

Abstracts

Verena Adamik

University of Potsdam

Abstract:

Imagining Communities in Afrofuturisms: Octavia Butler's *The Parable of The Sower* and #Blacklivesmatter

This paper explores the heterogeneous ways in which Afrofuturisms—future visions drawn up by Black artists—navigate “the sea of possibilities to create communities” (Womack 191), in particular, how they negotiate the construction of the imagined national community of the United States. In Octavia Butler’s novel *The Parable of the Sower* (1993), taking place in a near future, the protagonist strives to establish a novel community that will eventually overcome the apocalyptic state the USA are in, and expand beyond planetary boundaries. By frequently referring to national symbols and communal belonging, the novel suggests that, while governmental structures have crumbled, the imagined community prevails, and so do discrimination, racism, and slavery. It thus implies a link between national community and racism, and that the ‘old’ “nation-state is a crucial locus for the articulation of racist ideologies” (Jackson and Penrose 9) instead of creating a community of “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7). Butler’s protagonist works on imagining new ways of forming a community, but often fails, reproducing expansionist aims as well as exclusionary mechanisms. I therefore argue that the novel critiques the imagined community, while acknowledging its resilience. Other voices calling for a radical, systemic change—from the “Western-prescribed nuclear family structure” (blacklivesmatter) to the economic system of the United States—have risen since 2014 through the social media #BlackLivesMatter network, e.g. in short stories and art work collected February 2016, Black Futures Month. This paper will discuss how these, like Butler’s *Parable*, challenge the overall formation of national communities, the role of the media that allegedly bind the national community together (cf. Anderson 37), and the common past and the “limitless future” (Anderson 12) of the imagined community of the United States.

Bionote:

I am currently holding a PhD scholarship, awarded by the Potsdam Graduate School and the State of Brandenburg, supporting my work on my dissertational project on utopian communities in US American Literature, which is supervised by Prof. Dr. Nicole Waller, University of Potsdam. Until October 2015, I held a position as a teaching assistant for American Studies at the University of Potsdam. Before, I studied English Literature, American Studies, and Psychology, at the Julius-Maximilians University of Würzburg and the University of Swansea, Wales. I received my M.A. in 2013 with a thesis on British popular Gothic fiction in the late nineteenth century, supervised by Prof. Dr. Gerold Sedlmayr, now TU Dortmund. My research interests include Utopian Studies, American Studies, Space, Science Fiction, Commu-

nalism, Political Participation, and Gothic/Horror literature; in the context of my PhD project, I have recently begun to pursue after the utopian visions of Afrofuturisms with regard to the United States.

Lisann Anders

University of Zurich

Abstract:

The Dynamics of Community in the TV Show *Community*

What is a community and what does it mean in the context of contemporary American popular culture? Can we speak of one American community? In my essay I would like to take the TV show *Community* as an example to examine how communities are constructed and in which way they represent American life. Primarily, I would like to analyze how the individual is or is not integrated into a community and what effects a community has on the individual by means of the different main characters in *Community*. My argument will be that a community can have a positive effect on the individual but only under certain circumstances. These circumstances present in fact the value system of American society that are often not evident in today's society anymore but that are still promoted – at least indirectly – in American popular culture in general and American comedy TV shows such as *Community* in particular. Thus I will show that a community is a major part in shaping and changing one's individual values and thus has an effect on a person's character and identity traits. The consequence then of an individual's change is a change of the dynamics of the community. Hence, by means of the effects of a person's change by a community, the community itself is changed. That again means that such a portrayal on TV can serve as a role model of an ideal vision of a community and opens perspectives on possibilities of social change.

Bionote:

Lisann Anders holds an MA in Screenwriting from the National University of Ireland Galway as well as an MA in English Literature & Linguistics from the University of Zurich. Her MA thesis discussed best friends in Shakespeare. Lisann's minors at the University of Zurich were Media & Communication and History. After several years as a Language Skills & Culture tutor at the English Department, she is now a research and teaching assistant to Prof. Barbara Straumann. Her research interests include Shakespeare, American literature, crime fiction, and film. Lisann's PhD project focuses on the American city in general and New York City in particular. She discusses how the city can trigger the imagination of crimes. The main focus of this project lies on literature of the 1980s and 1990s but it finds its point of departure in the 19th century Gothic representation of cities. Lisann actively supports the arts by being a member as well as founder of the Blueprint Masquerades, the former English Drama Group of Zurich. Furthermore, she was the director of the Zurich Shakespeare Festival 2016, which had been launched by students of the English Department of UZH to commemorate Shakespeare's 400th death anniversary.

Abstract:

Reinhabiting the Frontier: Bioregionalism, Re-Localization and the Contemporary American Reflection on Social and Ecological Sustainability

In the late 20th-century North American counterculture, the bioregionalism movement – which emerged in California in the 1960s through the thinking and activism of Allen Van Newkirk, Raymond Dassman, Peter Bergand Kirkpatrick Sale – has played a crucial, if too often understated, role. It has kept alive and disseminated ideas about an ecologically sustainable, culturally vibrant economy. It has attempted to find a fitting place for the native American heritage of settling and caring for the land. It has – to borrow the words of Ursula Heise – sought to rekindle Americans’ “sense of place” in order to safeguard their “sense of planet”. In the specific brand of bioregional countercultural critique, the notion of community plays a central role, but in a way that is neither parochial nor communitarian. Much in keeping with the hippie movements of the 1960s and 70s, it envisaged community mainly as a politically progressive, even revolutionary, element to counter social anonymity, ecological wastefulness and cultural weightlessness. The main tenet of bioregionalism was that the citizens of California and, more generally, the United States had largely lost their sense of “inhabitation.” They had been uprooted by administrative and economic gigantism. Americans urgently needed to “re-inhabit” their regions and recover their ability to form (along with other living species) life-supporting, biotic and symbiotic communities – “lifeplaces,” as they are called by the prominent contemporary bioregionalist Robert Thayer Jr. This paper seeks to provide a forward-looking reading of American bioregional thought by asking how its brand of community has been taken up and metabolized by more recent re-localization and “re-inhabitation” initiatives such as the California-based Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) as well as the up-and-coming “locavesting,” permaculture and ecovillage movements in the US. The eventual aim is to understand how the idea of community is being mobilized today as a tool to subvert the forces of social and ecological unsustainability that are jeopardizing the United States.

Bionote:

Christian Arnsperger is professor of sustainability and economic anthropology at the Institute for Geography and Sustainability (IGD) of the Faculty of Geoscience and Environmental Studies (FGSE) at the University of Lausanne. He holds a PhD in economics from the University of Louvain (Belgium) and has been teaching and researching for many years at the interface between economic analysis, human sciences, and existential philosophy. A specialist of post-consumerist/ post-growth economic alternatives and of the link between ecological transition and the change of mentalities and lifestyles, he is also a scientific adviser to the Alternative Bank Switzerland (ABS) and, in that capacity, he develops "action research" field projects and collaborations in the area of sustainable finance. He is also interested in the cultural roots of American unsustainability and is currently beginning a research project on

Los Angeles as a paradigm for some of the challenges as well as possible solutions to environmental crisis.

Thomas Austenfeld (Author-Meets-Critics Panel)

University of Fribourg

Bionote:

Thomas Austenfeld is Professor of American Literature at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Austenfeld is the author of *American Women Writers and the Nazis: Ethics and Politics in Boyle, Porter, Stafford, and Hellman* (2001). He is the editor of *Kay Boyle for the Twenty-First Century* (2008), of *Critical Insights: Barbara Kingsolver* (2010), and of *Katherine Anne Porter's Ship of Fools: New Interpretations and Transatlantic Contexts* (2015). He is co-editor of *Writing American Women* (2009, SPELL 23) and *Terrorism and Narrative Practice* (2011). His work has appeared in *American Literary Scholarship*, *Mississippi Quarterly*, *Colloquium Helveticum*, *Prose Studies*, *South Atlantic Review*, *Pacific Coast Philology*, *Southwestern American Literature*, and *Great Plains Quarterly*.

