

TRANSIENT BODIES IN ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE AND CULTURE

9th June 2017

University of Koblenz-Landau, Campus Koblenz, Germany

CALL FOR PAPERS

Throughout history, the human body has always been a controversial and much debated topic and constantly had to negotiate its place between glorification and vilification. Whereas the beauty and strength of people's physical structure was praised and positively emphasised, the body's diseases, flaws and frailties functioned as a constant reminder of human imperfection and the inevitability of natural decay. Despite the fact that the concept of the "body" has been discussed in academic research in recent years, the representation of the transient body – a body located at the intersections of significant phases of life – has not been given the attention it deserves. Against the background of declining fertility rates and ageing populations in Western societies as well as in the context of new paradigms in interdisciplinary research, such as the medical humanities, intersectionality and ageing studies, the high complexity of cultural attitudes towards the body and its metaphorical relevance are currently gaining more public awareness and challenge us to ask new questions. How are bodily *rites-de-passage*, such as birth, death, disease and decay represented in Anglophone literature, culture and media? Which narrative, aesthetic and medial strategies are employed to represent and document bodily transitions from one stage of life to another?

The one-day symposium aims at discussing these questions and related topics in the context of English and American Studies and invites papers addressing the transience of the human body as represented in Anglophone literature and culture from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. We invite contributions from the fields of literary and cultural studies, media studies, art history, history of ideas, ageing studies and medical humanities. Topics for papers could include, but are not limited to:

- the representation of transient bodies/bodies in progress in Anglophone literature, culture and media (e.g. photography, film, music)
- the life cycle; identity and human development over the different stages of life; bodies in transition/bodies in waiting (pregnancy, birth, disease, death)
- (paradoxical) conceptions of beauty
- idealized youthful bodies vs. natural bodily flaws and decay
- the ageing body; the ageing process and the social stigma of ageing
- illness and disease, e.g. cardiovascular diseases, strokes, Alzheimer's disease, cancer etc.
- coping with the imminence of death; coping with separation and loss; euthanasia
- human efforts at transcending bodily limits, e.g. through religious or spiritual beliefs, meditation exercises, drug abuse, necrophilia etc.
- cultural discourses on the transient body, e.g. intersectional or feminist perspectives on social constructions of meaning, medical humanities, ageing studies etc.

Please send abstracts of 250-300 words for 20-minute presentations and a brief bio-note in a Word document or PDF file to both conference organisers by **15th December 2016**.

Conference organisers:

Sarah Schäfer-Althaus (University of Koblenz-Landau, Campus Koblenz), [salthaus\[at\]uni-koblenz.de](mailto:salthaus[at]uni-koblenz.de)

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