

2024 Ruhr PhD Forum in American Studies

UNIVERSITY OF DUISBURG-ESSEN | TU DORTMUND UNIVERSITY | RUHR UNIVERSITY BOCHUM

January 26 & 27, 2024

UNIVERSITÄT
DUISBURG
ESSEN

Offen im Denken

tu technische universität
dortmund

RUHR
UNIVERSITÄT
BOCHUM

RUB

Friday
01
26

12.30-12.50

Arrival: Glaspavillon, Universitätsstr. 2., 45141 Essen, Room R12 S00 H12

12.50-13.00

Welcome

PANEL 1

SOUND, SPACE, AND HISTORY: NARRATING MEMORY

13.00-13.15

HILARY MEUTER "Let Sleeping Dogs Lie": The Conflicting Narratives of Montgomery, AL Memorial Landscape

13.15-13.30

MASAYOSHI YAMADA A Neighborhood with the Necessary Musical and Human History: The Making of *The Cry of Jazz* in Chicago's Hyde Park and the Interracial Sociality of Jazz Listening in the Age of Racial Integration

13.30-13.45

ELLIOTT NIBLOCK Saying You to the Wreckage of History: The Poetry of Adrienne Rich, Urban Landscapes, and Reckoning with the Past

13.45-14.30

Q&A

14.30-14.45

Coffee Break

PANEL 2

READING THE ROOM: THE UNWRITTEN ELEMENTS OF WRITTEN WORDS AND IMAGES

14.45-15.00

DILARA SERHAT-SAWITZKI Misogyny in the Debate of Science vs. Art in Carl Djerassi's Science-in-Theatre Play *Phallacy*

15.00-15.15

ZOHRA HASSAN-PIEPER Wordless Narration in the Works of Eric Drooker

15.15-15.30

ELÉONORE TARLA The Imagination of Survival in North American Survival Manuals since 1945

15.30-16.15

Q&A

16.15-16.30

Coffee Break

PANEL 3

MARGINALIZATIONS AND MOBILITIES: MOVING IN SPITE OF LIMITATIONS

16.30-16.45

ANA ELISA GOMEZ LARIS Contest(ed) Legitimacy: The Pulitzer Prize and the Immigrant American

16.45-17.00

BARBARA GFOELLNER Archipelagic Poetics of Mobility in Contemporary Anglophone Caribbean Poetry

17.00-17.30

Q&A

17.30

Closing Remarks Day 1

18.15

Dinner at Sattgrün - Theaterpassage Rathenaustraße 2, 45127 Essen (*self-paid*)

8.50-9.00 Arrival and Coffee: IBZ, Emil-Figge-Str. 59, 44337 Dortmund
9.00-9.05 Welcome

PANEL 4 QUEER CORPOREALITY AND (TRANS)NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIES

9.05-9.20 JULIA MACHTENBERG Vulnerability, Queer Embodiment, and Lines of (Re)Orientation
in Ocean Vuong's *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*

9.20-9.35 KAROLINA KOWALSKA Literary and Visual Geographies of the Rural Queer:
Transformations of Small-Town American Communities through Non-Normative Expression

9.35-9.50 MELIH KÖKCÜ (In)visible Beings: Queer Corporeality and Spaces in Turkish American Literature and Media

9.50-10.35 Q&A

10.35-10.50 Coffee Break

PANEL 5 SPACES OF SURVIVAL, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY TEXTS

10.50-11.05 NATALIE ERKEL Collaborative Utopian World-Building: Trauma, Kinship, and Spaces of Belonging
in Rivers Solomon's Underwater Utopia *The Deep*

11.05-11.20 HEND AYARI My, Her, Our Stories: Survivance and Decolonizing Trauma in Memoirs by Native American Women

11.20-11.35 CHARLOTTE PIEWEK-MENGEDE A Privileged Diaspora: Identity in Ben Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station*

11.35-12.20 Q&A

12.20-13.00 Extended Coffee Break

PANEL 6 CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO: DEFIANT PEDAGOGIES, IDENTITIES, POETICS

13.00-13.15 MARTIN ZIMMERMANN "This is perhaps a day of general honesty/Without example in the world's history":
Misrepresentative Poetics and a Sense of Occasion in the Poetry of John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara

13.15-13.30 MARKUS KUBESCH Marking as Prevention Practice: On 'Theatre Pedagogy' and Vulnerability – A Brief Ethnographic Account

13.30-13.45 EREN ILERI Cyborg Astronaut: Disembodied White Masculinity and the Imagination of Outer Space in
Contemporary Digital Games

13.45-14.30 Q&A

14.30 Closing and End of Conference

Hilary Meuter is a PhD candidate in the department of American Studies at TU Dortmund. The working title of her dissertation is “Politics of Memorialization: Interpreting Confederate monument discourse as a reflection of America’s *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*.” She is an instructor of academic writing and English at TU Dortmund’s Zentrum für Hochschulbildung. Her research interests are Southern studies and the intersection of memory and history.

“Let Sleeping Dogs Lie”: A Study of the Contradictory Monument Landscape in Montgomery, Alabama

Susan Neiman, director of the Berlin-based Einstein Forum and author of *Learning from the Germans*, lists five crucial facets to work off a country’s criminal past, or, as she refers to it in German, *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*. They are 1) a coherent and widely accepted national narrative 2) a narrative that is reinforced by symbols 3) a narrative that carries through education 4) words set to music and 5) restitution paid to victims while perpetrators are pursued in the courts.[1] My research analyses confederate monument discourse through the lens of the first three facets while making a transatlantic comparison to German post-Holocaust memory to answer the question “What can Americans still learn from German Holocaust *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*?”

