

## Editorial

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“I always start out with an idea, even a boring idea, that becomes a question I don't have answers to.”

— Toni Morrison<sup>1</sup>

“The best way to work across boundaries is to refuse to believe in them.”

— Fred Moten<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction, Or: “I Always Start Out with an Idea”

Last year's Postgraduate Forum (PGF) of the German Association for American Studies (GAAS) took place from October 6–8, 2016, at the University of Hamburg. In 2016, the PGF was not only jointly hosted by doctoral students of the University of Bremen and the University of Hamburg; it also returned finally to northern Germany. This issue of *COPAS—Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies* contains a selection of contributions emerging from the annual PGF conference, each article reflecting current debates and concerns in postgraduate American Studies in Germany.

All in all, fifty-seven young Americanists—speakers, chairs, auditors, and organizers—from all over Germany as well as three young scholars from Austrian universities attended the PGF in Hamburg. During the three-day conference, twenty-eight of them presented their current research among peers. Our call for papers had invited contributions from all the various disciplines and fields that American Studies in Germany consists of and we arranged the presentations into seven topical panels of four papers each. The conference showcased the broad thematic scope of scholarly work conducted by young Americanists in Germany. Ranging from topics like “Reading against the Grain” and “Tradition and Dissent” over “Spaces and Movement,” “Bodies and Speculative Fictions,” and “Writing Lives,” to “Moving

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<sup>1</sup> Morrison, Toni. *Conversations*. Edited by Carolyn C. Denard, Univ. of Mississippi P, 2008, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Moten, Fred. Interview by Doni Shepard. *lunchticket*, <http://lunchticket.org/fred-moten-poet/>. Accessed 12 May 2017.

Images: TV and Film” and “Mediality and Perception,” each panel attested to the vibrant ‘knowledgescapes’ of postgraduate American Studies research.

Apart from these topical panels, we organized the “PGF Café” during which the conference participants discussed career opportunities within and outside of academia with six distinguished experts, thus continuing the previous efforts of the 2015 Bamberg/Bayreuth team to put this topic on the PGF’s agenda. The PGF 2016 also invited the postgraduates to participate in two social events, both of which were attended and greeted with enthusiastic responses: the opening of an exhibition of pop art paintings at the Amerikazentrum Hamburg and a guided performative tour about the colonial legacies of the University of Hamburg. In this way, the annual PGF conference not only provided a platform to both generate and share knowledge among peers, it also offered young scholars a shared space to discuss how to navigate the academic landscape more generally— notions that both the President of the GAAS, Prof. Dr. Carmen Birkle, and the U.S. Consul General, Richard Yoneoka, addressed in their opening statements for the conference. In the face of an increasing competition in academia the PGF acts as a venue for both earnest and rigorous intellectual exchange and networking among peers, fostered by an atmosphere of mutual support and solidarity.

### **The Issue’s Contributions at a Glance**

Together with the *COPAS* editors, we edited this issue containing extended and revised contributions from nine speakers of last year’s PGF conference. Following the PGF tradition, we did not set a thematic focus but invited papers from all fields within American Studies. The present issue thus reflects a broad range of topics and provides a glimpse into current research by emerging young scholars from various fields of American Studies: from digital media studies, gender studies, and aging studies to life writing studies, social movement studies, and more.

In her article “The Function of Form, Fiction, and Faith in Elisabeth Elliot’s Life Writing” Mareike Zapp probes the function of faith in US-American missionary Elisabeth Elliot’s life writing. She compares Elliot’s autobiographical novel *No Graven Image* (1966) with her memoir *These Strange Ashes* (1975) and journals. With this comparative analysis, she shows that Elliot’s autobiographical novel *No Graven Image* deploys spirituality as a means to negotiate processes of identity constitution on multiple levels. This also encompasses the struggle of the ‘authoring I’ in becoming a writer. The second article of this issue also focuses on life writing. In “Resisting Xenophobia: Transatlantic Mobility and Aleksandar Hemon’s Immigrant Autobiography *The Book of My Lives*” Elvira Bolanca-Lowman shows how

Hemon's autobiographical writing belongs to a lesser known archive of U.S. (im)migrant writing that may counter anti-immigrant rhetoric in Europe and the United States as well as diversify American conceptions of the self and the other.

