

Interdisciplinary conference

Institutional Inertia and Transformation

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Speakers and abstracts (alphabetical)

Thomas Bedorf

Iterability of Institution as *Pièce de Resistance* against Inertia

When considering the moments and forces of inertia in institutions, we look for ways to loosen or mobilize this inertia—just as sluggish or stiff muscles must be mobilized in order to regain mobility. This is a task for political theory or political practice. Philosophy, on the other hand, can offer conceptual suggestions for thinking differently. One such suggestion is the concept of ‘Stiftung’ (translated as ‘institution’), which has a long history of reception from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty, Lefort, Derrida, and others. The concept implies the contingency of instituting acts that mark the beginning of an institution, as well as the necessity of iterative repetitions that stabilize the institution. This inaugurates a temporality of the institution that could resist inertia.

Thomas Bedorf is Professor of Practical Philosophy at the FernUniversität in Hagen. From 2015-2017 he was President of the German Society for Phenomenological Research. He specializes in social and political philosophy, phenomenology and philosophy of digital culture. Recent publications include *Bodenlos situiert. Eine politische Phänomenologie* (Suhrkamp 2025), *Political Phenomenology. Experience, Ontology, Episteme* (ed. with Steffen Herrmann, Routledge 2019); *Digitale Hermeneutik. Maschinen, Verfahren, Sinn* (ed. with Peter Risthaus, Hagen UP 2024); *Grundbegriffe digitaler Kultur* (ed. with Daniel Schubbe-Åkerlund and Anna Tuschling, Hagen UP 2025).

Maeve Cooke

Institutional Inertia and Institutional Change

Social institutions must exercise power that is nonauthoritarian, yet authoritative. Luc Boltanski’s account of social institutions emphasizes the role social institutions play in shaping and stabilizing social meanings, resulting in a relative inertia. One unwelcome consequence of this is the degeneration of institutional authority into authoritarianism. When this happens, the social side of the constitution of institutional agency – its human fabrication – is obscured, or at least not readily visible, impeding protest against and resistance to institutional authoritarianism and its detrimental effects. If institutions are to exercise power that is authoritative, yet nonauthoritarian, they must be open to change for the better in response to objections to their institutional agency. They must perceive themselves, and be perceived by those affected by them, as in a permanent process of self-transformation through ethically motivated contestation. I describe this process of transformation as ‘self-transformation’ or transformation ‘from within’. By this I mean that even the most fundamental and far-reaching changes are not imposed externally

but are made by the institutional agencies themselves, typically as a result of ethical learning processes.

Maeve Cooke is Full Professor of Philosophy at University College Dublin, Ireland and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. Her current research addresses challenges for critical social theories arising from anthropogenic ecological devastation on a planetary scale. She is the author of two influential monographs in critical social theory: *Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas's Pragmatics* (MIT Press, 1994) and *Re-Presenting the Good Society* (MIT Press, 2006) and the author of over 120 articles in the areas of social and political philosophy. She is on the editorial board of several scholarly journals and has held visiting appointments at leading universities in the USA and Europe. Her third monograph: *Transformations in Critical Theory: Decentrings, Openings, Futures* (Polity Press, 2026) has just been published.

Matthew J. Delhey

Institutional Inertia and Social Ontology: A Hegelian View

Institutions have an inherent tendency to resist amelioration, even when the majority of people desire it. Accounting for this institutional inertia is surprisingly difficult for the predominant theories of institutions developed by Anglophone philosophers, such as John Searle and other social ontologists. This is because these theories ground the existence of institutions in collective acceptance: the conscious recognition of a system of constitutive rules by a sufficient portion of the population. In this way, they conclude that institutions are socially constructed. In this presentation, I sketch an alternative view of the ontology of institutions that rejects the mechanism of collective acceptance and the metaphor of social construction and that provides, I suggest, a more compelling account of institutional inertia. Drawing on Hegel's doctrine of objective spirit and on nonideal social ontology, this view conceptualizes institutions not as rules but as social forms that are (a) normatively ordered by the demand for freedom and (b) capable of existing even if people have no mental attitudes or representations concerning the institutions themselves. On this view, institutional inertia arises when these social forms fail to live up to the normative demand for freedom (or cease to do so) yet continue to exist, without requiring that people collectively accept them.