My presentation explores the second facet, specifically the uneven national narrative of slavery’s role in the American Civil War by comparing the contradictory messages of the Confederate Memorial on Alabama’s state capitol grounds and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (Lynching Memorial) in Montgomery, Alabama. When putting these two categories of monuments side by side, values, heroism, and victimhood are contradicted. I analyze the Lynching Memorial as a counter-monument and its task to contradict previously held sets of local, state, and national beliefs and how it compares to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) recorded 48 confederate monuments removed in 2022, the same report noting approximately 2,600 confederate symbols are still present across the U.S. [2] I posit this is a reflection of uneven education, political response, and national values when it comes to how Americans remember the American Civil War and the role that slavery played in the conflict.

[1] Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2019), 85-86.

[2] “SPLC counted 48 confederate monuments removed in 2022,” WABE, April 21, 2023, <https://www.wabe.org/splc-counted-48-confederate-monuments-removed-in-2022/>.

**A Neighborhood with the Necessary Musical and Human History:
The Making of *The Cry of Jazz* (1959) in Chicago's Hyde Park and the
Interracial Sociality of Jazz Listening in the Age of Racial Integration**

This paper probes into the making of *The Cry of Jazz*, a short film depicting a meeting of a fictional jazz appreciation club that turns into a quarrel over the music's racial politics. Produced by a group of African Americans from Chicago, the film has lauded as ahead of its time, on the one hand, and dismissed as an aberration from the racially egalitarian ideal of the civil rights years, on the other.

Although it is often categorized as a semi-documentary, my paper presents *The Cry of Jazz* as a semi-autobiography of its producers: novelist Mark Kennedy, urban planner Nelam L. Hill, mathematician Eugene Titus, Jr., and composer Edward O. Bland. By situating their filmmaking within the historical context of the Hyde Park neighborhood in post-World War II Chicago, I argue that *The Cry of Jazz* was at once a product and a critique of an integrated community in a highly segregated city. Fostered by the 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* decision prohibiting restrictive covenants and razed by urban renewal a decade later, an interracial culture scene flourished in the formerly all-white neighborhood during the 1950s. The Black filmmakers' firsthand accounts of the social life centered around jazz inspired the film's setting, while the social capital they accumulated there helped enable its production. The film thus provides a glimpse into the social and political culture of the post-*Shelley v. Kraemer*, pre-urban renewal Hyde Park.

Derived also from the African American co-producers' participant observations of the interracial musicking was incisive criticism of postwar liberalism. Having navigated the racially stratified topographies of interwar and postwar Chicago, they grew increasingly critical of Hyde Park liberals, who, despite one of the most severe forms of segregation unfolding in front of their eyes, strove to build an integrated community by espousing the ethos of race-less-ness.

Masayoshi Yamada is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History at the University of California, Los Angeles. His dissertation examines the history of jazz fandom and listenership with a focus on the political potential of listening. Masa's work has appeared in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes.

Elliott Niblock is a PhD candidate in Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, serving for the 2023 – 2024 academic year as a guest lecturer in Cultural Studies with the American Studies Faculty at TU Dortmund. His research is fundamentally interdisciplinary, intersecting scholarly conversations in such academic fields as Philosophy of Religion, Modern Jewish Thought, Critical Theory, Comparative Literature, and Intellectual History. Prior to beginning his doctoral work in Virginia, Elliott previously earned his BA in History and Religious Studies from Macalester College, MTS in Philosophy of Religion from Harvard Divinity School, and MFA in Creative Writing (Poetry) from the University of Montana.

Saying You to the Wreckage of History: The Poetry of Adrienne Rich, Urban Landscapes, and Reckoning with the Past

My research project combines Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue with Walter Benjamin's concept of history, suggesting that Buber's idea of "saying You" can help illuminate and operationalize what Benjamin calls our "weak messianic power." This combination of Buber's dialogue with Benjamin's concept of history helps to reframe Benjamin's concepts of "weak messianic power" and "now-time" within, I argue, the more straightforwardly actionable paradigm of an active saying You to history, offering a more intuitive, actionable understanding of Benjamin's "Theses on the Concept of History." In turn, this Buberian-Benjaminian paradigm helps to modify our understanding of Buber's philosophy of dialogue as well, adding to his three spheres of relation a potentially productive fourth sphere: history.

In the conclusion of my dissertation—which I will focus on in presenting this conference paper—I apply this hybrid Buberian-Benjaminian concept of history to two American case studies: the poems of Jewish-American feminist Adrienne Rich, and the legacies of slavery in urban spaces in the American South. First, viewing Rich's poems as "artifacts of saying You to the wreckage of history" shows how her engagement with history exemplifies Benjamin's ideal historian. This case study helps to illustrate the paradigm of relating to the past drawn out of the sources of Buber and Benjamin, and raises more general questions about poetry as a resource for philosophy.[1] Second, I consider this concept of history within urban landscapes that have grown out of the systemic inequity bequeathed by legacies of exploitation in general, and legacies of slavery in particular. Moving through urban spaces in the American South with a sense that we are *addressed* by the past—by previous downtrodden generations who, for Benjamin, constitute our greatest source of strength—opens up our historical imagination and sense of place in urban spaces, providing a new perspective on reparations for slavery.

