

# Systems of Agency in Face of Disruption

2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of the Disruption and  
Societal Change Center at TU Dresden

12 to 14 October 2022

(version: September 28, 2022)

## Systems of Agency in Face of Disruption

Understanding disruption requires a critical engagement with systems of agency in crisis. Disruptive experiences are situated and embodied, tied to social actors whose habitual construction of the world is suddenly unsettled or defamiliarized. Confronted with a disruption of entrenched patterns of perception, knowledge, and practice, the capacity to act needs to be recalibrated. What happens to concepts of self-efficacy and agency when faced with feelings of powerlessness, despondence, and radical uncertainty?

Foregrounding agency in the context of disruption may begin by drawing attention to the mechanisms of power and priority that determine whose experiences of disruption are acknowledged, even normalized, while others remain invisible. Whoever has agency in defining the crisis and its underlying causes will also leave a mark on its imagined solutions. From precarious frontline activism to well-funded high-tech—who are the actors that drive transformation and change? Who or what has the power to disrupt and who or what experiences disruption under conditions of the climate crisis, colonial warfare, or digital capitalism? Granted that no one ever acts alone, that agency is not a property of bounded individuals but a relational, emergent, and distributed phenomenon of a collective of actors that include humans and nonhumans alike, what would it mean to trace the interrelationships of actors involved in multiscale and systemic processes of disruption and transformation?

# Introduction

Disruptive events both expose and restructure distributions of power, knowledge, and activity within complex systems whose infrastructural dimensions frequently remain opaque. Access to infrastructures—be they cognitive, social, technological, material, institutional, or political—is thus a key function of asserting agency and actively shaping transformation processes.

What are the passages that lead from critical awareness to transformative action, from conceptual knowledge to actionable knowledge? Closing the knowledge-action gap in activating wholesale transformation processes with the aim of shaping more sustainable and equitable societies may require a concept of disruptive agency. Which modes of action and forms of accountability are effective and necessary in catalyzing change? Which hegemonic patterns of perception, knowledge, and practice are in fact in need of fundamental disruption in order to effect change? Disruptive experiences can themselves be the cause for disruptive practices as radical, defiant, aesthetic, and material interventions from the margins or even the center. What is the role of the collective and the individual in such processes? What is at stake in examining the modalities and differences of moral, material, and legal agency in trying to understand disruption as the paradigmatic condition of systems in crisis?

## Hosting TUDiSC Projects

Disruption on the Internet: More Sovereignty towards Deceptive Technologies

↻ [DESIGNATE](#)

Many Moving Parts: Continuity, Disruption, and Change in Global Humanitarian Aid Relations ↻ [HUMGLOBAL](#)

The Disruptivity of the Others in Urban Transformations ↻ [DOUbt](#)

Transformative Place-Making for Uncertain Futures: Narratives, Education, and Design  
↻ [TPM](#)

12 10

18:30 | **Public Keynote:  
Disruption and Agency from a  
Sustainability Transition Perspective**  
Julia Wittmayer (The Dutch Research Institute  
For Transitions, drift Rotterdam)

moderated by Moritz Ingwersen

With the conference focusing on 'disruption – agency – transformation', this keynote will take one of these concepts as an entry point to reflect on the other two. From a sustainability transitions perspective, we will discuss the space for disruption and agency for addressing the current environmental and social crisis. We specifically take a closer look at different forms of agency in sustainability transitions and how these are reinvented and transformed through social innovations. We will also consider the close interlinkages between innovation, disruption and system reproduction in attempts of actors to influence transition dynamics and end with a reflection on the agency of research(ers) in and for sustainability transitions.

20:00 | **Get Together & Reception**

 Heinz-Schönfeld  
Lecture Hall  
Barkhausen-Bau  
Helmholtzstr. 18  
01069 Dresden

13 10

12:00 | **Welcome**  
Christian Prunitsch

**Project Presentations & Discussion**  
moderated by Lucas von Ramin

12:15 | **DESIGNATE**  
Stefan Escher, Deborah Löschner, Helena K. Jahromi


13:05 | **DOU**b**T**  
Daniel Peter, Sergiu Spatan, Gundula Thiele

13:55 | **TPM**  
Moritz Ingwersen, Pauline Mai, Leon Jank

14:45 | **HumGlobal**  
Patricia Ward

15:35 | Coffee and Cake

| Walk to the Inaugural Lecture in the Heinz-Schönfeld  
Lecture Hall

 Klemperer-Saal  
SLUB Dresden  
Zellescher Weg 18  
01069 Dresden

13 10

16:40 | **The Smartness Mandate:  
Re-imagining our Technological  
Future**  
Orit Halpern (Chair of Digital Cultures)

*The university wide inaugural lecture of Orit Halpern will be part of the conference. The event will also be streamed live via [YouTube](#). To attend in person, it is mandatory to register via the [official form](#).*

Smart Grids. Smart Cities. Smart homes. Smart Medicine. Today, growing concerns with climate change, energy scarcity, security, and economic volatility have turned the focus of urban planners, investors, scientists, and governments towards computational technologies as sites of potential salvation from a world consistently defined by catastrophes and “crisis”. The penetration of almost every part of life by digital technologies has transformed how we understand nature, culture, and time. But how? And for whom? What futures are we imagining, or foreclosing, through our “smart” infrastructures? This talk will historically and ethnographically situate this new mandate to be smart and discuss how the humanities and sciences can work together to develop technologies that engage planetary scale problems in more ethical, just, and diverse ways.

18:10 | **Champagne Reception**

 Heinz-Schönfeld  
Lecture Hall  
Barkhausen-Bau  
Helmholtzstr. 18  
01069 Dresden

## World Café

Four to six predefined questions will be discussed in smaller groups at respective tables. Beforehand, you get to sign in for the three tables you want to join.

08:30 | **Coffee and Sign-In**

09:00 | **Introduction**  
Karoline Oehme-Jüngling

09:15 | **World Café Round 1**


09:55 | **World Café Round 2**

10:35 | **World Café Round 3**

11:05 | **Coffee and Snacks**

 Klemperer-Saal /  
Talleyrand-Zimmer/  
Foyer  
SLUB Dresden  
Zellescher Weg 18  
01069 Dresden

- 11:30 | **Presentation of the World Café**  
The results of the discussions at each table will be presented by the table hosts.
- 12:00 | **Final discussion**  
moderated by Anne Lauber-Rönsberg and Moritz Schulz
- 13:00 | **Closing Round:  
Organization and Planning**  
Christian Prunitsch
- 13:30 | **End of Conference**  
optional lunch at Mensa Siedepunkt  
(self-payd)

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