Limits of Knowledge – Knowledge of Limits: The Productiveness of Ignorance, Non-Knowledge, and Agnotology in Anglophone Studies, Literature and Culture

Most recently, but also ensuing the crisis in the humanities much has been written about knowledge in literature, fiction or literary form (Kley and Merten 2019, Chodat 2017, Jay 2014; *cf.* special issue on "What Form Knows" in *Anglistik* 2019). In this panel, we focus on how we speak – who and in which contexts – about limits of knowledge and knowledge of limits. Art historians call it the *horror vacui* – artists' fears of leaving unadorned spaces on their paintings. Among cartographers of the 16th and 17th centuries, it was common to fill blank spaces on the maps with compass roses, sea monsters, even imaginary islands and cities. It was only with the emergence of empiricism and science that the void began to feel less intimidating – or did we learn to phrase what we do not know differently? Non-knowledge appears to be fundamentally opposed to human curiosity and therefore the basis of all scientific endeavour, however, philosophically, it is part of the Socratic paradox claiming that perfect knowledge cannot be attained. In all disciplines, there are puzzles upon which there is no consensus in the scientific community, other than recognizing them as unresolved: the millennium problems in mathematics, the causes of the Great Vowel Shift in linguistics, the identity of Jack the Ripper in criminology, or the authorship debate in Shakespearean studies. It is the aim of this panel – not to solve these puzzles, though you are welcome to try – but to analyse how our disciplines as well as literary and cultural practices voice and deal with non-knowledge.

Non-knowledge, ignorance, gaps and limits of knowledge have always been controversial but also very productive topics in the humanities, for instance in philosophy (Kant, Herder, Humboldt), psychology (Freud), theology and ethics (Cusanus' *docta ignorantia*, Jonas' ethics of responsibility), history (Foucault, Greenblatt, Gallagher, White), and literary theory (Iser's theory of gaps). In popular science, Dawkins famously referred to phenomena of non-knowledge as "the worship of gaps", *i.e.* the faithful acceptance that some problems are 'not meant to' be solved (2006: 152). This panel will provide a historical perspective on gaps in Anglophone literature and culture; as much as it will explore areas of knowledge in which scholars hit the limit of their knowledge. It is at this point that interdisciplinarity becomes more than a buzz word, as one discipline may contribute new methodologies and perspectives to fill the gaps of knowledge identified by another. For this reason, we invite papers on cross-disciplinary approaches, for example from linguistics and didactics. Topics may include:

- Historical ways of coping with gaps in human knowledge and their representations, *e.g.* the problem of longitude, the Shakespeare authorship question, as well as long-term effects of gaps in knowledge closed,
- Representation of non-knowledge, literary and medial re-enactment of non-knowledge, such as Roland Emmerich's *Anonymous* (2011),
- Relationship of knowledge and power, reproduction of knowledge by power (Foucault 1969) and the implications of these ideas for non-knowledge,

- Strategies of coping with insufficient knowledge, effects on political action and public reaction, such as expert discussions on climate change (Janich/Simmerling 2013), ecocriticism, political or ideological instrumentalization of non-knowledge or lack of knowledge (Proctor and Schiebinger 2008); emergence of conspiracy theories and historical revisionism (Exeter conspiracy, Flat Earth theory, Stephen Knight's *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*, 1976); mythologization, utopisation of the unknown ('lost world literature')
- Non-knowledge as a narrative strategy, articulation and evaluation of non-knowledge by language, 'unresolved issues' in linguistics and theory formation,
- Cross-disciplinary approaches to solving puzzles, *e.g.* forensic linguistics as a tool in criminology, non-knowledge communication in academic contexts (Rhein 2015), expressions of uncertainty as symbolic action (Campbell 1985). approaches to non-knowledge in didactics, informed ignorance, maieutics, *e.g. The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière 1987).

Please send abstracts for contributions (300-350 words) and a short biographical note to Anna Auguscik (anna.auguscik@uol.de) and Simone Broders (simone.broders@fau.de) by January 15, 2020.

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