[1] I presented a draft of this argument on 11/20/23 at the 2023 American Academy of Religion's annual conference in a conference paper titled "Diving into the Wreckage of History: Adrienne Rich as Philosopher of History."

Misogyny in the Debate of Science vs. Art in Carl Djerassi's 'Science-in-Theatre' Play *Phallacy*

In his second career as a writer, Carl Djerassi (1923 – 2015) makes it his mission to reveal the culture of the natural sciences. The former, world-famous chemist, primarily known for his contribution to the development of the birth control pill, views himself eligible to reveal the secrets of the otherwise exclusive culture of science. In his works, he creates complete fictional worlds in which actors and institutions can be observed in their culture-specific interactions. The striving for priority and, as a result, brutal competition are central characteristics of Djerassi's scientists. Most importantly, as I investigate in my dissertation, the culture of science in Djerassi's literary works is structured according to gender criteria. Djerassi's culture of science is portrayed as an 'old boys' network', in which experienced, male scientists dictate (and reproduce) the shared code of conduct – and in which the female scientists develop diverse, creative (and at times even devious) strategies to prevail in the male-dominated culture of the sciences.

In my presentation, I will focus on *Phallacy*, Djerassi's last 'Science-in-Theatre' play, published in 2012. Central to the play is the question of authenticity of art works and the supposed opposition of truth versus beauty. By order of the director of an Austrian museum, chemistry professor Rex Stolfuss examines the chemical composition of the real-life bronze statue *Jüngling vom Magdalensberg*, a statue that, up to that point in time, was believed to be a Roman original. Yet, Stolfuss' recent analysis proves that, in fact, the statue is a copy from the Renaissance period. With *Phallacy*, Djerassi creates an intriguing portrayal of the culture of the sciences in opposition to art and art history, alluding to the 'Two Cultures' dichotomy. In my paper, I will examine how Stolfuss uses his skepticism of art history as an academic discipline in order to mask his misogynist attitudes towards his female counterpart Regina Leitner-Opfermann, an art historian and expert on the statue.

Dilara Serhat-Sawitzki is a PhD candidate in the American Studies Department at TU Dortmund. She received a B.A. in British and American Literary and Cultural Studies, Protestant Theology, and Pedagogy in 2014 as well as a M.Ed. in English and Protestant Religious Education in 2016, both from TU Dortmund. From 2013 to 2015, she taught at the University of Virginia, USA. In 2021, she earned her *Zweites Staatsexamen für das Lehramt an Gymnasien*, and has since held a permanent position as teacher for English and Protestant Religious Education at Phoenix Gymnasium in Dortmund. In her dissertation, she investigates the role of gender in the culture of the natural sciences in Carl Djerassi's literary works. She lives in Dortmund with her husband and her two children.

Zohra Hassan-Pieper completed both her Bachelor's degree Anglophone Studies and German Studies; and her Master's degree Anglophone Studies and Literary and Media Studies (LuM), with a focus in literature, media studies and postcolonial studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen. In her Master's thesis "The Oprah Phenomenon: Redemption and Self-Improvement in Oprah's Next Chapter", she argues that the endorsement of exuberant self-examination and redemption in Winfrey's shows is connected to the revivalist ethic that resonates with the religious history of North America. Her research interests include: narrative theory, representations of Muslim Othering, and interdisciplinary approaches to race and ethnicity.

Wordless Narration in the Works of Eric Drooker

In graphic novels, it is usually the multimodal ensemble of text and imagery that provides a foundation for comprehension and supports the reader's navigation. Interestingly, Eric Drooker's graphic narratives rely on what one might refer to as wordlessness thus they have the skill to tell a story solely using images whilst discarding the use of words and verbal tracks. The main focus of my dissertation is to show how wordlessness in his works functions as a narrative mode to express fundamentally unlivable urban conditions and help to reveal various ideological forces that influence an urban environment. Drooker's visual renderings operate as narrative portraits in the sense that they operate in the same way a text does, therefore, possessing a narrative structure that involve similar processes to achieve cohesion. At the intersection of history, literature, and social critique, Drooker's oeuvre offers a unique perspective on urban life in New York City, drawing inspiration from luminaries such as Jacob Riis and Frans Masereel. By analyzing architectural symbolism such as buildings, stairs and windows; I would like to expose how they enable the reader to decode the protagonist's journey and the underlying tension that pervade the graphic narratives. Drooker's architectural storytelling not only adds depth and complexity but also underscores the ability to convey intricate emotions and social commentary. Finally, by mapping the different ways of movement in Drooker's works, it becomes obvious that they serve as strategies of configuring mental states and emotional states of the protagonists. Moreover, it becomes clear that the ways of traversing convey the psychological and affective patterns that these spaces and places elucidate.

The Imagination of Survival in North American Survival Manuals since 1945

This dissertation project aims to trace the emergence and development of survival manuals and guides. Emerging in the military context of the Second World War, survival manuals have since proliferated, spanning diverse contexts, speakers, and modalities. They can be encountered in the form of US Army Field Guides, Cold War-era civil defense pamphlets, survivalist manuals, wilderness survival books as well as countless nominal survival guides, i.e., self-help books that use the notion of survival metaphorically to frame the experience of overcoming hardships (e.g., *The Asshole Survival Guide: How To Deal with People Who Treat You Like Dirt* or *Your PhD Survival Guide: Planning, Writing, and Succeeding in Your Final Year*). This thesis situates the boom of survival manuals within a larger cultural preoccupation with the notion of survival and the attendant figure of the survivor since the second half of the 20th century. In addition to focusing on the generic and discursive entanglements of these texts, this thesis will examine the cultural work performed by the form and concept of the survival guide and pay close attention to the way race, class, gender, and sexual orientation inform and shape its articulation. The aim of this project is to work out the specific contours of the discourse of survival at specific historical junctures, critically looking at the perspectives and positionalities from which survival is articulated and focusing on the (dis)continuities and tensions that arise within the form of survival manuals.