Sofie Behluli

University of Bern

Abstract:

Transgenerational Female Communities in Siri Hustvedt's *The Summer Without Men*

In my paper I address the question of how Siri Hustvedt's 2011 novel *The Summer Without Men* deals with postmodernism, which proclaims itself as the 'end of history' and destroyer of great narratives such as 'the subject' or 'unity'. I focus particularly on the transgenerational communities of women, the intersubjective identity formation processes and the emphasis on corporeality in the novel. My paper argues that Siri Hustvedt tries to move beyond the detached position of postmodernism by stressing (female) communities and their corporeal, face-to-face interactions. In other words, she discards 'cerebral aesthetics' in favor of the more pragmatic and 'human'.¹ Female communities in particular are presented as an important point of reference when faced with identity-threatening crises (e.g. being dumped by a husband of 30 years). *The Summer Without Men* is aware of postmodernism's problems of representation and meaning-making, but it attempts to tackle those problems from a more pragmatic, communal standpoint rather than from a solitary position. Since this turn toward community strongly highlights concepts empathy and trust, Ihab Hassan's arti-

¹ This is not to say that all postmodernist strands are cerebral and detached from 'reality', as can be seen in the extremely pragmatic agenda of postcolonialism and feminism. What I refer to here in particular are notions of 'text', 'transcendental signified', 'simulacra' and the like, whose importance was first and foremost restricted to an intellectual, academic elite.

cle “Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust” (2003) constitutes one of the main theoretical texts of my paper.

Bionote:

Sofie Behluli, M.A., is an assistant and PhD student to chair of Literatures in English / North American Literature and Culture at the University of Bern. Her research interests focus on intermediality, visuality, materiality and aura in the contemporary North American novel. She is investigating the purpose of ekphrastic descriptions and aura-enhancing passages in these novels, trying to link this heightened awareness for the material and tangible to the epochal shift from Postmodernism to Post-Postmodernism. These foci can also be seen in Sofie’s MA thesis in which she develops a new, aura-enhancing function of ekphrasis in her reading of Donna Tartt’s *The Goldfinch* (2013). At the moment she is working on the SNF proposal, turning her MA thesis into a publishable article, and co-writing an article on “Ekphrasis in the Digital Age” with her PhD supervisor, Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rippl.

Dustin Breitenwischer

Albert-Ludwigs University Freiburg

Abstract:

From Brook Farm to Harlem: America's Romance with the Creative Community

In the past four decades cities have become playing fields for their own aesthetic “culturalization” (Reckwitz). Following the demands of postindustrial restructuring urban centers have been turned into *creative cities*, that is, places that provide room for the creative avant-garde to engage in the exchange of creative ideas, creative processes and creative products. From Brooklyn through Detroit to LA’s Venice Beach, the force of urban culturalization has been as much the product as it has been the producer of *creative communities* that are essentially held together by a defining interest in the emergence of the popular and the aesthetically new. In my talk I would like to sketch the cultural-historical development of this transnational phenomenon and ask in how far the establishment and perpetuation of creative communities and the aesthetization of their urban life-worlds rely on a philosophical utopia whose foundations can be traced back to late-eighteenth century Idealism (and Schiller’s idea of the *Aesthetic State*) and which found its earliest manifestations in the transcendental communities of kindred spirits. In a comparative analysis of mid-nineteenth century communities such as Brook Farm, Hawthorne’s satirical representation of those communities in *The Blithedale Romance* and current popular narratives of the urban creative community (from *Mad Men* to *Vinyl*) and its economic cooptation. I am particularly interested in the question of whether the communal paradigm of the *creative city* is merely a transromantic derivative and the urban-cultural materialization of a communal endeavor that reaches back far beyond the 1970s.

Bionote:

Dustin Breitenwischer is Postdoctoral Researcher in the field of North American Studies at the Graduiertenkolleg “Faktuales und Fiktionales Erzählen” at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg. He studied North American Studies and German Literature at Freie Universität Berlin and the University of Minnesota, and he was a Visiting PhD Scholar at Columbia University in New York. In 2015 he defended his dissertation on aesthetic in-betweenness at FU Berlin, dealing with the self-representation of aesthetic experience in 20th-century American art and poetry. His project was funded by the German National Scholarship Foundation. In his current research project he engages in the transnational history of creativity and the creative self in American culture. His monograph *Dazwischen: Über Wesen und Wirken ästhetischer Erfahrung am Beispiel der amerikanischen Kunst und Dichtung von Hopper bis Hustvedt* will be published with Fink Verlag in spring 2017. He is co-editor of *Die neue amerikanische Fernsehserie* (Fink, 2014).

Stella Castelli

University of Zurich

Abstract:**The Serial Tragedy - *Twin Peaks* and the Disrupted Community**

Within the American literary landscape we find a recurring theme in the representation of community, that of the insular American town in which those within hold a distinct knowledge of which those without are excluded, a concept that positions itself on the threshold between private and public. Consequently, within the confines of the American small town we find a combination of polis and privacy, a microcosm of the American nation torn between the secret and the shared. This state of instability is bound to continuously disrupt and re-erect itself due to the impossibility of consent, which is why the serial representation offers itself to the depiction of community, harboring the ability to give voice to the specifically American notion of creative destruction (Fisher, 2000).

A particularly seminal example of such a community is David Lynch’s 1990 series *Twin Peaks*. Feigning a harmonious unity, it is only once tragedy strikes that the entire town of *Twin Peaks* falls victim to disruption, bringing to light the twisted and dark entanglements of secrecy within the community, potentially threatening its very structure. It is also tragedy that turns an outside spotlight onto the community, thereby rendering it unable to escape the hungry eye of the outsider, the formerly safe community suddenly crumbling under the gaze of the nation. Embedding the concept of a disrupted community in the serial narrative implies that we find circular notions inherent in the concept of community – a potentially endless cycle of obtaining privacy and the exposure thereof which causes the continuous dis- and misplacement of new secrecies forming the base of the community. The serial aesthetic gives voice to this continuity of disruption and re-erection of the community – continually torn between the private and the public and subject to this oxymoronic state.

Bionote:

Stella Castelli is the coordinator of the UZH English Department's Doctoral Program in English and American Literary Studies. She holds a BA in English Literature and Linguistics and Theory and History of Photography as well as an MA in English Literature and Linguistics from the University of Zurich. She wrote her MA thesis on *Aestheticized Representations of Death in American Literature and Film* exploring repressions of death and their symptomatic reappearance in contemporary American culture. She is currently working on her doctoral thesis furthering her research within this field with a specific interest in the serial depiction of death.

Atalie Gerhard

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

Abstract:**Critiques of U.S.-American Counterterrorist Communities of Virtue through its Pop-Cultural Individualizations in the TV-series *Homeland* and *Generation Kill***

This paper is interested in the representation of U.S.-American counterterrorist communities in the popular surveillance TV-series *Homeland* (esp. seasons 1-3; 2011-2013; creator: Alex Gansa) and the anti-combat miniseries *Generation Kill* (2008; dirs. Susanna Wright/Simon Cellan Jones). Although both these productions critique politicized U.S.-American Wars on Terror narratives (in the first case, the sleeper is actually a returned Prisoner of War; in the second case, local radicalization follows Operation Iraqi Freedom), they still adhere to democratic individualism's scripts which, according to Elizabeth Anker, hegemonically define U.S.-American post-9/11 public trauma as melodramatic with the possibility of collective catharsis. However, selected protagonists break the molds of the stoic female or the unspecified soldiers that Benedict Anderson considers constitutive for patriotic propaganda. But do their morally justified instances of civil disobedience rather render them republican exception(alist)s imploding an otherwise discriminatory polis generating homini sacri (Giorgio Agamben) or do they metonymically presentify its very subjective vulnerability (Judith Butler)?

