory, religious studies and political science.

Papers may address one or more of the following topics:

- × Reading and writing mystical experiences
- × Decreation and self-annihilation
- × Performativity and ritualization
- × Asceticism, anorexia, disciplining
- × Unspeakability, withdrawal, unavailability
- × Fetish, trauma, desire
- × Melancholia and jouissance
- × Resonance and questions of the good life
- × End of the world, eschatology and apocalypticism

The submission deadline is on March 1st, 2020. Please send abstract proposals of up to 300 words to Thomas Sojer (thomas.sojer@uni-graz.at). The working language is English, and notification of submission results will be communicated by April 1st, 2020.

Each participant is asked to submit selected passages by Simone Weil and/or other writers (15 pages maximum) prior to June 1st, 2020. These passages will be collected and distributed among participants two weeks in advance. At the workshop we will ask you to provide a short introduction to your text selection (10-15 minutes). We don't expect finished presentations, though we prefer participants to arrive with a tentative thesis to aid our common discussion and reading.

The four-days of our workshop will follow the principle of *dialogue*, realized via multiple practices and forms of reading, thinking and discussing *together*. Consequently, the workshop is structured and will proceed as follows:

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[Wednesday | July 1st, 2020]: The first evening is dedicated to an artistic open-air reading and the collective experience of textual performativity.

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[Thursday | July 2nd, 2020]: The second day focuses on the presenters' close readings of the selected passages and subsequent in-depth discussions within the group: after a brief contextualization, the presenters will guide the group through their reading of the text [along the question of writing to(wards) death] followed by a group discussion.

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[Friday | July 3rd, 2020]: The first half of the day focuses on resonance, death, and the capacity of attention in a dialogue between Simone Kotva and Hartmut Rosa followed by a plenary discussion. The second half of the day is filled by the common transfer to Berlin and completed by a joint evening in Germany's capital.

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[Saturday | July 4th, 2020]: The fourth day aims at linking the thought of Simone Weil with other thinkers and is, by its nature, experimental: the choice of location – *diffrakt | zentrum für theoretische peripherie* [The Centre of Theoretical Periphery] in Berlin – resonates with the dençkollektiv's central commitment to open dialogue and pushing existing boundaries. This final day invites all participants to a reflection on the basic ideas of the dençkollektiv and envisions its future collaborations and projects.

The conference will cover lodging expenses in Erfurt for the conference presenters, who are encouraged to seek coverage of transportation costs from their home institutions or other sources.

| organization:

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SIMONE WEIL

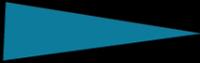
DENOCOLLEKTIV

[Martina Bengert, Thomas Sojer, Max Walther]

| partners:


**UNIVERSITÄT
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Max-Weber-Kolleg



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