Eléonore Tarla is a PhD candidate in American Studies at the University of Vienna. She studied Anglophone Literatures and Cultures and History at the University of Vienna, University of Chicago, and University of Graz. Her research interests include (historical) popular culture and cultural studies, narrative non-fiction, feminist theory and gender studies, and conceptual history.

Ana Elisa Gomez Laris is a research assistant and lecturer of Inter- and North American Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE), where she is working on a dissertation tracing changes to the U.S.-American literary marketplace spearheaded by recent multilingual and transregional undocumented migrant and refugee writers and artists from 2008 onwards. She studied Comparative Literature and American Studies at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, focusing on Mexican, U.S.-American, Turkish, and German literature. Before joining the faculty at UDE, she worked as an assistant editor of the DGfA quarterly *Amerikastudien / American Studies*.

Contest(ed) Legitimacy: The Pulitzer Prize and the Immigrant American

In 2022, poet Javier Zamora became the first Salvadorean writer to make *The New York Times Best Seller* list. Zamora, a formerly undocumented, long-term resident of the United States, achieved this feat with *Solito*, a memoir about his nine-week journey to the U.S. as an unaccompanied child migrant in 1999. The memoir is timely in light of the Trump-era family separations, which heightened the American public's sensitivity to issue of child migration. This development in recent national memory arguably contributed to the success of Zamora's memoir. The writer even garnered the attention of the judging committee behind the Pulitzer Prize in Literature, an award which the author was ineligible to receive because of his citizenship status. In this paper I explore how such contest regulations based on citizenship award but also deny legitimacy to non-citizen writers in the U.S. Further, I trace the impact of interventions spearheaded by non-U.S. citizen migrant writers working to change said regulations. At the center of my discussion is a recent private-turned-public exchange between the judging committee of the Pulitzer Prize in literature and Javier Zamora, arising after the committee invites the writer to serve as a judge for the prize's 2023 Autobiography/Memoir category. Himself excluded from the category just one year earlier, Zamora responds with an invite of his own, challenging not only the contest's outdated definition of what it means to be an "American," but also, I argue, calling into question the cultural value and relevance of literary prizes in the United States.

Archipelagic Poetics of Mobility in Contemporary Anglophone Caribbean Poetry

This dissertation takes as a point of departure the multiple complex im/mobilities that have shaped the Caribbean: Indigenous movements, the Middle Passage and the plantation, *kala pani* and indentureship, as well as more recent forms of migration, such as to and from the US and Canada. These im/mobilities have been complicated and fraught, at times forced and violent, which shows the unevenness of im/mobility construed through often oppressive regimes of mobility that operate within imperial, colonial, capitalist, and neoliberal structures. Drawing on mobility studies, the term “mobility” and its concomitant “immobility” offer a more far-reaching angle to explore not just one form of movement, such as migration, or only movement; rather, working through im/mobilities makes space for various forms of mobility that have shaped the Caribbean and its diaspora, as well as their often attendant immobilities so as to illustrate their relationality. Against the backdrop of these im/mobilities, Caribbean poets problematize linear and teleological movement with a clear point of departure and arrival; instead, im/mobilities in the chosen poems are often entangled, overlapping, plural, or ruptured. The archipelago serves as a framework to conceptualize and draw out a Caribbean relationality of im/mobilities in contemporary anglophone Caribbean poetry.

This thesis ultimately aims to think through these complexities of movement by carving out a poetics of mobility through the archipelagic. Drawing on Sylvia Wynter, Aimé Césaire, and Édouard Glissant, a poetics is not just understood as an object of study but becomes knowledge itself, which, from a Caribbean perspective, potentially unsettles hegemonic Western epistemes and opens into a form of reimagination, or reinvention, of im/mobilities in the poems. I will look at diasporic Caribbean poetry (e.g., Kaie Kellough, Dionne Brand, Safiya Sinclair) which in different ways reimagines more expansive forms of movement by both problematizing but also attempting to go beyond restrictions, such as ones tied to the nation state.

Barbara Gfoellner is a PhD candidate and university assistant at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna and holds a master's degree in English and American Studies as well as French Studies from the same university. She is part of the research platform *Mobile Cultures and Societies* and started her PhD within the doctoral program *Cultural Mobility Studies* (FWF). She spent a semester abroad at the Université des Antilles in Martinique in 2017 and was a visiting scholar at York University, Toronto, in 2022, and at University of the West Indies, Mona, in 2023. She has co-edited a volume on *Cultural Mobilities between Africa and the Caribbean* (Routledge, 2021, with Birgit Englert and Sigrid Thomsen) and a special issue on “Archipelagic Spaces and Im/Mobilities” (with Alexandra Ganser, Gabriele Ramirez-Pisarz, and Steffen Wöll), published in *Journal of Transnational American Studies* (2023).

Julia Machtenberg is a PhD student at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (RUB). Julia received their BA in German and Anglophone Studies from the Universität Duisburg-Essen in 2017 and their MA in English and American Studies from the RUB in 2020. Currently, Julia is working on their PhD project with the working title “Vulnerability in US-American Poetry.” Next to vulnerability and trauma studies, Julia’s research interests include gender and queer studies.