This presentation has three parts. First, I briefly examine patriarchy as an example of institutional inertia, drawing on the debate between Juliet Mitchell (2016, 2000) and Judith Butler (2016, 2012). Second, I use this example to raise the more general problem of institutional inertia for the 'standard model' of social ontology (Burman 2023). Third, I argue that a Hegelian view of institutions as social forms offers a more compelling account of institutional inertia and, for that reason, deserves more serious attention among the institutional theories available today than it has received so far.

Matthew Delhey is an Assistant Professor (contract-limited) at the University of Toronto, specializing in German idealism and social and political philosophy. He is currently working on a monograph on Hegel's theory of institutions.

Vangelis Giannakakis

Inertia and Event: Art in the Time of Catastrophe

This paper explores the relationship between inertia and event to reassess art's critical role in a world marked by catastrophe. It mobilises Henri Lefebvre's theorisation of the silent and loud catastrophes in modernity, Theodor W. Adorno's negative dialectics, and Alain Badiou's theory of the event to understand how a reality that seems static may nevertheless hold unrealised potential. Lefebvre highlights the gap between lived experience and historical change in late capitalism, showing how catastrophe is subtly normalised. Adorno's negative dialectics makes sense of the contradictions within this stillness, maintaining rather than resolving contemporary tensions as a means to preserve the hope for their future resolution. While Badiou's 'event' marks the interruption of this stillness by an incalculable otherness, creating opportunities for new ways of thinking and doing. The paper contends that art is uniquely equipped to capture and embody these dynamics. By sustaining diverse temporalities and intensities, art reveals the interplay between inertia and event, showing how catastrophic conditions both limit and enable truth. It creates a space where the static and emergent coexist, allowing possibility to be sensed before being thought.

Vangelis Giannakakis is a Belgian-Greek philosopher and Adjunct Lecturer at the Institute of Philosophy at Goethe University Frankfurt. His research is situated at the intersection of Critical Theory, contemporary Continental philosophy, Aesthetics, and Critical Pedagogy, and engages with the capacity of philosophical thought to interrogate the limits of culture, art, and education under late modern conditions, as well as to reopen horizons for emancipation and transformative praxis. He is the author of *Negative Dialectics and Event: Non-identity, Culture, and the Historical Adequacy of Consciousness* (Lexington Books, 2022) and *(In)aesthetic Theory: An Essay on Adorno, Badiou and Aesthetic Modernism* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2026). He has also published papers in leading journals, including *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, *Continental Philosophy Review*, *Theory & Event*, and *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. He holds a BA from the University of London and an MA and PhD in Philosophy from University College Dublin.

Frank Hindriks

Why Is Institutional Change So Difficult?

Institutions solve problems. Hence, they enable us to create a better world. At the same time, many institutions are unjust. To explain how these two claims can coherently be combined, I distinguish between two kinds of functionalism: etiological and teleological. From an etiological perspective, institutions are self-reinforcing because they cater to the preferences of their participants. This explains their persistence and inertia. Preferences are all-round – they take all relevant considerations into account. However, they are also situation-specific. From a teleological perspective, what is given in a situation may be unjust. Such a moral evaluation transcends the perspective of the agent. And it allows us to condemn institutional rules or regularities. It follows that institutions can be locally beneficial and make us globally worse off. I use this diagnosis to propose a critical model for social change.

Frank Hindriks is professor of Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy at the University of Groningen. His research concerns social groups, institutions and organizations, the patterns of coordination and cooperation they involve, as well as the benefits and burdens that they generate for insiders and outsiders. He is the author of *The Structure of the Open Society: Social Ontology Meets Collective Ethics* (OUP, 2025), which explains how institutions constrain and enable, empower and disempower in relation to topics such as money, gender and climate change. Hindriks is a member of the Royal Holland Society of Sciences and

Humanities. Furthermore, he is a founding member of the *International Social Ontology Society* (ISOS) and one of the founding editors of the *Journal of Social Ontology* (JSO). He collaborates with psychologists and sociologists within the consortiums *Sustainable Cooperation* and *Social Cohesion*.

