

Call for Papers

**Re-Orientating Gender (Studies):
Feminism, Queerness, Trans* in Cultural Studies Today**

Annual Conference of the Society for the Study of British Cultures
University of Bamberg, 20-22 November 2025

After a period of seeming consolidation, feminist politics, queer and trans* identities as well as gender studies as an academic field are, once again, under threat. In delineating the history of feminist discourses and activism, for instance, critics habitually represent the conflicts among different ‘waves’ of (white) feminists as cliquish battles. These “[d]erogatory narratives about all feminisms as racist and/or transphobic distract from the current political, systemic, and discursive backlash against LGBTQIA+ persons and feminists alike” (Olson & Lechner 299). In a similar manner, gender studies in general, and queer and trans* studies in particular, are frequently depicted as an unnecessary enterprise at best, as a threat to societal cohesion at worst. Paralleling the attacks on feminist, queer and trans* identities, gender studies are increasingly endangered on an institutional level (UK universities scrapping arts and humanities programmes and departments are but one example of this trend). These developments go hand in hand with politically charged language which is either directed at those who are still marginalised and at risk or is co-opted for ideological purposes like the weaponisation of gender-based resentment in the run-up to the Brexit referendum (see Green & Shorrocks).

The analysis of the plurality of gender expressions has always been at the core of cultural studies, which accommodate femininities, masculinities, queer and non-binary as well as intersectional identities. Taking its cue from the inherently political nature of cultural studies, this year’s BritCult conference wants to take stock of these histories and re-orientate the position of gender (studies) in British cultural studies today. In Sara Ahmed’s definition, orientation is “how [...] we come to find our way in a world that acquires new shapes, depending on which way we turn” (1). It consequently includes a diachronic view as well as one that is directed at the future: the (cultural, performative, political, theoretical) work of academics working in feminist, queer and trans* studies as well as activists and artists has become inspirational for their contemporary successors, the critics and activists who draw upon their work to call out injustices and think through genders and their representations. Thus, re-orientating may be a way to represent gender and queerness anew or to suggest future potentialities such as José Esteban Muñoz’s call to imagine queerness in a utopian near-future that has not yet arrived (2009). In a similar vein, the discomfort and disruption which feminist discourse can produce – via Ahmed’s notion of the ‘feminist killjoy’ – has led to a productive reclamation of the term ‘feminist’.



BritCult

In a political climate which paints queer and trans* identities as threatening, and the humanities as expendable, gender studies assume renewed responsibility within and beyond academia.

We invite abstracts with a focus on British theorists, phenomena and case studies. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- feminisms: histories, waves, concepts
- gender (and) politics
- body politics, the body as political
- intersectional approaches, post-intersectionality
- queer and feminist utopias and dystopias
- activism and practices of resistance and protest
- decolonial queer practices
- performativity, queer performance
- (representations of) femininities and masculinities
- mediated representations of gender
- heteronormativity/homonormativity
- sexualities and sexual practices
- trans- and/or posthumanism
- gender, ecocriticism and the Anthropocene

If you are interested in contributing a 20-minute paper, please send your **abstract** (ca. 300 words) and a **short bio-note** (ca. 150 words) to the organisers by **March 19, 2025**. Please email your proposals to conferences.englit@uni-bamberg.de.

Keynote Speakers

keynote 1: joint keynote by Elisabeth Lechner (Wien) and Greta Olson (Gießen)

keynote 2: Colby Gordon (Bryn Mawr, PA)

Organising Team

Susan Brähler, Sarah Busch, Susanne Gruß, Allison Lemley, Kerstin-Anja Munderlein
Chair of English Literature, Institute for English and American Studies, University of Bamberg

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- Green, Jane, and Rosalind Shorrock. "The Gender Backlash in the Vote for Brexit." *Political Behaviour* 45 (2023), 347-371.
- Muñoz, José Esteban, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York University Press, 2009.
- Olson, Greta, and Elisabeth Lechner. "#Feminist - Naming Controversies and Celebrating Points of Connection and Joy in Current Feminisms." *European Journal of English Studies* 26.2 (2022), 292-321.

