

Britcult Conference 2017
- Call for Papers -

Political Bodies

TU Dortmund University, 23-25 November 2017
Internationales Begegnungszentrum (IBZ)

It is hardly possible to think about culture(s) without taking into account the status of the body and the 'value' that is accorded to it. Even a cursory glance at what is happening around us each and every day reminds us of the fact that bodies are not merely matter, but rather, to paraphrase Judith Butler, that they matter. Current debates regarding the so-called refugee crisis revolve around issues connected to corporeality, especially to what is identified as the right to bodily integrity. We are regularly informed via the media about refugees drowning in the Mediterranean Sea or being hindered from movement by border controls, walls, and fences. Increasingly, people in Western countries return to and insist on the exclusivist idea of the ethnic integrity of national communities, because they feel materially and physically threatened by the bodily presence of 'others'; a threat that is turned back on those that allegedly represent it: as an effect of the Brexit referendum, for instance, the number of racially and religiously motivated hate crimes in the UK rose dramatically, particularly against Polish EU migrants. Across the channel, the ban on Muslim women in some French towns to wear a so-called burkini at the beach, i.e. a prohibition to veil their nakedness, sparked controversial discussions as to how religious and personal self-determination interfered with the larger community's (secular) value system.

Examples like these illustrate that in modernity, according to Michel Foucault, "the body [...] is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (*Discipline and Punish*). At the same time, Foucault insists, it is insufficient to conceive of the ways in which bodies are invested by power merely in terms of repression; on the contrary, for him, power is inherently productive. In contemporary consumer societies, as Jean Baudrillard claimed already in 1970, the body has ultimately taken over the moral and ideological function formerly held by the soul in that it has become an "*object of salvation*" (*The Consumer Society*): a hyperreal object used to generate profit in the here and now. On the other hand, materially present bodies still harbour the potential to make a change: While in Turkey, the state of emergency allows the government to suppress large-scale political protests and detain disagreeable journalists and activists, in the USA, people took to the streets right after the presidential election to protest against Donald Trump. As Judith Butler has recently stated in an argument in which she urges to recognise the political role of 'bodies in alliance': "the bodies on the street redeploy the space of appearance in order to contest and negate the existing forms of political legitimacy" (*Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 2015).

We encourage papers that fathom the political impact of bodies, their insertion within power discourses, their subversive and performative potentials, their productivity, their precarious status, their vulnerability and mortality, their permeability, their material versus their abstract forms (legislative bodies, literary corpora, corporations etc.).

We would also like to stress that we explicitly encourage reflections on the *historical* becoming of the body; it is not necessary or even desirable to deal solely with contemporary cultures. Apart from that, we also welcome papers that transcend the narrowly 'British' focus (without losing sight of it) and so allow comparative perspectives.

Topics may hence touch upon issues like:

- gendered / raced / classed / disabled / ageing etc. bodies
- legal / illegal bodies; body trafficking
- athletic bodies / bodies and the politics of sports
- media representations of bodies in news coverage, TV series, films
- virtual and artificial bodies; cyborgs, robots, etc.
- organic bodies / bodies without organs
- medical and technological discourses on the human body
- political bodies / the body politic (nation, the status of the EU, etc.)
- the body in the arts and literature
- etc.

Please send a proposal of about 300 words to britcult2017@tu-dortmund.de by 15 March 2017.

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