

## Editorial

The contributions to volume 13 of *COPAS* originate in the 2011 Postgraduate Forum (PGF) of the German Association for American Studies (GAAS), which was hosted by the Department of English and the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at Justus Liebig University Gießen from November 4-6, 2011. The present issue continues the tradition of cooperation between the PGF and *COPAS* that dates back to the year 2000.

Following introductory remarks and greetings by Wolfgang Hallet for the GCSC and the Department of English, Gießen, and by Udo J. Hebel (President of the GAAS), Greta Olson (Gießen) set the tone for the conference with her keynote lecture entitled “Political Positions in American Cultural Studies.” In her lecture as well as in the subsequent discussion, Olson pursued the issue and place of the ‘political’ within the field of American Studies, arguing for an essentially political approach to American Studies which would continue to challenge more institutionalized approaches to the field.

Roughly sixty German and international young scholars pursuing their doctorate and post-doctorate degrees in American Studies took up Olson’s challenge, both by discussing their current work-in-progress and by participating in eight thematic panels from various interdisciplinary fields such as American media culture, literature, history, and politics. The twenty-four papers presented at the conference concentrated on a broad variety of topics, offering different theoretical and methodological as well as decidedly interdisciplinary approaches to U.S. and transnational American cultural production.

The contributions gathered in this volume reflect this interdisciplinary scope. Quite impressively, these contributions show that the PGF—initiated more than twenty years ago by young scholars within the GAAS—still continues to address pressing theoretical developments in (transnational) American Cultural and Literary Studies. Andreas Beer (Rostock), in “The U.S. Filibusters in Transnational Newspaper Discourses, 1855–1857,” sheds light on the transnational entanglements of the so-called U.S. filibuster invasion of Nicaragua between 1855 and 1857. In his analysis of the events, Beer concentrates on the bilingual Spanish-English newspaper *El Nicaraguense*, published by U.S. filibusterer William Walker. He shows how discursive patterns previously used to describe the American West were applied in the

ideological and rhetorical appropriation of Nicaragua. Beer further argues, that, while the filibusters may be forgotten in the United States, they “are still highly potent reference points in Nicaragua.”

Benjamin Betka (Frankfurt) contributes a predominantly theory-driven piece with his “Blank Gaze and Vacant Skull—Cinema & Brain(s) & (Dis-)Affection in Recent Mindful and Mind-Related US Cinema.” Betka highlights the value of the ‘affective turn’ for the field of American Studies by combining Deleuzian film theory and recent research in neuroscience. Moreover, Betka demonstrates the (interdisciplinary) value of this intersection of film studies and neuroscience and of ‘brains’ and ‘screens’ offering brief case studies of three recent U.S.-American films: Gus Van Sant’s *Last Days* (2005), Jim Jarmusch’s *Dead Man* (1995), and Lars von Trier’s *Melancholia* (2011).

Eva Brunner’s (Berlin) article “‘I was a stuffed toucan:’ Poetic Self-Positioning in Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies*” addresses questions of narrative identity in Lowell’s famous 1959 collection of poems. In contrast to earlier psychoanalytical or biographical readings of the volume, Brunner focuses explicitly on aspects of narrative identity constructions as well as on the concept of ‘emotion,’ arguing that relational references to family, history, and other fellow poets in the text strongly influence the presented self image—a process Brunner calls “positioning.”

The contribution by Silvia Chirila (Berlin) focuses on aspects of humor and ambivalence in the novels of Toni Morrison. Chirila delineates the intersection of humor and ambivalence in various texts of the African American novelist, including *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Beloved*, and *Jazz*. She also traces the manifold functions of these concepts in regard to the racial oppression of African Americans, which plays a central role in the selected novels.

Katharina Fackler (Regensburg) engages in the field of Visual Studies with her contribution on “Waging a Visual War on Poverty: President Lyndon B. Johnson in Appalachia.” She powerfully investigates how press photographs shaped poverty discourses in the historical context of Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty. Discussing the iconographic traditions, the ideals, and the rhetorical pattern of the American jeremiad the photographs are embedded in, Fackler demonstrates that the photographs were meant to reintegrate the poor into dominant middle-class ideologies.

Karolina Golimowska's (Berlin) article reads David Hare's play *Stuff Happens* (2004) as a humorous and yet critical response to post-9/11 transatlantic politics. Dealing with the political controversies surrounding the Iraq War, the play's ironic treatment of the diplomatic relations between British and American political leaders, according to Golimowska, opens up critical perspectives on how political decisions are made and, more generally, on the idea of American exceptionalism.

Adhering to the tradition of theoretical and methodological contributions to the PGF and COPAS, Sebastian Huber (Munich) aims at introducing the work of French philosopher Alain Badiou into the field of American Studies. In his contribution "Event(u)al Disruptions: Postmodern Theory and Alain Badiou," Huber offers a thorough discussion of postmodern theory ranging from Jacques Derrida, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to Gilles Deleuze by means of which he illustrates the potential of Badiou's work for critical analyses in future American Studies.

In "Re-writing Woman," Carrie Khou (Mannheim) interrogates the forms and functions of the figure of the New Woman in American and Japanese short fiction. In her comparison of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "Turned" (1911) with Araki Ikuko's "The Letter" (1912), Khou finds striking parallels in the portrayal of the New Woman and the negotiation of issues such as marriage, adultery, and women's autonomy. These similarities, according to Khou, suggest that the New Woman is a literary phenomenon that is much more transnational than previously acknowledged. Moreover, the portrayal of the figure of the New Woman in the two short stories reflects an identity that is subject to change. Khou therefore locates a subversive potential in such literary representations promising to expose the arbitrariness of gendered identities (e.g. the New Woman vs. the True Woman).

In his article on aspects of violence and community in nineteenth-century Western pioneer narratives, David Rose (Berlin) offers a close reading of the (Western) frontier narrative *The Cattle Queen of Montana* by Nat. Collins. Drawing on theoretical work by Georges Sorel and Richard Slotkin, the article highlights not only violence's negative dimension, but also its constructive function as reflected in an "increased recognition of the multiple intersections that connect violent acts and processes of communal bonding." Rose concludes that the intricate interconnections of group violence and community were fundamental in the con-

struction of the U.S. as an imagined community during its westward expansion in the nineteenth century.

As always, the 2011 PGF would not have been possible without the help of many hands. Hence, the local organizers would like to thank the German Association for American Studies, the Gießener Hochschulgesellschaft, the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture, as well as the Department of English at Justus Liebig University Gießen for their generous support. We would also like to thank the group of student helpers, whose most valuable assistance ensured a pleasant and productive conference atmosphere. A conference without participants would not be the same, or, to be clear, would not be at all. Consequently, we would like to thank all of those who made their way to Gießen to present and to discuss 'Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies' at the 2011 PGF. A big thank you, of course, also goes to the organizers of the 2010 PGF at Leipzig, Florian Bast, Anne Grob, Sebastian Herrmann, Franziska Kloth, and Frank Usbeck for their advice and encouragement. Last but not least, we are greatly indebted to the general editors of *COPAS*, Ingrid Gessner, Susanne Leikam, Sascha Pöhlmann, Juliane Schwarz-Bierschenk, and Klara Stephanie Szlezák, for their most appreciated support and assistance in the editing process and compilation of the 13th volume of *COPAS*. Along these lines, we wish to express our sincere hope that you will enjoy reading the volume as much as we enjoyed the process of putting it together—starting with the conference, continuing with the editing of the various contributions, and concluding with eventually seeing them published.

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