Bionote:

Atalie Gerhard (age: 22) is currently completing her master's degree in the program "MA North American Studies: Culture and Literature" at the Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. There, she also worked as a research assistant and now hopes to enroll in the postgraduate program "Presence and Tacit Knowledge". Her research interests include cultures of minority resistance, literary genres of mystery, and narratives of terrorism. In her pastime, she enjoys learning foreign languages (she speaks German, English, French, Spanish, Italian, and Romanian).

Abstract:

Commodified Communities: The High Line, Grassroots Activism, and Gentrification in New York City

In a recent essay on American cities, Adam Gopnik writes that “those of us who dreamed of the High Line as an improbable public benefit, and then saw it come true, had to accept that it would next become a subject of ridicule, as a cynical developer’s amenity, a green-tinted scam” (“Naked Cities”). Through this, he aptly summarizes how New York City’s immensely popular High Line, a derelict industrial structure-turned-public park, developed in little over a decade from a cherished local community endeavor into one of the most prominent symbols of rampant gentrification in this and many other American cities.

Ironically, it is the project’s very specific subcultural mode of community-building that works smoothly with a culture of contemporary consumer capitalism which thrives on difference from and defiance of a perceived ‘mainstream,’ something that Thomas Frank has called “hip consumerism.” Together with Frank’s most recent study on the connection between political liberalism, the ‘creative class,’ and economic inequality (*Listen, Liberal*, 2016), this theoretical framework provides the backdrop for an analysis of the High Line and its economic and cultural impact on the adjacent Meatpacking District in New York City. In the end, the same bottom-up communal logic of urban development that was used by urbanists such as Jane Jacobs in the 1960s to prevent top-down political destruction of organically grown neighborhoods has nowadays become a major factor in processes of urban inequality and displacement routinely subsumed under the label of ‘gentrification.’

Bionote:

Florian Gross teaches American Studies at Leibniz Universität Hannover, where he is currently finishing his Ph.D. thesis “Negotiating Creativity in Post-Network Television Series.” Next to American television culture, his research interests include comics and graphic novels, contemporary literature, questions of authenticity, and the cultural history of New York City. He is co-editor of *The Aesthetics of Authenticity: Medial Constructions of the Real* (2012) and has published articles on the television series *30 Rock*, Michael Chabon’s novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, and *New York City’s High Line*.

Abstract:

The Law of Irony: Violent Negotiations of Identity and History in Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*

In his chapter for Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease's *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, Eric Cheyfitz writes that "A master narrative is at work here in which the United States is the site of an homogeneous people of Western European origin" (121) as he analyzes the imposition of the Western concept of law unto Native American cultures. This master narrative refers, however, not only to the beginning of colonization of the North American continent, but still applies nowadays, and is, since the Native American literary Renaissance in 1968, a major concern of Native American literature. Sherman Alexie, one of the leading contemporary voices of Native American literature approaches history, the creation of scattered Native American communities and fractured identity in many different ways throughout his work, however never without humor and biting irony. David L. Moore tells us in his introduction to Alexie that he "makes that link explicit between repressed history and the repressed psyche of American violence by setting grotesque violence as an outcome of colonial history" (Moore 304). This is especially true for Alexie's *Indian Killer* where the Native American protagonist, John Smith, is suspected of killing and mutilating white men. This paper thus seeks to explore Alexie's use of irony when (re)considering the unavoidably violent Native American history, present and identity in order to negotiate the schizophrenic position between the Native American and the imposed, white mainstream culture.

Works Cited:

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Cheyfitz, Eric. "Savage Law: The Plot Against American Indians in Johnson and Graham's Lessee v. M'Intosh and The Pioneers." Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, eds. *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993. 109-128.

Moore, David L. "Sherman Alexie: irony, intimacy, and agency." Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 297-310.

Bionote:

Cécile Heim is a PhD candidate with Prof. Agnieszka Soltysik-Monnet and Prof. Valérie Cossy at the University of Lausanne. After graduating from Lausanne she started her PhD with a two-year research and teaching exchange at the State University of New York at Buffalo before coming back to Lausanne, where she will start working as doctoral assistant in February 2017. In the last three years she has taught English Composition and Introduction to Literary Analysis. Her research focuses on the cultural negotiation of justice and the law in Native American crime fiction, featuring authors such as Sherman Alexie, Louise Erdrich, Louis Owens, James Welch, Tony Hillerman and Margaret Coel. Her research interests range from

feminist and women's studies to Native studies, cultural studies, political philosophy as well as law and literature.

Sarah Henzi

McGill University

Abstract:

Indigenous Popular Culture and New Media: Alternative Forms of Storytelling

"Comics, games, movies, and television," states Michael Sheyahshe, author of *Native Americans in Comic Books*, "have always been a way to gauge how we, as a culture, are viewed by the dominant culture in America. Whether it's the whooping, attacking horde of Indians in the early 'cowboy' movies, the notion of Native American as a crack-shot and/or expert tracker in comics, or the continued (mis)representation in video games [...] pop culture media serves to mirror the emotional consensus of how mainstream America sees us" (La-Pensée). This ongoing issue, according to Sheyahshe, warrants the need for Indigenous people to become more creatively involved in these various aspects of popular culture, given how, on the one hand, conventional theories of cultural studies have not accounted for the historical and political specificities of these productions and, on the other, popular culture is just as important to modern storytelling as are traditional art forms.

Through a discussion of Gord Hill's *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book*, David Alexander Robertson's graphic novel *7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga*, Jeff Barnaby's "grit" thriller *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, and *Skins*, a Mohawk video game series, this presentation explores how alternative, subversive forms of storytelling are "a necessary antidote to the conventional history of the Americas" (Hill). I contend that these types of productions—or rather interventions—call for a necessary change in world-view, a reflection on the direct link to a past of colonialism, and the undeniable connection to a contemporaneity of imperialism. Furthermore, the contemporaneity of these genres and works is an important component in the creation of a transcontinental public space in which Indigenous productions are participant in the making of new possibilities for renegotiation and reconciliation.

Bionote:

Sarah Henzi (Ph.D., Université de Montréal, 2012) is currently a Visiting Scholar at McGill's Institute for the Study of Canada as well as the Co-Organizer of and Lecturer for the International Graduate Summer School on Indigenous Literature and Film at Université de Montréal (CÉRIUM). Prior to that, she was a FQRSC-funded Postdoctoral Fellow in the First Nations and Indigenous Studies Program at the University of British Columbia and taught as a Sessional Instructor at Simon Fraser University for over a year in the Department of First Nations Studies. Her research focuses on genres that are redefining and expanding upon what we have considered thus far as "literature" in the field of Indigenous Literary Studies: comic books, graphic novels, science fiction, fantasy, speculative fiction, film script, and erotica.