Nicole Schneider's "Black Protest on the Streets: Visual Activism and the Aesthetic Politics of Black Lives Matter" connects state-of-the-art research on the role of Blackness in conceptualizations of what it means to be human with scholarship on aesthetic politics and visuality. The article analyzes instances of visual activism and discusses not only the aesthetics but also the ethics of the movement for Black lives in the United States. Questions of visuality are also of major concern to the next article, primarily in the form of conceptualizations and representations of visual perception. In her article "'Perceptions and Their Mutability' in Siri Hustvedt's Works" Diana Wagner illuminates the theoretical premises which underlie literary representations of visual and other modes of perception in Siri Hustvedt's works. Wagner's article interweaves discussions of conceptualizations of perception—in Hustvedt's non-fictional essays as well as in contemporary and historical cognitive science, psychology, and philosophy—with elucidating close readings of Hustvedt's fictional works.

Notions of time and/or technology form the common thread of the next four articles. Julia Velten delves into the ways in which age is a cultural construct in her article "'Extreme Forms of Aging: The Case of Sam Berns.'" By analyzing the depiction of the aging disorder progeria in the HBO documentary *Life According to Sam*, she explores the nexus between aging studies and disability studies. In "Reading Time Travel in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* as *Sankofa*," Alena Cicholewski puts science fiction into conversation with the Akan concept of *Sankofa* to negotiate whether physically returning to antebellum slavery can heal the wounds that history inflicted upon the novel's African American protagonist. In "The Struggle of Being Alive: Laboring Bodies in Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*," Juliane Straetz then discusses biotechnology and the Marxist question of how value is created through work by reading the android in Bacigalupi's novel as an allegory of the laborer in globalized capitalism. Technological visions unite and reassess past and future in Kristina Baudemann's article entitled "Seeds of a Future World: Science and Technology in the Digital Art of Elizabeth LaPensée." By introducing a visual language in her artwork to both express and to mediate traditional stories and Indigenous scientific literacies over and against colonial representations of science and technologies, Baudemann argues that LaPensée establishes her artistic production as decolonial practice and as a way to imagine different, decolonial futures, respectively.

The issue closes with Alina Schumacher's article "Disenfranchised Mothers and Maternity Insurance: Tracing Progressive Arguments in Ernest Hemingway's Short Stories," in which

Schumacher explores how contemporaneous progressive discourses inform representations of mother figures and maternity in Hemingway's short stories "A Canary For One" and "Hills Like White Elephants." Re-reading those stories through the lens of reformist arguments, she contends, allows us to reassess the extent to which these texts negotiated topics such as women's disenfranchisement.

### **By Way of Conclusion, Or: "The Best Way to Work Across Boundaries Is to Refuse to Believe in Them"**

Thematic openness and the work across disciplinary boundaries, as reflected by all of this issue's pieces, has been one of the distinguishing features of the PGF ever since its inception and it has since enabled as many young scholars as possible from all fields of American Studies to present and discuss their research among peers in a supportive setting. This tradition will continue in the years to come: This year's PGF will be hosted in Berlin by a team consisting of Ph.D. candidates affiliated with Humboldt University and the Free University of Berlin. In 2018, the PGF will take place in the Ruhr area organized by doctoral students from Technical University of Dortmund, Ruhr University Bochum, and the University of Duisburg-Essen. We are delighted to pass on the PGF responsibilities to these two excellent teams, wishing them all the best. We look forward to continued discussions among young Americanists on crucial and topical issues in and beyond our disciplines.

We are very grateful to the GAAS for the financial aid and continued support of the PGF. The GAAS's generous funding made the PGF conference possible and allowed young scholars to convene in Hamburg. The PGF 2016 was also kindly and generously sponsored by the University of Hamburg's Institute of English and American Studies and the University of Bremen's Department of Languages and Literatures. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Prof. Dr. Susanne Rohr and Prof. Dr. Astrid Böger (University of Hamburg) as well as to Prof. Dr. Sabine Broeck (University of Bremen), who encouraged us to embark on the adventure of jointly organizing the 2016 PGF conference from the very beginning. We received further funding and support from the U.S. Consulate General Hamburg, the ICA e.V., the Hamburgische Wissenschaftliche Stiftung, the Amerikazentrum Hamburg, and the publishing houses Peter Lang and Winter Verlag, whom we would like to thank cordially as well.

Finally, we feel that all conference participants, regardless of the particular stages of their projects, and the contributors to this *COPAS* issue strongly benefitted from both, the Postgraduate Forum 2016 and the joint venture of working on this issue, respectively. The lively discussions that started during the panel sessions, extended over coffee, lunch, and dinner, and continued even beyond the conference in the networks that these young scholars

formed during their time in Hamburg have found their way into this issue. We would like to thank not only the *COPAS* editorial team for working so diligently with us on the essays but also all contributors for their intellectual labor, contemplation, and patience with the editing process. This *COPAS* issue shows that postgraduate American Studies in Germany is alive, up, and running.

It's been a pleasure and an honor!

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