Jeroen Hopster

Institutional Transformation: Desirability and Feasibility

In this presentation I offer considerations relevant for reflection on (1) the desirability and (2) the feasibility of institutional transformation. Subsequently, I inquire if and how (1) and (2) are connected: Do feasibility constraints have normative significance, and if so, how should this significance be understood?

On the first topic, I start by distinguishing between the process and outcome dimensions of institutional transformations, and subsequently argue for the relevance of considering one conservative argument (among other relevant considerations): transitional justice requires consideration of the legitimate expectations of agents whose long-term projects depend on stable institutions.

On the second topic, I start by differentiating between feasibility constraints of different kinds, as commonly discussed in political philosophy. Subsequently, I inquire whether the notion of 'feasibility' collapses into the notion of 'possibility', and assess what this implies for the normative significance of appeals to feasibility constraints.

Jeroen Hopster is assistant professor at the Ethics Institute of Utrecht University and member of Utrecht Young Academy. In the project "Lost in Transition" (NWO Veni) he investigates principles of transitional justice for 'losers' and 'winners' of the climate transition. In the consortium "Ethics of Socially Disruptive Technology" (NWO gravitation) he investigates how human morality is reshaped in interaction with emerging technologies and changing concepts.

Daniil Koloskov

Hollow Institutions: a Merleau-Pontian Account of Institutional Inertia

In my talk, I will investigate the loss of relevance of contemporary democratic institutions, which find themselves in a situation that Hannah Arendt described as powerlessness – a separation of 'words and deeds', where words become 'empty' and actions lose their overall grip on the community, thus increasingly relying on merely processual, legal or even coercive means. For this goal, I take up Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of institution.

According to Merleau-Ponty, institution is 'establishment in an experience . . . of dimensions . . . in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense and will make a sequel, a history.' Institution describes ongoing genesis of sense, a certain *founding* that becomes '*sedimented*' as a normative framework of sense and that remains open to transformation. Some institutions become 'public' and even political as they are *sedimented* into a broader 'symbolic matrix' (he also speaks about 'secondary sedimentation') resonating across other fields of experience and organizing collective meaning.

The central claim of my talk is that political institutions become *affectively significant* and mobilize individuals insofar as they continue contributing to the specific openness of other fields

by introducing new elements into their unfolding histories. This requires constant redetermination of political ideas and values, so they remain responsive to the ongoing flow of social life. Conversely, the *hollowing out* of the political institution occurs when they no longer engage in this dynamic openness, and political discourse loses its capacity to *renew* the shared meaning. This analysis reframes political vitality not as fidelity to static ideals but as the political effort to *practice* those ideals within open spaces of shared life.

Daniil Koloskov (PhD, Charles University/Catholic University of Louvain, 2023) is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Hradec Kralove in Czechia, he is the author of *Life without a Ground: Praxis of Being-in-the-World* (Springer 2024) and multiple articles such as 'Sharing Antagonisms: A Reelaboration of Nancy's Political Philosophy' (*Human Studies*, 2025) and 'AI-informed Acting: an Arendtian Perspective' (*Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, 2024). He is interested in political phenomenology, topics of collective agency and constitution of community.