Also, the prevalence of new media and of the audio-visual and digital worlds are providing exceptional entry points to the land and territories (whether spatial, discursive, aesthetic) that many artists and writers may no longer have access to. Her work also seeks to promote the Francophone literary and artistic works of Indigenous peoples in Quebec. Taken together, her research seeks to offer new ways of thinking about such interventions, without them being constrained to or by fictitious frontiers – national, generic, linguistic or institutional. Her critical monograph *Inventing Interventions: Strategies of Reappropriation in North American Indigenous Literatures – Contemporary Works beyond National and Linguistic Divides* is under contract with University of Manitoba Press. She has publications in *Quebec Studies*, *Canadian Review for Comparative Literature*, *Studies for Canadian Literature* and *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, and is a contributor to the *Oxford Handbook on Indigenous American Literatures* (2014) and the *Routledge Companion to Native American Literature* (2015).

Roxanne Hughes

University of Lausanne

Abstract:

The Common Community Made Uncommon in Brian Sousa's *Almost Gone*

A community has predominantly been defined by its commonality, be it a shared place, language, ethnicity, set of values, experience, etc. Little attention has been granted, however, to the internal space of the disparate and uncommon in theoretical approaches to communities. By proposing to reflect on the notion of “uncommon communities” for its annual conference (October 2016), the American Portuguese Studies Association emphasizes the necessity to discuss “the increasing emergence (and/or rejection) of communities based on intense differences” in “settings of multilingualism, immigration and transnationalism.”² In the context of immigrant literature, what can we gain from such an approach?

I propose to discuss this theoretical aspect through the example of Brian Sousa's short story collection *Almost Gone* (2013). This collection presents Portuguese migration to North America from the multifarious viewpoints of protagonists, whose relation varies in time and space, but connects Portugal and America, then and now. By telling the same stories from different perspectives, Sousa amplifies the Portuguese diasporic community's internal divergence and separation, while simultaneously emphasizing the protagonists' necessity to connect and/or re-connect throughout the collection. Sousa's conflicting perspective on Portuguese immigrants' experience thus complicates the definition of community based exclusively on commonality and shared history. By highlighting the Portuguese diasporic community's disparate experience and vision, Sousa proposes indeed a more nuanced depiction of what makes a community in the context of both migration and transnationalism. The genre of the

² <http://apsa.us/uncommon-communities>

short story collection accentuates this sense of uncommon community as its fragmented whole simultaneously separates and unities, compares and opposes the independent stories told.

Bionote:

Roxane Hughes is a PhD candidate at the University of Lausanne specializing in Ethnic American Studies. Her dissertation thesis focuses on representations of footbinding in Chinese American literature and popular culture. She is the author of two articles “Cinderella from a Cross-Cultural Perspective: Connecting East and West in Donna Jo Napoli’s *Bound*” (in *Cinderella Across Cultures: New Directions and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Wayne State University Press, 2016) and “Multicultural or Destitute Hawai’i? Re-Visioning the Symbolism of the Aloha Shirt” (forthcoming).

Sabin Jeanmaire

University of Zurich

Abstract:

Polis and Institution: Timothy Findley’s *Psychiatric Microcosm of Power Structures*

Where and how do the popular and the political intersect? What role does literature play in the negotiation of power structures between them? In this paper I aim to tackle these questions from a Canadian perspective, through the lens of the influential 20th century author Timothy Findley. In his novel *Headhunter* (1993), set in a dystopian future version of Canadian society, he presents a mental health clinic as a special community in which the private and the political sphere intersect. In this institution, patients and psychiatrists are pitted against each other, and their interactions, which expose private traumata to the far more public eye of the therapists, are marked by corruption and abuse. As a microcosm of society, this clinic negotiates the power relationships between the popular and the political. The imposition of normative power to create sane and non-deviant members of the polis recalls the historical institutions of the residential schools where the private identity of First Nation children was radically eliminated to achieve assimilation and homogeneity. This national trauma, which has been described as the “Canadian holocaust,” lurks in the background of a novel which also makes a strong claim about literature and the act of reading: the perception of and potential resistance towards those abusive powers exercised by the representatives of the polis are epitomized in a crucial misreading which shows the power of language to reveal a hidden kernel of truth – seen through the eyes of a traumatized patient, the role of those in power is that of (a) “TheRapist.”

Bionote:

Sabin Jeanmaire is a research and teaching assistant to professors Elisabeth Bronfen and Barbara Straumann at the English Department of the University of Zurich. She holds both a BA (2010) and an MA (2013) degree in English Literature and Linguistics, as well as Spanish

Literature and Linguistics, from the University of Zurich. She completed parts of her BA studies at the University of Valencia, Spain, and parts of her MA studies at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. Her research interests include metafiction, adaptation, and psychoanalytic criticism. She wrote her MA thesis on metafictional elements in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, and is now working on her doctoral thesis on the Canadian author Timothy Findley, focusing on the topics of trauma and witnessing in his novels.

Janusz Kazmierczak

Adam Mickiewicz University

Abstract:

The Community of Writers at The University of Iowa and its Representation in The Accounts of The Polish Participants of The UI International Writing Program

Ever since the inception of the Iowa Writers' Workshop in the 1930s, year after year, the University of Iowa has hosted vibrant writers' communities. These communities acquired a truly international dimension after the start of the International Writing Program in the year 1967. Among the over 1400 writers that the IWP has brought to the USA to this date, there have been over 50 Polish men and women of letters. Many of them, on return to Poland, published written accounts of their stay in the USA. It was the intention of the founders of the Program to create an international community of writers, centered on Iowa but bringing together present and past participants of the Program all over the world. The paper, based in part on archival research done in Iowa, investigates how and to what extent such a community has been built, under the auspices of the IWP, in Iowa and globally. Also, it discusses what representation this community has had in the accounts of the Polish participants of the Program. A leading theoretical concept, applied and tested in the discussion, will be the notion of *communitas*, as developed by Victor Turner.

Bionote:

Dr Janusz Kaźmierczak is an assistant professor at the Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland. Among his research interests are the literary image of America in Poland, communist anti-Western propaganda in Poland, visual communication, and cultural theory. In 2015 he published the book *Transatlantic Pilgrimages: Travel to America in the Writings of the Polish Participants of the University of Iowa International Writing Program*. His articles have appeared in American, German, Polish, Portuguese and Romanian journals and edited collections. He co-edits the journal *Polish-AngloSaxon Studies* (Poznan), and is a member of the editorial board of the *International Journal of Comic Art* (Philadelphia).

Xenia Knoesel

University of Oxford

Abstract:

The Role of Literature for Forming Normative Thoughts

For building communities, religious, ideological or philosophical thoughts have often played an important role. They provide a (seeming) connection to something greater, which has the power to unite individuals into one community. A (supposed) deeper understanding of the world and normative systems (and may they consist in the defiance of such normativity) provides a common direction for all individual lives, transcending the apparently weak contribution that each single person may make, into a larger picture of human worshipping, progress, dignity or whatever aim might be claimed to be morally justified. Throughout history, a normative framework has proven to be one of the strongest links to shape communities and many systems and ideologies have experimented with a variety of tools to strengthen the unified moral understanding of each member of the respective community. Art in general and literature in particular have been used to varying degrees in order to convey a deeper understanding of moral rules, an atmosphere to support their implementation, or role models to showcase their benefits. It might be helpful to take a look back on how different ideologies used literature as a means of communicating and strengthening their respective normative views, both in the US and in Europe, and to think about in how far we use these possibilities nowadays, in what is sometimes considered a post-ideological age. Seeing that normative systems have constituted such a fundamental role in most of history, this might lead us to attach a higher importance even to contemporary literature and its role for our society.

Bionote:

After my Abitur in 2013, I spent one year travelling and working on literature. From September 2014 to May 2015, I studied two semesters at WHU - Otto Beisheim School of Management, receiving a scholarship from the German National Foundation. After four months of working in the finance industry, both in Frankfurt and New York City, I came back to working on literary and philosophical thoughts, independent from any university. In October 2016, I will start studying Philosophy, Politics and Economics at St. John's College, Oxford University.

