

Complicity and the Politics of Representation

16-18 JUNE 2017
RUHR UNIVERSITY BOCHUM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: JOHN STOREY, UNIVERSITY OF SUNDERLAND

CALL FOR PAPERS

While the concepts and manifestations of religious sin, moral guilt and legal culpability have been defined and categorized expansively, the notion of complicity, especially regarding forms of cultural representation, still remains a rich source for closer scrutiny and examination. Most broadly defined as the position of contributing to or benefiting from a moral wrong that one does not directly perpetrate, complicity is an elastic concept with political, moral, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions and implications. Even though complicity critiques have become increasingly important in cultural and literary studies (J. Pfister), the concept has seldom been properly defined or systematically analysed. This interdisciplinary conference seeks to continue a discussion about the vexed complexities of complicity initiated at Brighton University's "Complicity Conference" in 2015, and places a particular emphasis on the politics of representation, broadly defined to include forms of cultural production including literature, film, new media, and so on.

Appropriating James Phelan's 2014 differentiation of four levels of narrative ethics, we would like to explore complicity within the *ethics of production, representation and reception*, as well as investigate intra-textual negotiations of the concept. Geoffrey Hartman, for instance, argued in 1974 that texts can initiate us into complicity because "spying is complicity raised to an art, and the novelist [or 'agent'] is a socially tolerated spy in league with many of our cruder instincts"; in addition, there are critiques of the way our engagement with texts can lead us as readers into broader complicities, either because we may be "amusing ourselves to death" (N. Postman) or pursuing the satisfaction of "false needs" (H. Marcuse). In addition to such questions concerning the ethics of production, representation and reception, we are interested in intra-textual ethics, i.e. in ways in which cultural products negotiate issues of complicity, either explicitly or implicitly.

We invite contributions from the fields of literary and cultural studies, media studies, sociology, psychology/psychoanalysis, art history, history of ideas, law, theology and political theory. Themes for papers could include, but are not limited to:

- Definitions of the term *complicity*
- Types of complicity (e.g. complicit silence, complicit hypocrisy, or involuntary complicity)
- Complicit language
- Complicity in racism, ableism, patriarchal ideology, etc.
- Complicity as part of a polemic moral or political critique
- Resistance to complicity
- Complicit writing
- Complicit representations
- Critical complicity; complicit reading/reception
- Complicity critique as a method

Please email 200-300 word abstracts for 20 minute papers to Cornelia Wächter (Ruhr University Bochum), Alex Adams (Independent Scholar) and Robert Wirth (University of Paderborn) at cornelia.waechter@rub.de by **30 September 2016**.