Lucie Middlemiss

Embracing the Inertia of Family Life in Aspirations for the Sustainability Transition

I am an environmental social scientist, and a sociologist, and I am frequently confronted by the expectation that social life needs to change in the context of environment and climate policy. I have a career-long interest in the inertia of family life (for the purpose of the conference - the institution of the family) and in this talk I will take a wider view on this work bringing in empirics and theory. In an environmental context, and indeed in wider discourses in sociology, we often make assumptions that the family is changing, specifically individualising, and that change in family life is negative for society and for environmental outcomes. The idea of individualisation neglects to account for various forms of inertia in family life - including the inertia associated with care-giving, but also more widely with intimate and hyper-local relationships that persist in the present in similar ways to in the past. In environmental thinking, intimate and hyper-local relationships are often overlooked, yet they seem to form the basis of critical household decision-making which has clear environmental outcomes for 'good' or 'bad'. Intimate relationships are also central in qualitative conversations about environmental futures and everyday life. I will share recent thinking in this space, including empirical and theoretical work on relational approaches to energy, and on what 'Net Zero' means to daily life developed with two teams in the UK. I argue for closer attention to the inertia of family life, embracing this inertia as neither positive nor negative, instead a social reality which aspirations for environmental change must account for.

Lucie Middlemiss is a sociologist, and her research focuses on the intersection between environmental and social problems, with a particular interest in finding fair solutions in the Net Zero transition. Her work on fuel poverty is known for its translation of evidence in the lived experience into thinking about policy solutions. In recent years, she has established the Leeds relational energy team, bringing economic sociology into practical application in energy retrofit. She is co-author of a book *Just Climate Futures* out last year.

Nick Psomas

Autonomy in the Face of the More-Than-Human: Toward a Theory of Radically Entangled Democracy

Under the critical conditions of ecological catastrophe, existing institutional configurations increasingly fail to contend with Earth's systems and processes, which operate on radically different spatio-temporal scales. Meanwhile, entanglements with more-than-human entities become increasingly complex, unforeseeable, and opaque. This paper argues that such opacity is ought not to be conceived as an epistemic deficit to be overcome through improved forecasting or control, but as a constitutive condition for resisting dominant institutional regimes of predictability and re-imagining democratic life. Operating under the logic of economic and techno-scientific forecasting, these regimes present the planet as a transparent object of management and manipulation, thereby foreclosing alternative forms of democratic co-habitation between human and more-than-human entities.

Against this backdrop, the aim of the paper is to explore conceptual pathways that re-imagine democratic institutions from the standpoint of opaque entanglements with more-than-human entities. To that end, I turn to Cornelius Castoriadis' theory of the social imaginary with an emphasis on autonomy as the explicit self-creation of instituting society. I begin by analysing Castoriadis' notion of autonomy not as the mere interrogation of ossified institutions and their social imaginary significations, but as an act of openness that enables the creation of new forms of being. Then, I examine how this indeterminacy inherent in acts of autonomy can foster processes of institutionalisation attuned to the unforeseeability and opacity of planetary entanglements. I conclude by outlining the implications of this reading for a theory of a radically entangled democracy, understood as a politics of institutional openness that cultivates forms of democratic co-habitation with more-than-human worlds.

Nick Psomas is PhD candidate in philosophy at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (University of Amsterdam). His doctoral research is part of the project *A Planetary Aesthetics for the Future Democratic Society*, funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation. His work examines how a speculative poetics of planetary entanglements can construct an imaginary of democratic co-habitation between human and more-than-human worlds, drawing from traditions of Critical Theory and Decolonial Critique. His interests include social and political philosophy, democratic theory, history of aesthetic thought, decolonial critique, and the question of utopian imagination/imaginaries.

Gregor Schäfer

The Idea – and its Rest: Situating Institutional Inertia in Hegel

Hegel's *Science of Logic* culminates in the concept of the absolute idea as the all-encompassing structure of absolute self-reflexivity. Paradoxically, it is precisely at this point of thinking's highest self-transparency that Hegel introduces the figure of a 'rest': 'All the rest is error, confusion (...), and transitoriness; only the absolute idea is being, imperishable life, self-knowing truth, and is all truth.' By positing itself as absolute self-knowing, the absolute idea, as 'all truth', thereby is constitutively accompanied by an irresolvable remainder, a shadow, which then – at the end of the *Logic* – comes to the fore as nature's opacity, intransparency, and inertia. Repeating this

logical process, in Hegel's *Realphilosophie*, also spirit – precisely as a structure of absolute self-reflexivity – is accompanied by its re-naturalization, which, in the context of objective spirit, takes on the form of the blind reproduction of customs, habits, and institutions (described as spirit's 'second nature'). Whilst spirit's liberating activity – realizing itself through all forms of objective spirit from family to civic society and the state, culminating in world history – thereby takes place as the process of a permanent revolution against such re-naturalization, this rest still re-appears again and again as both a condition and an intrinsic obstacle to spirit's becoming self-transparent freedom.