Yvonne Knop

Siegen University

Abstract:

Power through Apathy: America's 1950s, the White Middle-Class, and a new National Character

The 1950s not only mark the historical moment when the United States gained global power, but also were a decade marked by extraordinary changes in the class structure. They

brought the beginning of mass production and the white middle-class' domestic isolation in the suburbs. Like no other community, the white middle-class shaped and defined what today is called the 'Age of Anxiety'. Therefore, I will concentrate on the connection between the white American middle-class, its influence on class structures and race relations, as well as its significant role in American Politics in the 1950s. During these years, the political apathy and anxieties of the white middle-class helped to intensify the fear of a Soviet threat and the need for surveillance. Apart from that, the growth of suburbs and a growing consumerism shot the white middle-class off from the rest of America's population, which, in turn, helped race issues to come to the boil again. To assess the previous mentioned points, I will first define the white American middle-class in sense of a community. Subsequently, the characteristics of the new suburban life, such as popular culture and religion, and the growing need for privacy and security will be addressed. Concluding, I will draw the connection between the white middle-class and Politics in the 1950s, and will discuss how and why exactly the white middle-class defined and shaped the national character of the 1950s, known today as the 'Cold War Culture'.

Bionote:

Yvonne Knop is a senior teacher trainee for the English language and Social Sciences at the University of Siegen. Her main interests are in the fields of cultural, social and literary topics related to America's 1950s. In February 2016, she presented her paper on America's 1950s, domestic surveillance, and the founding of the NSA in the student forum of an international conference at the Georg-August-University Göttingen. Currently, she is publishing her first monograph, titled "Visions and Reflections of America. A close reading of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's 'I Am Waiting'". After finishing her studies next year, she is planning to write her PhD in the field of American Studies.

Christina Maria Koch

University of Marburg

Abstract:

Who Are "We"? Dissent and Aggressive Rhetoric within Feminist Activist Communities

When we think of dissent and aggressive rhetoric in the context of progressive political movements, we tend to focus on movements' relationships with their adversaries. When political movements are studied more closely, challenges to collective identity and mechanisms of dissent within groups come to the fore, a particular long runner being the history of the labor movement and "the" current Left (Polletta and Jasper; Polletta). Feminist theorists and activists of the last decades have been discussing vigorously issues of plurality, particularity, dissent and unity (versus homogeneity). Intersectional, postcolonial, and queer feminisms have been incisive in reformulations of feminist communities and struggles. Current discussions about "White Feminism" or "TERFs" (trans-exclusionary radical feminists) tend to be among the most heated in online or offline feminist communities. While some feminists

appeal to civility and a common, unified struggle against anti-feminist agendas, other feminists criticize a homogenizing “we” and unmask “tone policing” and pleas for unity as oppressive mechanisms of privileged activists used to silence marginalized groups and abuse their energies. In this paper I will combine perspectives on emotions/affect from social movement and social media studies with current feminist theories and activist discourses concerned with emotions/affect in communal activism. In scholarship and selected discourse within online activist communities such as Guerilla Feminism, I will trace if and how academics and activists try to answer questions that translate well to many other political movements: Can feminists knit larger and stronger communities without sacrificing the “feminist killjoy” (Ahmed) and the reclaimed position of the “angry black woman” (Griffin; see McKenzie et al.) for pragmatic political concerns? Can there be a #lesstoxicfeminism (Thelandersson) and a cautious “we” that does not imply movement-internal oppression?

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Bionote:

Christina Maria Koch is a PhD candidate in American Studies at Philipps University of Marburg, Germany, where she studies how medium-specific traits of graphic illness memoirs shape representations of illness experiences and their sociocultural dimensions. Her research interests include comics studies, gender studies/feminist theories, political iconographies and social movement studies, and the intersections of literature and medicine.

Alicia Krömer

University of Vienna

Abstract:

Social Influence and Impact on the Collective Memory of the Native Residential Schools in Canada: 1867-1996

The Canadian Native Residential school system was first established and funded by the Federal Government of Canada in cooperation with the Catholic and Protestant Churches of Canada in 1867, and continued until the final school closure in 1996. During this time, 150,000 Aboriginal children were placed in a network of 125 schools across Canada. Many former students claim they lost their cultural identity there, reporting physical and sexual abuse from the school staff. It has been cited that at least 3,000 children died while in attendance. In the late 1990s, numerous Native Canadians initiated lawsuits against the Canadian government due to the widespread accounts of abuse at the schools. In response, the Canadian government set up compensation agreements with former students, culminating in the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The paper provides a brief historical overview of the residential schools and the government response. The theory of collective memory by Maurice Halbwachs frames the research design. The study also examines the social phenomenon through the lens of a selection of relevant interview partners. This is done in order to reconstruct the thoughts and opinions that the interview partners have on this subject (including Native and non-Native Canadians). The study inquires into the perceived negative intergenerational impacts the schools may have caused as well as its possible contributing factor to the lower social outcomes for Natives (in contrast to non-Native Canadians). The paper also examines the potential for Canada to act as a role model for other countries in dealing with postcolonial histories of oppression, acknowledging the impact of such a history on Indigenous communities, as well as reflect on the role of politics of remembrance in building bridges between past and present for future generations to promote more tolerant, multicultural, and inclusive societies.

Bionote:

Alicia Krömer is from London, Canada. She has completed a BA in English Literature at the University of British Columbia in 2007 and graduated in 2010 with a Masters in European Studies from the University of Graz in cooperation with the University of Barcelona and the European Research Institute in Bolzano, Italy. Her Master's thesis focused on the Indigenous rights of Sami and First Nations. Since 2012, she has been working on her doctoral thesis in the department of political science at the University of Vienna. Her thesis explores the social influence and impact on the collective memory of the Native Residential schools in Canada (1867-1996).

Nidesh Lawtoo

John Hopkins University

Abstract:

The Mimetic Experience of Community: A Genealogy

In the wake of the philosophical articulation of the concept of “community” by Jean-Luc Nancy’s ground-breaking, *The Inoperative Community* [La Communauté désoeuvrée] in 1983, a number of influential thinkers—from Benedict Anderson (1983) to Giorgio Agamben (1990), Roberto Esposito (1998) to J. Hillis Miller (2014), among others—have contributed to disseminating the problematic of the “in-common” in the heterogeneous field of literary theory in general, and American studies in particular. And yet, despite the popular attention given to this concept, its genealogical foundations remain largely to be retraced. This paper offers a first step in this direction by unearthing the conceptual and affective influences central to Nancy’s account of “inoperative community.” In particular, it follows up on Nancy’s untimely claim that Georges Bataille “has gone furthest in the crucial experience in the modern destiny of community” from a mimetic, and thus double, perspective. On the one hand, I build on my diagnostic of Bataille’s account of “the laughter of community” (Lawtoo 2013) in order to show how the “inner experience” of mimetic communication opens up a relational conception of the subject which is shared (partagé) and paves the way for a political thought of community. On the other hand, I argue that Nancy’s account of the sharing of community, which involves both sharing and division (partage), cannot be dissociated from his communal intellectual experience with his philosophical alter ego: Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. Together, these two perspectives contribute to revisiting the foundations of the theory of community from the angle of a mimetic experience community—perhaps yet to come.

Bionote:

Nidesh Lawtoo is SNSF Visiting Scholar in The Humanities Center at Johns Hopkins University. He is the editor of *Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Contemporary Thought* and the author of *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (2016) as well as of *Conrad's Shadow: Catastrophe, Mimesis, Theory* (2016). He is currently working on a book project titled *Homo Mimeticus*.

