



Fear and Anxiety in Contemporary British Cultures

Annual conference of the German Association for the Study of British Cultures

21st to 23rd November 2019 at Universität Hildesheim, Bühler-Campus

– Call for Papers –

Contemporary Western social and cultural discourses are preoccupied with narratives of fear and anxiety. In contrast to the anxieties and fears that come with and are clearly linked to immediate dangers, for instance at times of religious persecution or civil war, in Western democracies fear has turned into – what we would describe as – ‘fear for fear’s sake’, and “[...] being scared has become a culturally sanctioned affectation that pervades all aspect of life” (Furedi 2005, 1). While Sara Ahmed points to the political functions of emotions and persuasively argues that “emotionality as a claim *about* a subject or a collective is clearly dependent on relations of power, which endow ‘others’ with meaning and value” (2004, 4), Carolyn Korsmeyer and Barry Smith contend that “[e]motions yield a type of cognition that is unavailable by any means other than emotional experience itself” and that “mental phenomena such as emotions and beliefs are ‘about’ something; they are ‘directed towards’ some object or other, whether a real object, an imaginary object, or a state of affairs.” (2004, 10) Accordingly, one might even go so far and describe fear and anxiety today as approaches to reality and modes of perception that serve as perspectives in the processes of sense making (cf. Furedi, 2005, 131).

Ongoing geo-political divisions, for instance into East and West, as well as state-sanctioned surveillance attest to today’s all-pervading fears and anxieties. In this context, it is not surprising that there has been a significant increase in (popular) cultural production negotiating contexts, people, events, and situations that relate to these emotional states. Encounters with works of art are neither restricted to a cultural elite or a clear-cut section of society nor located outside the political. In the understanding of cultural materialism, culture is, as John Brannigan puts it, “a field of much ideological contest and contradiction, and [...] no cultural artefact or practice is outside this political sphere.” (1998: 12) At this conference we wish to discuss what we mean by fear and anxiety and how

cultural production attends to them as well as to shed light on contemporary structures of feeling and on the contemporary “politics of fear” (Furedi).

We invite proposals for papers in English of 20 minutes in length, with possible topics including (but not being limited to):

- representations of fear, anxiety, unease, and dis-ease
- the politics of fear and processes of cultural production and expression
- xenophobia, the fearsome Other, and constructions of evil
- expressions of gender anxieties
- anxieties and surveillance; panoptic and synoptic regimes
- fears and anxieties in connection to Brexit
- dystopias, science fiction, and horror scenarios

Keynote speakers: Dr. Patrick Duggan, University of Surrey, Theatre and Performance &
Prof. Dr. Matthew Kramer, University of Cambridge, Faculty of Law

A selection of papers will be published in the *Journal for the Study of British Cultures*.

Please send your proposal of about 300 words and a short biographical note to
britcult@uni-hildesheim.de by **15th April 2019**.

Organising team: Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier, Lisa Kalkowski, James McKenzie,
Maria Neuber, and Daniel Schäbler

Literature:

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Routledge 2004.

Brannigan, John. *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1998.

Brusberg-Kiermeier, Stefani & James McKenzie. Desire and Anxiety: Cold War Voyeurism in Contemporary TV Spy Series, in: *British Cold War Cultures*, ed. by Kathleen Starck. *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* vol. 24, no. 1/2017, 73-88.

Duggan, Patrick. Unsettling the audience: Affective ‘Dis-ease’ and the Politics of Fear and Anxiety in Contemporary Performance. *Key Words* vol. 15, 2017, 40-54.

Furedi, Frank. *Politics of Fear*. Continuum, 2005.

Korsmeyer, Carolyn & Barry Smith. Visceral Values: Aurel Kolnai on Disgust. In: Aurel Kolnai, *On Disgust*. Open Court 2004, 1-25.

Kramer, Matthew H. *The Ethics of Capital Punishment: A Philosophical Investigation of Evil and its Consequences*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Kramer, Matthew H. *Torture and Moral Integrity: A Philosophical Enquiry*. Oxford University Press, 2014.