In its first part (*i*), the paper outlines the structure of institutional inertia in this Hegelian framework. Following this structure, inertia cannot be neglected as only an empirical problem or as something accidental but – *taking seriously Hegel's more paradoxical and disturbing lesson* – must be understood as *systematically* inscribed in social-political processes of transformation, emancipation, and revolution: finally, as being rooted in spirit's very logic itself and as articulating a necessary moment in the dialectics of historical processes. In its second part (*ii*), the paper confronts some influential strands of post-Hegelian critiques of institutional inertia – such as the prominent Marxist critique of Hegel's state as form of alienation – with this logic: According to Hegelian dialectics, Marxism's communist 'ideal' – as the overcoming of all inert institutions in favor of a transparent political life – thereby *constitutively* faces its historical 'realization' in 20th century's socialism and its bureaucratic structures. Instead of being an avoidable 'failure' in the actualization of an original 'ideal,' institutional inertia thereby turns out to be inscribed in an ongoing dialectical process, which includes *both* the revolution's objectivization in – inert – institutions *and* its permanent struggle against them.

Gregor Schäfer wrote his dissertation on Hegel at the University of Basel where he was Lehrbeauftragter. He currently is research fellow at the University of London, working on a post-doc project on crisis, transformation, and utopia in Classical German Philosophy. His research and publications mainly include Classical German Philosophy (Fichte, Hegel), metaphysics, aesthetics, and political thinking.

Peter Sutoris

When Inertias Collide: Micro-Activism and Institutional Persistence in Sustainability Transformations

This paper argues that sustainability transformations are shaped not by a single institutional inertia but by the interaction of multiple forms of persistence. While institutional inertia is often invoked to explain the endurance of unsustainable systems, I distinguish between the inertia of technocratic transformation regimes and the patterned continuities of everyday life revealed through micro-activism. Micro-activism—small-scale, locally embedded, and often unrecognised forms of environmental action—provides a comparative lens through which these competing inertias become visible.

Drawing on cases from the United Kingdom and Nepal, the analysis shows how technocratic sustainability interventions reproduce institutional inertia through standardised metrics, infrastructural path dependencies, and visibility regimes that privilege scalable and institutionally legible forms of action. In contrast, micro-activist practices such as maintaining damaged environments, protecting land and water, and sustaining threatened forms of life enact a different

inertia rooted in care, subsistence, historical memory, and cultural continuity. These practices do not seek rupture but sustain livable worlds within compromised conditions.

Conflicts in sustainability transformations, I argue, often arise from collisions between these inertias. What appears as irrational resistance from the standpoint of technocratic institutions may constitute protective persistence from the standpoint of everyday life. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's concept of the space of appearances, the paper suggests that micro-activist practices generate fragile forms of political presence grounded in shared action and plurality, even when they leave little durable trace. However, dominant transformation frameworks equate political relevance with visibility, scalability, and institutional uptake, rendering these spaces of appearance unintelligible and reinforcing institutional trajectories that have become obsolete or unjust.

By bringing phenomenological and critical-theoretical accounts of the practico-inert into dialogue with sustainability research, the paper proposes a relational understanding of inertia as essential for distinguishing between persistence that sustains domination and persistence that safeguards social and ecological resilience. Recognising this plurality, it argues, is crucial for transformations that are both durable and just.