Audrey Lötscher

University of Lausanne

Abstract:

National Identity, Communities and the US Politics of Environmental Unsustainability

Amidst growing international concerns regarding resources scarcity and climate change, ecological issues remain largely absent of the American political debate and agenda, and rather unsurprisingly, the US emerges as one of the least sustainable countries in terms of energy footprint and per-capita energy consumption. The refusal to address pressing environmental

issues, or indeed to even consider an issue, among other, the half a decade-long Californian drought, owes to an ideology of abundance that is almost consubstantial to national identity. Out of the necessity to maintain actual this narrative of an abundant land, for fear of rewriting the main national paradigms, arises a politics of environmental unsustainability precluding the development of self-imposed restrictions, limitations and other constraining measures necessary to ensure a sustainable course. This talk will explore the tensions between the dominant political discourses forming and informing the body politic, or the imagined community of a unified American land and people subscribing to the pregnant myth of the infinite abundance, and the heterogeneous communities that have emerged in the wake of the growing pauperization of the middle class, which are built around solidarity but also out of necessity, as illustrated by the community gardens in Detroit. In outlining the fault lines between dominant master-narratives feeding unsustainable environmental discourse and practices, and emerging alternative views and understandings of America and its various communities, we shall consider the following questions: how do these communities, if they perceive themselves as such, view themselves in respect to the dominant discourses of abundance and perpetual growth? How are they, in turn, portrayed in political discourses? Do members of these communities consider their situation a transient state before regaining access to economic growth, or is this type of social organization paving the way for a new understanding of the nation? By underlining the various levels on which communities evolve and come into conflict, I propose to reflect on the articulations but also the tensions at work between the imagined/imaginary community of “America” as constructed by elite political discourses and made of atomistic consumer-individuals, and new arenas of popular political power, or poleis organized around communities in the true sense of the term, namely entities owning something in common, such as a livelihood.

Bionote:

A graduate of the University of Lausanne, I have been pursuing a PhD in American Studies in this institution since February 2016. My areas of specialization are cultural studies, critical theory and discourse analysis. Owing to a diversified curriculum, I have developed an interdisciplinary profile and my interests lie at the crossroads of disciplines ranging from continental philosophy to political economy and sociocultural anthropology. My doctoral project interrogates the cultural causes of unsustainability in the US, and more specifically the relationship between dominant narratives underlying the national identity and the unsustainable environmental discourse and practices that have accompanied its economic and cultural development.

Abstract:

From Brook Farm to Burning Man: Alternative Communities in the United States

The question of community has been at the heart of how the United States defines itself from the very start, especially if we consider that the Puritans founded their original colonies as the first ‘alternative communities’ in the New World. Since then, America has continually reinvented itself through an ongoing series of experiments in how to live together as groups united less by ethnic or traditional ties and more by choice, affiliation, common purpose and political and/or religious values. What I propose to do in this talk is present a short history of alternative communities in the United States up to the present, examining in particular the principal kinds of impulses that have led people to decide to withdraw from the so-called ‘mainstream’ and establish an alternative society based on a desire to apply one’s values to a total way of life. One of the questions that is raised by the issue of alternative community is what exactly is a community, in both its practical and spiritual aspects. By practical, I refer to issues of definition – is, for example, the ephemeral city in the desert erected each year in Nevada, known as Burning Man, a community – as it claims? By spiritual I wish to evoke the deeper sociological issues raised by Emile Durkheim in the 1910s when he argued that human existence in groups is essentially and emotionally linked to the experience of religion, including the feeling of belonging to something larger than one’s self, the feelings of awe, love and deep attachment that are awakened by the divine as by one’s group, and the rhythm of life distributed between the mundane and the effervescent. In evoking this connection I intend to explore the question of whether alternative communities are always necessarily sites of alternative or heightened spiritual/religious awareness/practices. Finally, I am interested in how these issues of spiritual being in the world have been historically linked on the part of alternative communities to an interest in an ecological engagement and environmental being in the world.

Bionote:

Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet is Professor of American Literature and co-director of the New American Studies Master’s Specialization Program at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. She has published a monograph, *The Poetics and Politics of the American Gothic: Gender and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2010, Ashgate) and is completing a monograph on American war narrative. She has also edited or co-edited several volumes: *Writing American Women* (2008, Gunter Narr Verlag), *The Gothic in Contemporary Literature and Popular Culture* (2012, Routledge), *Emotion, Affect and Sentiment* (2014, Gunter Narr Verlag), *War Gothic* (2016, Routledge), and *Neoliberal Gothic: International Gothic in the Neoliberal Age* (2016, Manchester University Press). Her research and publication topics include melodrama, horror and military adventure, as well as race, gender, war and nationalism.

Abstract:

The One, The Many and The Few: Communal Democracy after Tocqueville

This paper outlines a conceptual history of the notion of *community* in Romanticism and in classical Tocquevillian democratic theory. I will draw special attention to the philosophical origins of the discourse of community in romantic hermeneutics: While German and American romantics emphasized the neoplatonic dialectic of the One and the Many, abolitionists around Frederick Douglass pointed out the strident political overtones of romantic knowledge practices and proposed a fully developed philosophical counter-position centered on the *community*, the *faction*, and the *Few*. In this respect, Douglass suggested a solution to the classic problem articulated by Tocqueville in Chapter XVIII of *Democracy in America*: How can a democratic society manage the claims of partial groups or factions if it conceives of itself as the mutual absorption of *individual* and *collective* claims, thus implying that these partial groups lack all democratic function and legitimacy (in Tocqueville's terms: "the intermediate space is empty")? In this presentation, I will present some of the crucial sources pertaining to the discursive shift set in motion by Frederick Douglass, notably his readings of the American Constitution. If Emerson maintained that the coming American poetics would convincingly stage the neoplatonic national motto (*e pluribus unum*), Douglass argued for a reading of the Constitution that would allow for popular coalitions of interests geared towards societal change. Ultimately, this paper argues for renewed understanding of the community as the crucial *legal* and *constitutional* category in American political theory between 1800 and 1865.

Bionote:

I received my Ph.D. in American Studies from Humboldt University of Berlin in 2014. I was a Visiting Scholar at Brown University in 2009, a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University in 2012-2013, and a Fulbright Scholar in 2014. I am currently an Assistant Professor of American Studies at Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. My dissertation, *Man as Method: General Hermeneutics and Partial Democracy*, will be published with Winter (Heidelberg) in June. I am currently working on a second book, titled *One Hundred Years of Tenderness*, which discusses the construction of "legitimate kindness" in authoritarian political theories of the 20th century.

Abstract:

“We’re Not Fighting for the People Anymore... We’re Just Fighting.” American Superhero Comics Between Criticisms of Community and Critical Communities