Vulnerability, Queer Embodiment, and Lines of (Re)Orientation in Ocean Vuong’s *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*

In his poetry collection *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (2016), Ocean Vuong shows how the condition of vulnerability, as “a basic kind of openness to being affected and affecting” (Gilson 310), shapes our ways of (co-)inhabiting the world. Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), my paper examines the ways in which Vuong represents vulnerable states of queer embodiment against the backdrop of a cis-heteronormative socio-cultural environment. Through my analyses of these vulnerable states, I will show how Vuong represents the condition of vulnerability to unsettle conventional ways of perceiving and inhabiting the world.

More precisely, I will analyze the ways in which Vuong’s representations of vulnerable states of queer embodiment allow him to contour, in Ahmed’s sense, lines of (re-)orientation that divert from their conventional counterparts. By reconstructing the interplay between cis- heteronormative lines of orientation and queer bodies’ movements within, between, across, and beyond these lines, Vuong shows that the vulnerable openness of queer embodiment allows for alternative ways of inhabiting space to emerge. These alternative ways originate from and hence always lead back to the condition of vulnerability as the central point of origin from which our ways of moving in the world originate. Vuong’s representation of vulnerable states of queer embodiment thus instigates processes of (re-)orientation regarding the ways in which bodies are shaped and simultaneously (re)shape the socio-cultural environments through which they move.

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology. Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke UP, 2006.

Gilson, Erinn. “Vulnerability, Ignorance, Oppression.” *Hypatia*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2011, pp. 308-332.

Literary and Visual Geographies of the Rural Queer: Transformations of Small-Town American Communities through Non-Normative Expression

This project aims to explore the impact of Queer presence on the rural United States, namely its influence on the cultural transformation of American small-town communities. By analyzing the functioning of Queer identity in rural contexts, I will attempt to investigate how Queer expression formulates and redefines cultural, social, and physical spaces. My working hypothesis is that the effect of Queer presence is a multidirectional and multilevel process: these are not only the traumatic events of discrimination and homophobia that are not always part and parcel of a small-town experience but rather a genuine transformation of the place, namely the space where the interaction occurs. Since my project puts much emphasis on the spatial aspect of Queer expression, my methodological tools are derived from cultural geography (the impact of human enterprise on the inhabited space) which allows me to distance my research from defining Queerness in the conventional binary system of sexual identity or presenting it as a token diversity. Instead, I redefine it as an integral and agential part of the construction of the space Queerness inhabits. Moreover, the project attempts to redefine Queerness as not necessarily tied to urban metropolitan centers.

New Queer perspectives in Queer studies traverse diverse paths but what they have in common is an attempt to dismantle binary thinking about gender, sexualities, bodies, and identity. If Queer identity can be construed as in-the-making, fluid, and contextualized, we can similarly perceive the space of Queer expression: small-town or rural space is not inherently heterosexual, conservative, and waiting to be disrupted by "Queering." Rather, space is mediated, negotiated, and constructed through bodily interactions. Second, my project will analyze texts representing different modes of power (homophobia, ableism, classism, racism) and therefore I will apply the concept of intersectionality that in cultural geography and Queer studies facilitates the representation of how different processes of marginalization play out in space. Finally, my project follows the most recent developments in Queer theory and cultural geography that clearly move away from the metropolitan center.

Karolina Kowalska graduated from the University of Warsaw with an MA in American Literature and is currently a prospective PhD candidate. Active professionally as an ESL teacher and teacher trainer, her academic research focuses on comic book studies, identity in small-town America and Queer literature.

Melih Kökcü is a PhD student at the University of Duisburg-Essen. He writes his PhD thesis with Prof. Dr. Florian Freitag. He completed his bachelor's degree in American Culture and Literature at Dokuz Eylül University, Izmir, Turkey. He holds his master's degree in religious studies at the University of Erfurt, Germany. He wrote his master's thesis, *'Pantheistic' View of Divine Unity in Islamic Mysticism and American Transcendentalism* with Prof. Dr. Jamal Malik (University of Erfurt) and Dr. Elena Furlanetto (University of Duisburg-Essen). He is teaching English and Religion at the Ingeborg-Drewitz-Gesamtschule. He is academically interested in Literary Studies, Media Studies, Transnational Studies, and Queer Studies.

(In)visible Beings: Queer Corporeality and Spaces in Turkish American Literature and Media

In recent years, queer individuals have been highly represented in media and literary products, which increased their visibility in society compared to past decades. While American media and literature today produce more content about queer individuals within liberal and tolerant politics, Turkish counterparts remain unable to do so, since queer folk became a preferred target under Islamism, androcentrism, and ultra-populism. In the last decade, this right-wing tendency in Turkey compelled queer writers, performers, and artists to produce and render their work under surveillance, censorship, and inhibition. Turkish queer media and literature today resist and subvert traditional gender binaries in an intersectional context due to the resistance against the default categories of sexual, racial, and heteronormative dynamics. In my dissertation, I will discuss how queer media and literature deconstruct binary boundaries and enable the visibilities of queer communities, and how they show resistance against mainstream ideologies in the US and Turkey. I am eager to work on this project since queer media and literature have been raising awareness against essentialist views of sexuality and gender in the public sphere for a while. They build queer corporeality and spaces for being present in daily life, domesticities, and institutions. This dissertation offers profound analyses of queer representations and realities in media and literature from a transnational queer perspective.

