

Call for Papers  
**Politics of Emotion/  
Emotions of Politics**

Annual Conference of the Society for the Study of British Cultures  
University of Innsbruck, 21–23 November 2024

“How can paying attention to our feelings / become part of our political movements?” asks Ann Cvetkovich in her “Alphabet of Feeling Bad. Now.” (Cvetkovich 2023, 18). From the Scottish Independence Referendum and Brexit to Covid-19, immigration-, austerity- and climate-policies, emotions have proven to be key-components in affecting social and cultural politics. Emotional politization often results in ‘affective polarizations’ which are “a collective, social outcome of political developments, not based solely on individual experience” (Gohrisch and Stedman 2023, 4). Affective polarizations affect British cultures and (re-) formulate and implement hegemonic ‘feeling rules’ and highlight existing power-structures.

These developments become manifest, among other things, in current debates in which affective re-labeling is employed as a hegemonic strategy. Thus, for example, while environmental activism has been perceived as obstructing people from getting on with their lives (see debates on *Insulate Britain*, *Extinction Rebellion*, and *Fridays for Future*), recommendations by scientists or climate activists have been labelled as too emotional or emotionally troubling. Discussions about pro-equity and pro-diversity follow similar patterns with measures identified as being either restrictive (#feministkilljoy, #thoughtpolice, #AllLivesMatter) or hypocritical (#virtuesignaling, #identitypolitics).

A common paradox in such discourses seems to be a strongly emotion-driven refusal of social movements that are perceived as too emotional. In the context of so-called ‘wokeness’, for instance, acts of taking offence with injustice have been amply discussed as (misguided) politicised indignation (King 2014) and left-wing indoctrination (see Mahoudeau 2022). Yet, many of these responses to wokeness are highly emotionally charged. What can we glean from this? What can counter-indignation to wokeness, as it were, tell us about political power over the meaning and status of emotions? What inferences can we make when neoliberal contempt for structural criticism sparks a polemic against the fundamental structure of certain sensibilities?

Simultaneously, affective concepts like ‘empathy’ are being (mis-)used for attempts to create affective cultures, while potentially resulting in “problematic appropriations or projections on the part of ‘privileged’ subjects [and] risk obscuring their complicity in the wider relations of power” (Pedwell 2016, 7). In light of these developments, we want to explore how (historical) technologies of emotion were and are being used to simultaneously divide and create communities and place individuals within their respective ‘bubbles’ or outside groups. How does an increased attachment to these group identities affect the willingness to cooperate and compromise? And how do these emotional policies influence democratic processes?

However one may answer these questions, the related developments seem to translate, in the words of *BBC Radio 4*, to an 'Age of Emotion' (2018).

This *BritCult*-conference invites papers that explore the intersections and relationships of affective phenomena of and within British 'structures of feeling' from either a diachronic or synchronic perspective. Topics may include, but are not limited to discussions of:

- Medializing Emotions
- Political events (e.g. Brexit, Scottish Independence Referendum, death of Queen Elizabeth II)
- Algorithms and Affect
- A.I. and Emotions
- Populism
- Gamification of Empathy and Affect
- Cultures of Affect and Mental Health
- "Wokeness", "Cancel Cultures" and the dictionary of emotional division
- Emotionality and Complicity
- Affective Anthropocene
- History of Emotions and Politics
- Shaming and affective discourses of (self-)control

### Keynote Speakers

Ann Cvetkovich (Carleton University, Canada)

Carolyn Pedwell (University of Kent, England)

We are inviting proposals for 20-minute papers by March 18, 2024. Please include a title, short abstract (ca. 300 words), short bio-note (ca. 150 words). Please email your proposals to [britcult24-anglistik@uibk.ac.at](mailto:britcult24-anglistik@uibk.ac.at).

The conference will take place at the University of Innsbruck, Austria.

### Organising Team

Department of English, University of Innsbruck

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### Works Cited

- Cvetkovich, Ann. "Alphabet of Feeling Bad. Now." *Re-Imagining Depression*. Eds. Julie Hollenbach and Robin Alex MacDonald. 13–22. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.
- Gohrisch, Jana, Gesa Stedman. *Affective Polarisation: Social Inequality in the UK after Austerity, Brexit and Covid-19*. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2023.
- King, Richard. *On Offence: The Politics of Indignation*. London: Scribe, 2013.
- Mahoudeau, Alex. *La Panique woke: Anatomie d'une offensive réactionnaire*. Paris: Les Éditions Textuel, 2022.
- Pedwell, Carolyn. "Decolonizing Empathy." *Samyukta: A Journal of Gender and Culture*. 1.1. 2016.