

35th Annual CDE Conference, Frankfurt/Bad Homburg, 27-29 May 2027

The German Society for Contemporary Theatre and Drama in English (CDE) is pleased to announce its 35th Annual Conference (27-29 May 2027). It is organized by the Institute of English and American Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt with the assistance of the University of Bamberg and will be held as a residential conference at Goethe University's [Forschungskolleg Humanwissenschaften in Bad Homburg](#).

‘Ugly Feelings’: Hope and Anger in Contemporary Theatre

In 2026, CDE's Annual Conference explored the subject of ‘resilience’. Next year, the conference topic is “‘Ugly Feelings’: Hope and Anger in Contemporary Theatre” and we invite scholars working in the broad field of Anglophone drama to investigate what role extreme or supposedly naïve emotions such as hope and anger play on the contemporary stage.

More specifically, we want to continue thinking about how theatre and performance react to societal and political crises. Responding directly to renewed anxieties about gender, war, right-wing extremism, networked misogyny and transphobia, articulated most recently by Judith Butler,¹ the conference asks what theatre in particular can do to respond to such developments. We turn to and revisit feminist theories of emotion and affect from the last two decades, for instance, Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre*,² Sara Ahmed's “feminist killjoy” from *The Promise of Happiness*,³ or Sianne Ngai's concept of “ugly feelings”,⁴ which we use in the conference title. We ask how these theories are approached in Anglophone theatre scholarship. In particular, we take up Ngai's list of supposedly negative emotions – such as envy, anxiety, paranoia, ‘animatedness’ and ‘stuplimity’ – and add anger and hope to the list of ugly feelings to ask how they can act “as a mediation between the aesthetic and the political in a nontrivial way”.⁵ As Siân Adiseshiah puts it in her *Utopian Drama: In Search of A Genre*, engaging with hope means taking “a political position, a praxis combining political commitment with faith in the *potential* of collectivism”.⁶ In line with Rachel Silverbloom,⁷ who argues that hope in queer-feminist contexts is always-already a form of refusal, we contend that hope and anger are not mutually exclusive: Anger can be hopeful and hope *must* be angry to inspire any change at all. Indubitably, both sometimes ‘get ugly’ on page and stage, rousing bodies and minds.

In line with this, we invite proposals for papers in English of 20 minute-length as well as alternative/creative formats in line with the philosophy of the CDE and its intention to promote research and teaching in the area of recent and contemporary theatre and drama in English. In particular, we invite scholars working in/with **theatre and performance, affect theory, queer-feminist theory** and **cultural studies** to consider these (by no means exhaustive) **thematic clusters** and **questions**:

¹ Judith Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (Penguin, 2024).

² Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (University of Michigan Press, 2005).

³ Sara Ahmed, “Feminist Killjoys”, in *The Promise of Happiness* (Duke University Press, 2010), 50-87.

⁴ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵ *ibid.*, 3.

⁶ Siân Adiseshiah, *Utopian Drama: In Search of a Genre* (Bloomsbury, 2023), 5.

⁷ Rachel Silverbloom, “Hope as Refusal: Queer, Feminist Futurity”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 49.4 (2024): 807-830.

Political Hope and Anger

- How do recent Anglophone plays respond to fascist developments all over the world and what role do the affective dimensions of hope and anger play?
- Circa 20 years after Ngai's and Ahmed's pivotal publications, what do 'ugly feelings' or 'feminist kill-joys' mean and do on stage?
- How do queer, disabled, racialised bodies perform anger or hope on stage? How do such perspectives complicate normative understandings of 'negative' and 'positive' feelings?
- What new (or in fact, old) dangers are theatre institutions and festivals facing when conservative governments cut arts budgets and censor what can be performed?
- How do Anglophone playwrights respond to ongoing wars, such as those in Ukraine and Gaza?

Angry and Hopeful Que(e)ries

- Is there a return or a renewed interest in provocative or shocking language on stage?
- Can we observe a revisiting of genres such as 'in-yer-face' theatre? What new genres, for instance Afriquia theatre (cf. Goddard and Adebayo)⁸, allow us to investigate anger and hope anew?
- Who are the 'angry young wo/men/queers' today?

Digital Feelings

- What aesthetic and performative dimensions of contemporary extremism in digital culture can we observe and how do practitioners and audiences respond?
- How can theatre bridge or trouble the binary between 'AI/technology is bad' and 'human co-presence is good'?
- In times when humans ask AI for emotional and therapeutic advice, how can playwrights advocate for the theatre to remain a place for 'utopian performatives' (Dolan 2005) and emotional support?

Other possible thematic clusters include:

- aesthetics of other 'negative' or 'positive' feelings and affects
- investigations of 'angry' or 'hopeful' performance art
- history of emotions in contemporary theatre: 'angry' or 'hopeful' on stage then and now
- theatre and/as protest
- other 'ugly', 'angry' or 'hopeful' theatrical approaches to current crises

Confirmed keynote speakers: Mojisola Adebayo (Queen Mary University of London), Siân Adiseshiah (Loughborough University), Paul Halferty (University College Dublin), and a performance by Kfir Lapid (Glasgow).

In accordance with CDE's constitutional policy, papers should deal exclusively with contemporary (i.e. post-1989) theatre and drama in English. Please note: All submissions are welcome. Preference will be given to abstracts submitted by scholars who have not given a paper at last year's conference.

Abstracts: Abstracts (300 words) for papers proposed (20 minutes maximum delivery time) should be accompanied by a short biographical note, plus full address and institutional affiliation.

Deadline: 30 September 2026

Send to: Mev Skuroshi (she/her): skuroshi@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Organising team: Heidi Lucja Liedke (Frankfurt), Sarah Busch (Bamberg), Mev Skuroshi, Nina Heise, Gianluca Calio (all Frankfurt)

Selected papers will be published in a special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English* (JCDE). CDE encourages contributions by emerging scholars. Scholars who work on a PhD in the field of contemporary theatre and drama (even if the PhD topic is not related to the conference topic) may apply to the CDE PhD forum, which will take place on 26 May 2027 in the afternoon and 27 May 2027 in the morning at the conference venue. For further information, please see <http://contemporary-drama.de/phd-forum/>.

NB: Only paid-up members are eligible to give papers at CDE conferences. Membership subscriptions should be taken out or renewed prior to the conference. For details, please contact CDE's treasurer Martin Riedelsheimer (martin.riedelsheimer@uni-a.de).

⁸ Lynette Goddard and Mojisola Adebayo, eds., *Black British Queer Plays and Practitioners: An Anthology of Afriquia Theatre* (Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2022).