Discussing the significance of communities with regard to superhero comics opens up two levels of analysis. On the one hand, superhero comics have a large following; the fans form communities that engage in lively discussions on a great variety of topics, often occupying a meta-space between fandom and academic debate (Henry Jenkins dubbed such critics aca-fans). This metatextual form of community has been the topic of studies both in sociology and in cultural studies. On the other hand, ‘community’ is a much-debated concept within the superhero narratives themselves. From its very creation, the figure of the superhero seems to challenge the community’s bond with him or her. Superheroes, by sheer extraordinariness, are their readers’ opposite by definition; simultaneously embodying and transgressing the law, they clash with the official institutions of the USA while still representing truly ‘American’ values. Historically, this ambiguity has led to superheroes being used in a nationalistic context, even advocating American military mobilization (e.g. Superman and Captain America fighting Hitler and promoting the ‘American way of life’). At the same time, however, superhero comics were paradoxically accused of weakening the authority of the state and causing juvenile delinquency (Fredric Wertham’s 1954 *Seduction of the Innocent* is the best-known example of such critique that contributed to the establishment of the Comics Code Authority, a system of self-censorship within the comics industry). Such tensions have fueled stories within the medium itself that focus on the relationship between superheroes, the people, and the government. Some of the most acclaimed superhero comics feature a government’s attempt to limit the powers of the superheroes, forcing them to cooperate or to become outlaws, excluded from their communities. Essentially, these are stories about the conflict between control, registration, bureaucracy on the one hand, and freedom, abnormality, secrecy on the other, or, in other words, between the individual’s and the community’s interests. We propose to analyze this antagonism and its reception amongst fan communities in some of the most famous superhero comics. A masterpiece of publisher DC’s ‘dark and gritty’ era which rejuvenated the genre, *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller (1986) features an aged and disillusioned Batman, forced to fight a corrupt US president (easily identifiable as a caricature of Ronald Reagan) and a Superman degenerated into a government lackey. Equally influential, *Watchmen* by Alan Moore (1986/87) depicts a group of once-revered superheroes, disempowered by political pressure. One of them perfidiously attempts to prove their relevance by turning against his fellows and the community they swore to protect. Despite deconstructing the image of the shining superhero, both comics have been extremely popular with fans and were adapted into movies, increasing their impact on the genre and on popular culture in general. Decades later, Mark Millar’s Marvel comic *Civil War* (2006/2007) implicitly deals with the political situation in the US post 9/11 and specifically with the USA PATRIOT Act that aimed to remove legal impediments to

identifying potential acts of terrorism. In the story, Captain America – Marvel’s classic representation of US-America itself – goes against his own government (and his friend Iron Man) when a ‘superhero registration’ act is approved by congress. The comic not only reflects a heated debate about what it means to be American in its plot; the way it was received is an excellent example of fan communities participating in and thereby shaping a cultural and political discourse. Therefore, the two levels of analysis meet: the comic narrative presents a critique of community that was itself criticized by the fan communities. All these comics outline the end of superheroism in the face of uncooperative governments and decreasing support from the population. They debate the legitimacy of superheroic yet unregulated violence, law enforcement, and counterterrorism, thereby dealing with the genuinely political within a medium of popular culture.

Bionotes:

Thomas Nehrlich received his BA and MA in Comparative Literature from Freie Universität Berlin. Since 2011, he has been teaching in the German Department of the University of Bern. In 2015, he was a visiting lecturer at the California State University Long Beach. His PhD project focuses on literary rebels after 1945. He is also involved in the critical edition of Alexander von Humboldt’s complete essays. His publications include books and articles on E. A. Poe, Heinrich von Kleist, as well as the history and theory of superheroes.

Joanna Nowotny holds an M.A. in German Studies from the University of Bern and is currently a PhD student working on her thesis on *The German-Jewish reception of Sören Kierkegaard* at ETH Zürich (project funded by Swiss National Science Foundation, SNF). She studied German language and literature, art history and philosophy and worked in the art business during her studies. Her academic fields of interest include German-Jewish literature and culture, contemporary German literature, gender studies and comics studies.

Maria Verena Peters

University of Siegen

Abstract:

Constructions of Blackness and Whiteness at the Superbowl Halftime Show 2016: Black Music and the Modern Civil Rights Movement

The 50th Superbowl Halftime Show was supposed to be the climax of their career for the British band Coldplay, which had been booked as the main act. In the end, however, lead singer Chris Martin found himself sidelined by his two supporting acts, Beyoncé and Bruno Mars. What is more, his failed attempt to “fit in” with these two performers garnered him much ridicule on social media platforms (e.g., a meme captioned “When you’re trying to fit in”). The talk will shed light on the dynamics of exclusion/inclusion of these performances through a semiotic reading of the verbal, acoustic and visual markers which excessively marked Beyoncé’s and Mars’ performances as other from Coldplay’s presence. The analysis

will highlight the dense intertextual play in which the first two engaged on stage and elucidate how Coldplay failed to enter into a dialogue with this richly evocative text. The evocation of a history of black music through a re-imagining of icons such as Michael Jackson and James Brown, the references to the Civil Rights Movement both past and present and to black music's history as a medium to speak about experiences of disenfranchisement on the basis of race and gender discrimination, which can all be found in the performances at the Superbowl Halftime Show 2016, serve as proof that the generic label "black music", while it has been severely criticized, is a necessary evil to be able to talk about a particular musical field with regard to its political genesis and impact. Far from taking an essentialist approach to the term, the talk will highlight its ability to point to the historical contingency of musical styles and the latter's propensity to call up a community spirit by means of inclusion/exclusion.

Bionote:

Dr. des. Maria Verena Peters graduated from Ruhr-University Bochum with a master in Anglistik/Amerikanistik and Komparatistik. After teaching in Bochum and Göttingen, she is now working as a lecturer at the University of Siegen while also teaching in Dortmund. Her PhD-thesis is dedicated to the intersectionality of age and gender: At the example of Twilight and Harry Potter, she analyzes concepts of coming of age both in fantasy literature for children and in literary criticism that chastises unruly – that is, adult – readers of children's literature. She has published on various literary and cultural studies subjects such as religion, gender, bodies, and monsters and their representation in popular culture.

Jesse Ramírez

University of St. Gallen

Abstract:

#NotYourMule: The 2016 Oscars in Black, White, and Brown

The US left has often assumed that African and Latinx Americans naturally form a political community of resistance. Have not both groups been subject to the same sort of racialized oppression? Do they not share common experiences of political and economic marginalization? A recent conflict over the racial makeup of the Academy Awards (commonly referred to as the Oscars) suggests that interracial relations in the United States are not so simple. In the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement, the whiteness of the 2016 Oscars became a hot topic among black critics, although the selection of Chris Rock, a prominent African American comedian, as the ceremony's host seemed to provide some recompense. Rock's blistering critique of whiteness during the ceremony drew headlines, but so did the fury that erupted on Twitter when Jose Antonio Vargas, an undocumented Filipino American and journalist, asked Rock to mention the absence of other, nonblack people of color from the Oscars. The backlash against Vargas clustered around the hashtag #notyourmule, as many tweets by African Americans accused Vargas of demanding that black people "carry" other

people of color (especially Latinxs, as many took Vargas's last name to indicate this background). This talk investigates the major points of conflict in the #notyourmule debate, in particular the question of whether one racial minority has the ethical or political responsibility to speak for another. More broadly, the talk seeks to underscore the importance of interracial/interethnic studies in contemporary American studies, and to demonstrate that the black/white binary that many scholars use to examine racialization is inadequate to the study of a nation that is undergoing complex demographic and political change.

Bionote:

J. Jesse Ramirez is Assistant Professor of American Studies at the University of St Gallen. In addition to his research in interethnic studies, he is currently writing a book about apocalyptic science fiction. Jesse blogs at jjesseramirez.com.