Collaborative Utopian World-Building: Trauma, Kinship, and Spaces of Belonging in Rivers Solomon's Afrofuturist Underwater Utopia *The Deep* (2019)

Rivers Solomon's Afrofuturist utopia *The Deep* (2019) imagines an underwater community formed by thousands of kidnapped and pregnant African women who were thrown overboard by slavers in the Atlantic Ocean. As her people's "Historian," Yetu is tasked with holding the memories of her people, and thus functions as a link to the trauma of their ancestors. However, experiencing the visceral pain of transgenerational trauma alone leaves her physically and emotionally impaired. As an Afrofuturist literary utopia, *The Deep* is strongly connected to the spatial dimension of affect and emotion as well as the memory and the affectivity of the past. The creation of the underwater society speaks to a form of *survival* in the face of unspeakable horrors and the utopia functions as a memorial to the genocide of enslaved Africans.

An essential element of Solomon's utopian novella is that it is a collaborative project that is part of a larger mythology. The novella is intimately connected to James Stinson and Gerlad Donald's 1980s electro-project Drexixya and their Afrofuturist underwater mythmaking, as well as the 2019 song "The Deep" by the hip-hop band clipping. Much like Yetu in *The Deep* realizes that she cannot bear the burden of the past alone, clipping, who is actively featured in Solomon's novella, use the metaphor of the "artistic Telephone" to explain their collaborative utopian project.

Through the lens of Afrofuturism and utopia, I will focus on themes such as memory, trauma, kinship, and the power of storytelling. In my paper, I argue that Rivers Solomon uses some of the conventions of a literary utopia in order to open up a space of belonging, create a bridge between the past, present and future, and create an empowering and lyrical narrative that gives voice to the transgenerational trauma and haunting of the slave trade. Solomon's multifocal narrative deconstructs colonialist perspectives and empowers the historically silenced. It does so by engaging in a project of collaborative utopian-world building and by deconstructing the gender binary and heteronormative notions of sexuality, thus making way for a queer utopia.

Natalie Erkel is a PhD student and research assistant ("wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin") at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (RUB). She completed her Master of Education in French and English and her Master of Arts in North American Studies and English Language, Literatures and Cultures at the University of Göttingen. She also spent two years abroad studying French, English and comparative literature in Tours, France and at the UNAM in Mexico City, Mexico. In Göttingen, she taught classes on English didactics, American cultural history, short stories and academic writing. In Bochum, she has taught classes titled "Cultural History and Rhetoric: Feminism in the U.S.," "Women's Writing in the 19th and 20th Century," and "Feminist Utopias and Dystopias." Her research interests include feminism, gender studies, African-American literature, utopias, dystopias and science fiction.

Hend Ayari is a Ph.D. candidate at the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Debrecen in Hungary. Her research is oriented around examining Native American cultural productions, the decolonization of representation of Indigenous peoples across various media, and the reinterpretation of intergenerational trauma in life narratives, namely Native American women-authored memoirs in the 21st century. She is also interested in the Indigenous theorizing and practice of tribal/Red Feminism(s) and its manifestations in Indigenous literary productions. She presented papers covering various topics concerning Indigenous studies including posthuman/Indigenous worldviews overlaps. She earned an MA in Cross-Cultural Poetics from the Higher Institute of Languages in Tunis, University of Carthage in 2014 and an MA in Cultural Studies from the Faculty of Languages, University of Manouba in 2022. She received a Fulbright Teaching and Excellence Achievement (TEA) award at the University of Arkansas in 2020. [ayari.hend@yahoo.com]

My, Her, Our Stories: Survivance and Decolonizing Trauma in Memoirs by Native American Women

Historically, both trauma and autobiography studies rendered the American Indian subject as lingering in the discursive spaces of victimry. A growing interest in the reinterpretation of these discourses has proven congruent with decolonizing research championed by Indigenous scholars and identified as a pivotal step towards self-determination and sovereignty, which is tantamount to healing from the past/present colonial discursive violence. Under the auspices of the decolonizing project. My proposed research aims to demonstrate that healing from transhistorical trauma by Native Americans is possible by shifting its articulation and its understanding from a Western perspective that traditionally emphasizes the “ontology of victimry” to reading it in terms of the hermeneutic of survivance. This will be achieved by analyzing contemporary memoirs by American Indian women because they advance survivance by reclaiming their subjectivity/agency in a traditionally white-male-dominated ethnographic discourse. Survivance hermeneutics registered in these texts open spaces for restoring lost balance wielded by disruptive colonial practices concerning the land-based transmission of knowledge, kinship with the land, and sexual identity. The first part of the dissertation investigates the areas where Western trauma theories perpetuate the very structures that created it. In what can be seen as an adoption of decolonizing strategies, autobiographical texts, by virtue of their self-expressive propensity, unsettle the Eurocentric cultural representation of American Indian subjects, including their experience of trauma, using Native American methodologies, namely, survivance stories. Starting with the selected texts’ breaking with the conventional conceptions of subjectivity dominating the Euro-American autobiographical tradition, they (re)consider the centrality of storytelling, gender, memory, and restoration in the representation of and healing from trauma. The second part of the thesis examines aspects of survivance hermeneutics as a restorative approach, and their implementation in the memoirs.