Peter Sutoris is Associate Professor in Climate and Development at the Sustainability Research Institute, University of Leeds. Trained in history and anthropology, he combines social science and humanities approaches in studying sustainability transformations. His research focuses on imagination of the future and environmental social movements. He has authored the books *Visions of Development* (Oxford University Press, 2016), *Educating for the Anthropocene* (MIT Press, 2022) and *Reimagining Development* (with Uma Pradhan, Oxford University Press, 2025).

Xenophon Tenezakis

Gramsci: Institutional Inertia as Catastrophic Equilibrium

The notion of institutional inertia, for example of political institutions in response to climate change, is paradoxical. On the one hand, inertia implies an absence of change. Yet, even inert institutions are in movement: they require that their individual components actively reproduce them daily. Furthermore, the concept of institutional inertia is centred on institutions as organisations, but it also typically presupposes an inadequate relationship with a changing reality. Thus, to be aptly described, institutional inertia requires a philosophy of society that is both processual (to account for change) and relational (to account for overlapping and interlinked realities). Gramscian philosophy considers the processual and relational character of societies simultaneously. Notably, Gramsci, to describe forms of dangerous social paralysis, develops the notion of a 'catastrophic equilibrium' of social forces. This catastrophic equilibrium constitutes a crisis of hegemony, a breakdown of social institutions, caused by discrepancies between elite groups concerning the way to tackle existing social problems. Thus, institutional inertia, rather than an inherent property of institutions, constitutes a dynamic process of decomposition of an institution's constituent forces, which are gradually shifting in mutually conflicting directions. In Gramsci's point of view, a caesarist leader can exploit such a paralysis to seize power. However, the outcome of such a power grab – classified by Gramsci as either progressive or regressive – is

uncertain and even dangerous, depending on the leader that takes power. Another solution exists: the progressive rebuilding of institutional mediations to allow for a new hegemony.

Xenophon Tenezakis holds a PhD in Political Philosophy from the University of Paris-Est. He is a member of the CRePhAC research laboratory at the University of Strasbourg and currently works as a philosophy professor in French secondary education. The title of his thesis was 'How to Act for Democracy in a Neoliberal Context. Philosophy of Democratic Collective Action Based on Sartre, Deleuze, and Guattari'. It focuses in particular on the possibility of collective, egalitarian resistance in the context of contemporary individualism. He is also working on caesarism in Gramsci and Spinoza, populism and the political philosophies of Sartre, Deleuze and Guattari.

Julie Van der Wielen

Institutional Psychotherapy and Analysis: a Historical and Conceptual Introduction

During the Second World War, a clinical and theoretical movement called institutional psychotherapy emerged in France. This movement was centred around the problem of the pathogenic effects of institutions, and it posited that institutions themselves can fall ill and require continuous treatment. It was initiated by the Catalan psychiatrist and Marxist Francesc Tosquelles, who had to flee the Franco regime. Tosquelles ended up in a concentration camp in Southern France, where he started treating the mentally ill with little to no means. His service was connected to maquis resistance networks and enabled people to escape from the Vichy regime. As Tosquelles was noticed by a doctor in the region, he was offered a position at the Saint-Alban psychiatric hospital, where he developed his practice and notion of institutional psychotherapy, while continuing his resistance activities within the Société du Gévaudan. The hospital served as both a stronghold of resistance and an asylum for those in hiding. Tosquelles established an extraordinary organisation, which was quite influential, with at least five hospitals in France and one in Belgium currently applying the methods of institutional psychotherapy, a number of ramifications of the movement (notably institutional pedagogy), and several relatively known representatives (for example Félix Guattari and Frantz Fanon). Despite this, the movement is not so well-known in broader circles and has not received the attention it deserves.

