



Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin

INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

Understanding Risk in Time, Social Reproduction, and Market: The Objectification and Universalisation of a Social Construct

Symposium

Time: 16th October 2026, 16:00-18:00

Venue: Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (by invitation only) and online via Zoom

<https://eu01web.zoom.us/meeting/register/BJbsP42DRhaikeJkCLtWjQ>



With

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Moderated by **Minh Nguyen** (Bielefeld University; Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg 2026/2027)

How do we decide that something is a ‘risk’? The concept of risk is a container for diverse understandings: as an external danger, the probability of an event happening, threat to an established social order, an adventurous undertaking, or a reflexive condition characterising modernity. Yet, underlying these is the common notion that risk is not an objective reality; it expresses what might happen in the future rather than what actually does (G. Reith). Despite its social constructedness, however, risk can be objectified not only as something that can be calculated and reified for private management and social control, but also increasingly as a commodity produced for market exchange.

Whether for protecting certain social order or for profit making, much is at stake in the objectification of risk. It is not just that risk constructions have material consequences in real life for real people. More importantly, it involves processes of spatial and temporal homogenisation that help to concentrate power in the hands of corporations, states and dominant social groups. The latter have the most to gain from the universalisation of risk as a category, whereas the responsibility and blame thereby produced are often disproportionately borne by populations and groups who are already marginalised or disadvantaged (M. Douglas). As such, risk is neither a threat to nor just a productive resource for the global capitalist order, but is constitutive of the order itself.

This hybrid symposium brings anthropologists and sociologists together whose works have in one way or another illuminated risk's varying relationship to time and space, social reproduction and the market. The discussants will reflect on the historical and cultural processes underpinning the production of risk as a universal category and its implications for social and political lives in our fast-changing world.

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