A Privileged Diaspora - Identity in Ben Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station*

The study of literary versions of masculinity has become increasingly relevant to the field of masculinity studies as well as literary studies informed by persistent gender inequality. Literature and masculinity scholars have stressed the importance of global contexts when examining local representations of masculine identity and performativity, while transnationalism and travel writing scholars have underlined how fictionalized travel writing especially reveals white male authors' attempts to impose their own dominant national ideologies and culturally conditioned ways of seeing the world (and themselves) over foreign environments and people. The analysis of contemporary representations of white male American identity in travel fiction, such as in Ben Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011) allows for an understanding of not only the alienation of the American expatriate condition, but its intersections with masculinity. My research shows that despite far-reaching historical changes in both gender politics and America's global standing, the pattern of toxic American masculinity persists into the 21st century, a pattern which is set to continue unless it is compellingly exposed and deconstructed.

Charlotte Piwek-Mengede completed a Bachelor of Arts in German and Anglophone Language, Literature and Culture from the University of Duisburg-Essen. She then continued her studies at the University of Aberdeen, where she obtained her Master's degree of Creative Writing and Literature degree in 2019, completing her dissertation on Life Writing and creative realizations of Autofiction. She is currently pursuing a Cotutelle PhD at the University of Duisburg-Essen and Macquary University in Sydney. Her research interests are Masculinity and Mobility Studies with a focus on Travel Fiction and literary representations of Otherness and Imperialism in American Literature.

Martin Zimmermann is a PhD student at Ruhr University Bochum. He studied German and English/American Studies at RUB and graduated with a M.A. in English and American Studies from the same university in October 2020. After having written a Master thesis on Hart Crane's modernist epic *The Bridge*, titled "Mythmaking and the 'Transmemberment of Song' in Hart Crane's *The Bridge*", he began working on a dissertation project examining experimental U.S.- American poetry of the New York School poets in 2021.

This is perhaps a day of general honesty/Without example in the world's history": Misrepresentative Poetics and a Sense of Occasion in the Poetry of John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara

Among the first generation of the New York School poets, the poetry of John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara is usually characterized more by their differences than similarities. Yet, both O'Hara and Ashbery share a commitment to humor and wit in their poetry and, in both cases, their poetry reflects a thorough engagement with Anglo-American modernism, French surrealism, and the European avantgardes. Both poets were influenced by the visual arts, and they shared a personal connection to the scene of painters in New York City. Painters such as Jane Freilicher, Grace Hartigan, or Joan Mitchell were a shared circle of friends, and they were linked professionally to the avantgarde painters as art critics or, in O'Hara's case, as associate curator for the MOMA. Since collaborative efforts and practices were a central concern for the New York School poets, the poets collaborated with painters such as Larry Rivers, Jasper Johns, or Joe Brainard. Among their influences, O'Hara and Ashbery shared an acknowledged indebtedness to modernist poetry, combining poetic influences such as Auden, Stevens, and William Carlos Williams as well as Roussel, Pasternak, and Pierre Reverdy. One can argue that O'Hara's poetry in his "I do this, I do that"-poems is a variant of occasional poetry, a poetry for the coterie, which focusses, in an "aesthetics of attention" (Perloff), on the poet-speaker's quotidian experience, social encounters and perceptions against the background of New York City in the late 50s and early 60s. In contrast to O'Hara's "personism", Ashbery's poetry is decidedly anti-autobiographical - even in poems such as "Soonest Mended" or "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" where autobiographical reflections are conveyed in a strongly generalized or impersonal manner -, and it is, in its even more pronounced indeterminacy of its shifting or unspecified communicative address, its pastiche and variety of different genres and discourses, constant tonal shifts - and even duplicitous indeterminacy - between ironization of clichés and sincere poetical-philosophical reflection, overall more abstract than O'Hara's occasional poetry of his "I do this, I do that"-poems. As opposed to the problematic characterization of Ashbery's poetry as non-representationl, John Shoptaw reads his poetry as "misrepresentative", and David Herd emphasizes the poet's "sense of occasion" with regard to Ashbery's absorptionist poetics and his manner of meta-poetically reflecting on the need for finding forms and modes of discourse for ordering the disorderliness and constant change, the fragmentation and anti-climatic flux of quotidian experience; what Ashbery refers to as "the other tradition" in his prose poem "The System". I will suggest a reading of both Ashbery's and O'Hara's poetry as reflecting a misrepresentative poetics, which results from their different responses to their sense of occasion.

Marking as Prevention Practice: On 'theatre pedagogy' and Vulnerability – a Brief Ethnographic Account

In the wake of ongoing and erupting armed conflicts, impacts of climate change, threats of a global pandemic and rising social inequality, vulnerability, as a social, political, and philosophical concept, has entered the limelight of public discourse. While the objects and degrees of (our) vulnerability (historically) differ, vulnerability as a (transhistorical) human condition remains an uncircumventable fact, that is: an anthropological constant (see Dederich and Zirfas 202; Burghardt et al. 2017). Still remaining a desideratum of research in German speaking 'theatre pedagogy', vulnerability occupies a dialectical position as both called for as well as to be minimized. A major characteristic of German speaking contemporary 'theatre pedagogy' is that performers participate in authorship of their performance through sharing autobiographical elements and/or personal views on stage. Hence, facilitators and theatre pedagogues walk the tightrope of encouraging young performers to be vulnerable and share their stories while trying to shield them from physical and emotional harm in rehearsal and on stage. With regards to the former, so I argue, theatre pedagogues use marking to assess and communicate potential risks. Marking refers to a rehearsal practice most prominently applied in (contemporary) dance. When performers use marking, they execute a phrase, movement, or action in a reduced, simplified, less complete manner. Marking has energy saving, communicative and cognitive benefits for performers (Kirsh 2010, 2011, 2012). Based on participant observation of a two-year intercultural theatre project with adolescents and young adults, I will propose three dimensions of marking as prevention practice: marking for others to communicate, marking for others to coordinate, and marking-for-self to assess.