The movement of institutional psychiatry and its ramifications hold significant relevance for us today, particularly in light of our current political climate. From its inception, it has been intertwined with antifascism and resistance. What is more, our institutions often perpetuate reductive and dehumanising approaches, causing suffering not only in psychiatric hospitals but also in other institutions. Hence the importance of the main tenet of institutional psychotherapy: institutions can be pathogenic and need to be treated. Through different strategies, Tosquelles treated the hospital of Saint-Alban, and the result was exceptional in many ways. Approximately 45,000 psychiatric patients died of starvation in France during the war, and in Saint-Alban this number was 0. The hospital successfully brought together a diverse group of people — from the users of the mental facility to ordinary local workers, from exiles to artists and poets (for example Paul Éluard and Tristan Tzara). It redefined the conceptions of normality and pathology, of care, and of the role of the hospital, and played an important role in the development of outsider art (art brut).

I propose to: (a) sketch a short history of the movement of institutional psychotherapy, focusing on its difference with antipsychiatry (with which it is sometimes associated) and on its main principles and notions (some of which are derived from phenomenology, which had a strong influence on two of its most important actors, namely Tosquelles and Jean Oury, the founder of La Borde, where Guattari worked), which aim to create institutional plasticity and porosity; and simultaneously, (b) to situate Guattari's singular position within the movement and to show the significance of his 'institutional analysis', which reformulates the principles of institutional psychotherapy for a broader application.

Julie Van der Wielen holds a BA, MA and MPhil from KU Leuven, and a PhD from Universidad Diego Portales (Santiago, Chile) and Radboud University. She is currently employed as a postdoctoral researcher at Universiteit Antwerpen, funded by the Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek - Vlaanderen (FWO). In the context of this research, Van der Wielen visited several psychiatric hospitals, which apply the methods of institutional psychotherapy in France and in Belgium (notably La Borde, Saint-Alban and Albe vzw). She is the author of *Empirisme transcendantal et subjectivité* (Paris: Hermann, 2023) and of several articles and chapters on the philosophies of Sartre, Nietzsche, and Deleuze and Guattari.

Julia Wittmayer

Social Innovations and Institutional Change: Contestations and Dialectics

In sustainability transitions research, one of the central concepts is the notion of 'regime', understood as semi-coherent sets of rules (i.e. institutions) that underpin stability and inertia within systems. My research has focused on how these regimes—existing institutions—can be challenged, altered, or replaced through the emergence of alternatives. As a social and cultural anthropologist, I have been particularly interested in the alternative social and socio-material relations that arise from new ways of thinking, doing, and organizing. These alternatives are referred to as social innovations.

In this talk, I will introduce the concept of social innovations as ways of transforming systems and changing institutions. I will explore different types of contestations arising from social innovations and the dialectical relationship between social innovations and established institutions, highlighting how social innovations challenge existing institutions, but also reproduce certain aspects thereof. This creates a dynamic where social innovations must navigate between mainstreaming for example within institutional logics such as those of the market, state, or community (to be inclusive and impactful) and resisting capture (to maintain their radical core).

These tensions represent a productive dialectic interaction that should be acknowledged, understood, and strategically navigated by actors enacting those alternatives, often leading to the emergence of new hybrid forms. Drawing on empirical research in the realms of energy and academia, I will illustrate these dynamics and discuss how social movements can engage with them in smarter, more effective ways.

Julia Wittmayer combines a professorship at the Erasmus School of Philosophy with the role of senior researcher and advisor at the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions (DRIFT). Her work focuses on social innovations and governance in just sustainability transitions in urban areas and energy systems. To support the development of knowledge and action which addresses societal challenges, she designs and implements various collaborative action-oriented research formats. Recent work analyses how the

academic system itself is changing – and must change – to more effectively address intensifying challenges such as climate change, inequality, and polarisation.

Bart Zantvoort (organiser)

Bart Zantvoort is a lecturer and postdoctoral researcher in continental philosophy at Leiden University. His research focuses on the relation between social change and resistance to change in individuals, institutions and social structures more generally. He is the author of *Inertia, Resistance, Revolution: Hegel and the Logic of History* (De Gruyter-Brill, 2025) and the co-editor of *Hegel and Resistance* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and *Reimagining Europe* (SUNY Press, 2024). He has published articles on Hegel, Critical Theory, and phenomenology in journals including *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, *Azimuth*, *Chiasmi* and *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte*.