



TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITÄT
CHEMNITZ



Symposium as part of the 25th Anniversary of the Faculty of Humanities at Chemnitz University of Technology

Department of English and the Associate Professor of Intercultural Competency

17 January 2019, 9-17:30h (Altes Heizhaus)

Protestkulturen/Cultures of Protest

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Kathrin Ganz (Arbeit Gender Technik, Technische Universität Hamburg)

Is a “firestorm” already a form of protest? At any rate, it is a social phenomenon, facilitated by digital media, which enables each user of a social network to participate in a mass movement, albeit a very unorganized one, simply by using a hashtag or sharing a specific content. Likewise, by starting online petitions or fundraising, as well as commenting, users can take action with little time and effort. Concurrently, this kind of activism is problematic, because it is both predominantly passive (“slacktivism”) and generally not long-lasting (cf. Kony 2012). Due to the fact that the digital space is ephemeral by nature and users compete for attention, content is often represented in an abbreviated and simplified way.

Protest in digital space then, even more than its analog counterpart, raises questions of staging. Virtually any protest, even if motivated by serious concerns, is a kind of performance. Disguise, acting, and memorizing texts are part of the phenomenon. The aspect of staging, however, became especially controversial and prone to criticism during the G20 summit in Hamburg in July 2017, when the image of what became #riothipster went viral: A well-groomed young man taking a selfie in front of a burning barricade, thereby raising questions of authenticity and the interrelations between protest and capitalism.

“Empowerment” is a term associated with collective emotions, sometimes leading to the creation of a common enemy, among other things; however this term has become somewhat ambivalent. While empowerment was originally a concept intended to encourage individuals to live a self-determined life and to participate in all aspects of life, currently we are witnessing a type of empowerment, which tells women they are powerful and liberated by buying the right products and actively participating in capitalism (“Power women”). Thus, one can ask to what extent is participation in, or resistance to capitalism linked to protesting?

The rise of digital cultures of protest, however, does not resolve old conflicts. Everyday racism that is fatal in the USA and the resistance against it has been given a succinct label: Black Lives Matter, or #BLM. Additionally, ACT UP New York continues to use the slogan “Silence = Death” and describe themselves as “united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis”, just as they did when the protest group was formed in 1987. This slogan explicitly refers to the aims and views of the early ACT UP years and creates a link with the past. Is there a certain continuity in change?

The symposium, held as part of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Faculty of Humanities at the TU Chemnitz, aims to analyze cultures of protest in an interdisciplinary and diachronic mode by addressing

the following questions: To begin with, who protests? In which ways? Against what kinds of established politically, socially, or ethically restricting conditions? Additionally, how do these forms of resistance affect participants and societies? How may protests be sustained in our fast-moving age and what sorts of counter-movements may arise? By enabling an interdisciplinary dialogue of scholars who work in cultural, social, political, literary studies or related fields, we aim to create an academic discourse about protest cultures, to explore their origins and effects, and to create and present analyzing tools.

Contributions may address, but are not limited to, the following thematic areas:

- Contemporary forms of protest (online as well as offline) against existing political, social, or ethical mechanisms of suppression
- Minority cultures of protest (and corresponding counter-movements)
- Opportunities to create networks
- The role of affect and emotions in protests
- The role of performativity or authenticity in protests
- Media and carriers of protest (e. g. music, literature, online petitions, hashtags, land reclamation, etc.) and their expressions
- The dynamics of protests, sustainability, and efficiency
- Subversive practices as part of protests/cultures of protest
- Cultures of protest within specific contexts (e. g. racism, sexism, homophobia) and their interdependence with ruling systems
- Transnational cultures of protest vs. regional or national characteristics (e. g. regional aspects of Pride events, May Day protests)
- The aesthetics of protests

The focus of the papers should be on current cultures of protest (approximately on the past ten years). However, looking further back to past occurrences to explicate current situations is possible and also welcome.

Submission of abstract and participation:

Please send 250-word abstracts for 20-minute papers that deal with any of the aspects mentioned above, to one of the conference organizers by 16 November 2018. Please send a biography of 50-80 words along with your abstract. Abstracts and presentations may be in German or English. We intend to publish the papers after the symposium.

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