



Academic Freedom and the Politics of Free Speech with Jana Bacevic

A BSA Theory Study Group Event

25 September 2024 (4:30-6:00pm BST)
Online

About the Event

Within the current context of the media framing of a 'free speech crisis', the restructuring of the higher education sector, and changes of legislation, our immediate and collective attention is required to examine the meanings, manifestations of, and relationship between academic freedom and free speech. To this end, the BSA Theory Study Group is excited to welcome Jana Bacevic, who will present insights from her recently published and ongoing scholarship on academic freedom and the politics of 'free' speech. In particular, Jana will engage with theories of performativity of speech to reflect on the performative nature of societal and institutional speech-acts. The presentation will also highlight the role that free speech legislation (as performative utterance) and state power play in the lives of education workers, students, and wider communities, as well as in the reproduction of universities and student unions. Following Jana's talk, we are pleased to welcome Naomi Waltham-Smith as a discussant who approaches the issues of deliberation and disagreement on campus from the perspective of listening.

Audience members will also be encouraged to participate in a Q&A session.

About the Speakers

- **Jana Bacevic** - Jana is associate professor at the Department of Sociology at Durham University and associate editor at *The Philosopher*, UK's longest-running public philosophy journal. An interdisciplinary social and political theorist, Jana has written and published extensively on the relationship between modes of knowing about the world (i.e. ideas, institutions, and practices of knowledge production), and modes of being in the world (i.e. how they relate to economic, political and affective regimes). Previous publications address topics such as academic freedom and the politics of 'free' speech; the role of social science in crises; and the relationship between knowledge, prediction, and social interventions, in particular in relation to global risks such as pandemics and climate change. Jana's upcoming research project, 'Uncategorical Imperatives' (25-6), supported by the Leverhulme Trust, examines the concept, intellectual history, and contemporary politics of non-reciprocity to develop an ethics for the post-Anthropocene.
- **Naomi Waltham-Smith** - Naomi is a professor at the University of Oxford and Douglas Algar Tutorial Fellow at Merton College. She is an interdisciplinary scholar working at the intersection of recent continental philosophy with music and sound studies. She is the author of four books: *Music and Belonging Between Revolution and Restoration* (OUP), *Shattering Biopolitics: Militant Listening and the Sound of Life* (Fordham UP), *Mapping (Post)colonial Paris by Ear* (CUP), and *Free Listening* (Nebraska UP). Naomi is currently working on a monograph, supported by funding from the Leverhulme Trust and the British Academy and a fellowship at the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg, that excavates a hidden concept of listening in the history of political philosophy in the hope of illuminating the challenges facing our democracies today. Her interest in listening extends to the university as a site of democratic deliberation, and she has contributed to the higher education sector's work on academic freedom.