Markus Kubesch is a research associate and doctoral candidate in Mercator Graduate Programme Open-Mindedness, Tolerance and Public Engagement at the University Duisburg-Essen. After studying directing at the University Mozarteum Salzburg, he worked as a theatre director in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Since 2016 Markus Kubesch has been working as a theatre educator. In his doctoral project, he is investigating participatory practices in rehearsal processes with children and young people.

Eren Ileri is a researcher and artist. His current research interest lies in the images of disembodied masculinities in the context of the cultural production of outer space in science fiction digital games. He is a Ph.D. student at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Between 2020 and 2022, he was a DOC fellow at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Cyborg Astronaut: Disembodied White Masculinity and the Imagination of Outer Space in Contemporary Digital Games

Outer space travel and exploration have been the backbones of science fiction since the early days of the genre. Since the 20th century and increasingly in more recent years, issues such as interplanetary travel, outer space colonization, human enhancement, and the use of, or conflicts with, artificial intelligence in the context of outer space frequently appeared in popular science fiction and digital video games. The cultural and societal significance of space exploration and the imagination of outer space have been the focus of many research efforts in recent years (Cockell, 2016; Dickens and Ormrod, 2016; Geppert, 2018; Messeri, 2016; Rieder, 2008). In the field of game studies, researchers have begun to acknowledge the posthumanist dimension of digital games (Boulter, 2015). However, in the realm of the critical analysis of science fiction, the cultural imagination of outer space in digital games remains underresearched and posthumanist theory has been largely absent in this context.

Outer space travel occupies an increasingly important place in today's world and our visions for the future. The imagination of outer space in science fiction has had and continues to have a profound impact on the ambitions of real-world space exploration, together with our general understanding of outer space. In the cultural production of outer space, reconfigured and rearticulated disembodied masculinities play a major role. Therefore, analyzing how spacefaring humans, their bodies, and their positioning against non-human entities in outer space are represented in contemporary video games is vital in the field of game studies.

Through an in-depth critical trans-disciplinary analysis of video games, my research project examines how disembodied masculinity operates and what role it plays in the construction of the "final frontier" idea in digital game narratives and mechanics. To accurately analyze the issues of disembodiment in the context of the depiction and experience of outer space travel in video games, this study utilizes a philosophical framework that incorporates theories of critical posthumanism. By employing this framework in the analysis of video game case studies, the project's main research questions are:

1. How can the novel representations of disembodied masculinities, which appear in digital games engaged with outer space exploration, be analyzed within a framework derived from posthumanist theory?
2. In what manner is the disembodiment of masculinity and race manifested in the cultural production of outer space in contemporary science fiction video games?
3. How does the cultural production of outer space look like in digital games from 2010 until the present?

SENIOR EXPERTS

Astrid Franke // University Tübingen

Astrid Franke is professor and chair of American Studies at Eberhards Karls University Tübingen, where she has held this position since 2008. Previously she served as Assistant Professor in the same field at the University of Frankfurt and the Freie Universität Berlin.

Her research areas include poetry, cultural history, and African American Studies, with her recent publications centering links between American Studies and Relational Sociology. She has authored and co-authored a number of publications in these areas, including the monographs *Keys to Controversies: Stereotypes in Modern American Novels* (St Martins, 1999), for which she received the American Studies Network First Book Award; and *Pursue the Illusion: Problems of Public Poetry in America* (Winter, 2010), as well as the edited volumes *Von Selma bis Ferguson: Rasse und Rassismus in den USA* (co-edited with Michael Butter and Horst Tonn; Transcript, 2016); and, most recently, *Reading the Social in American Studies* (co-edited with Stefanie Müller and Katja Sarkowsky; Palgrave, 2022).

As part of the University of Tübingen's DFG-funded Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) 923: Threatened Orders, which she helped develop, Astrid Franke led three projects on the resilience of racial order in the U.S. between 2011 to 2023, concluding with the project "Past Futures of Threatened Orders. Alternative racial orders in speculative fictions and realities in the U.S.," which ran from 2019 to 2023.

Alexandra Ganser // University of Vienna

Alexandra Ganser is professor of American Studies at the University of Vienna, holding this position since 2015 and becoming chaired professor in 2017. Prior to this, she served as Assistant Professor of American Studies at Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg, where she earned a Ph.D. and a Habilitation.

Her research areas include US-American, Anglophone Caribbean, and Canadian maritime literatures and cultures, Astrocultures and Astrofuturism, and Gender Studies. Recent publications in these and other areas include the monographs *Roads of Her Own: Gendered Space and Mobility in American Women's Road Narratives, 1970-2000* (Rodopi, 2009), for which she received the Dissertation Award of the Bavarian American Academy, and *Crisis and Legitimacy in American Narratives of Piracy, 1678-1865* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), the edited volume *Maritime Mobilities in Anglophone Literature and Culture* (co-edited with Charne Lavery; Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), and co-edited special issues of journals including the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents*.

Alexandra Ganser currently serves as the head of the University of Vienna's research platform "Mobile Cultures and Societies," and of the FWF doc.funds PhD Program "Cultural Mobility Studies," funded by the Austrian Science Fund since 2019. She is the co-director of the university's Centre for Canadian Studies and a board member of the Austrian Association for American Studies, serving as president of the association from 2017 to 2018.

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