A. Elisabeth Reichel and Philipp Schweighauser

University of Basel

Abstract:

Folk Communities in Translation: Edward Sapir's Renditions of French-Canadian Folk Songs in Poetry

Today, Edward Sapir (1884-1939) is best remembered for his contributions to Boasian cultural anthropology and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. What is less well-known is that he also wrote and published poetry, a passion that he shared with fellow students of Boas such as Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. His poetic output is distinguished, however, by experiments in a wide variety of forms: from sonnets to brief quasi-imagist vignettes, from children's poems to translations of folk songs. In this talk, we focus on four of his renditions of popular French-Canadian folk songs, which were published in the July 1920 issue of *Poetry*. After being awarded with an honorable mention from the magazine, he published three more folk songs in *Queen's Quarterly* (1922) and co-authored, with Marius Barbeau, the anthology *Folk Songs of French Canada* (Yale UP, 1925). Sapir's interest in the cultural practices of folk communities--practices that are also popular in a second sense of the term (produced by the people for the people)--links up with his studies of Native American languages, both of which are driven by a desire to preserve for posterity cultures perceived as giving way to the pressures of modernization, and a broader search for authenticity that energized the modernist movement and prompted *Poetry* magazine to devote its February 1917 issue to 'aboriginal poetry', that is, interpretations of Native American songs by Anglo-American writers. Sapir's "Note on French-Canadian Folk-songs" thus emphasizes that "[t]he great currents of modern civilization have, until recent days, left practically unaffected this colony of old France [Quebec], where the folk still observe customs, use implements, recite tales, and sing songs that take us right back to the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries." In Sapir's versatile hands, salvage anthropology and literary primitivism go hand in hand. This talk analyzes Sapir's versions of French-Canadian folk-songs from the transnational perspective

that has reshaped American Studies since the 1990s. In crossing linguistic, national, generic, and medial boundaries, these poems bring into contact a variety of communal sites and practices, including early modern European songs, the popular realm of twentieth-century French-Canadian folk culture, and the literary community of the editors, contributors, and readers of the little magazines where modernism happened. Our talk inquires into the epistemological and political ramifications of the various translations that take place as sounds are converted into texts and one language into another.

Bionotes:

Elisabeth Reichel is Ph.D. candidate in Anglophone literary and cultural studies at the University of Basel. Her thesis is entitled “Sonic and Visual Others in the Poetry of Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead.” She has published and presented on sound and soundscapes in the poetry of Edward Sapir, the politics of Mead’s poetic and anthropological writing, and the integrative function of music in contemporary literature and film.

Philipp Schweighauser is Associate Professor and Head of American and General Literatures at the University of Basel. He is the author of *The Noises of American Literature, 1890-1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics* (UP Florida, 2006) and *Beautiful Deceptions: European Aesthetics, the Early American Novel, and Illusionist Art* (U of Virginia P, forthcoming 2016). He is currently serving as the President of SANAS.

Philipp Reisner

Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf

Abstract:

Contemporary Anglo-American Drama of Exile

The dominance of the motif of exile as the human condition in contemporary Anglo-American literature takes on special significance in recent American plays. Many playwrights infuse their characters’ conversations with psychological depth that goes beyond the absurd, which showcases the characters’ failure to make themselves at home in their communities. The intensity of parallel conversations and the polyphony of voices in rapid exchanges underline the fact that the general condition of exile is an exile from language: after the theater of the absurd, contemporary playwrights return to deep psychology of language exchanges. They show characters who lose their home in language and their communities by a series of verbal misunderstandings and misconceptions. The rapidity of the everyday language employed in dialogue does not forego violent expressiveness. The characters’ desire for community and communion and their sense of being lost in the world become tangible as they interact on stage. This suggests that drama is not exempt from the trend towards sacralization in contemporary Anglo-American literature. Exile in drama refers to the first exile of humankind from the Garden of Eden. This occurs in the context of a turn towards Old Testament texts, with special emphasis on the Book of Genesis and the Book of Psalms. Unob-

trusive references in the plays link this renewed emphasis on Old Testament material to New Testament texts, especially the First Letter to the Corinthians. Investigating how a new sense of home emerges from these interactions can contribute to our understanding of contemporary redefinitions of community.

Bionote:

Philipp Reisner teaches as a lecturer at the American Studies Department of Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf. His approach to research is multidisciplinary. His dissertation on the theological role that the New English theologian Cotton Mather (1663–1728) played in the context of early modern society appeared in 2012. He is currently working on his post-doctoral project, which is a structural study of Genesis motifs in contemporary Anglo-American poetry.

Nicole Schneider (Author-Meets-Critics Panel)

Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt

Bionote:

Nicole Schneider is currently research assistant in the American Studies department at the Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. Her PhD-thesis with the working title “Visual Protest, Viral Images, and Virtual Participation: Protest Photography in Contemporary U.S. Media,” focuses on the interrelations and democratic-participatory dimensions of visual as well as virtual activism and press photography in the current Black Lives Matter movement. Before graduating with a Master of Arts degree in Literary, Cultural, and Media Studies from the University of Siegen in 2014, she has spent two semesters at the University of Tulsa, OK, researching on Native American Literature and Culture. Her master’s thesis “Visual Mediation of Indianness: Visuality as Empowerment and Remembrance in Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* (1984) and *The Round House* (2012)” analyzed concepts of Visual Culture and the use of images in relation to cultural representation in the Louise Erdrich’s fiction.

Hannah Schoch

University of Zurich

Abstract:

The Political is Private: Home, Community, and Democracy in Melville’s “I and My Chimney”

Some of the most interesting thought experiments and some of the most pertinent comments on the American democratic project and the American community can be found in the popular form of the novel and the short story. It is here where different political models can be played through in private, so to speak. Melville can be considered to be one of the central authors to use these popular forms to investigate implications of American commu-

nity and democracy. While these might seem more manifest in texts such as *Benito Cereno* or *Moby Dick*, for this paper, I will look at Melville's short story "I and My Chimney" as an example highlighting the ways in which the political can be considered private. At the center of Melville's text is an unnamed couple, which throughout negotiates its ways of 'being-together'. While marriage has traditionally been seen as a moment of eclipsing difference, this short story in contrast insists on a sober coupledness and, thereby, also on a sustaining of difference. The couple's negotiation over the space of their private home is infused with political and 'public' language. Melville's "I and My Chimney" can be read as a fairly hopeful evaluation of the private couple's negotiation of different political models and conveys a sense that dissensus can be both necessary and productive for an ongoing (private, communal, national) conversation in a Cavellian sense. In other words, it is difference that fuels language both in terms of the story as well as in terms of the aesthetic project of the text. As Jacques Rancière reminds us, it is dissensus, i.e. an interest in and a sustaining of difference, that binds together both politics and aesthetics, and, I would add, that also binds together both a private and a political community.

Bionote:

Hannah Schoch holds a BA in English Language and Literature, Film Studies, and Philosophy and an MA in English Literature and Gender Studies from the University of Zurich. She is currently working as an assistant at the English Seminar, UZH. Her PhD project is entitled "Intimate Politics: The Couple and the American Democratic Project".

Lilian Tabois

University of Applied Sciences in Leeuwarden

Abstract: Pioneering the Anglo-American Frontier: The Construction of an American National Identity in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Leatherstocking Tales*

The early nineteenth century in the United States is characterized by an emerging collective desire to create an American national identity. This desire was inspired by growing feelings of nationalism and a new historical consciousness that had been the result of political, economic and ideological change. The author James Fenimore Cooper felt that he could both reflect and construct an American identity through his writings. The result of Cooper's literary endeavor is a series of five historical novels collectively known as *The Leatherstocking Tales*. Today, Cooper's American myth of descent, which includes the classic images of the pioneers, the Wild West, and the frontier, have become ingrained in American popular culture. Moreover, they are commonly regarded as having played a vital role in shaping America's national identity. However, seen in a wider, transatlantic context, Cooper's myth of the New World is closely related to the Old World. For example, *The Leatherstocking Tales* were modeled on the European genre of the historical novel as developed by the Scottish author Walter Scott. In addition, the different motifs of Cooper's myth of descent - that of a common ancestry, the golden age, and the ancestral homeland - commonly attest the complex

ambiguity of Cooper's position. In the composition of each myth-motif, Cooper was simultaneously severing and underscoring America's ties with Europe's ancient history and common ancestry. Thus, James Fenimore Cooper's work represents a premier example of how literature could influence the formation of national identity in the early nineteenth century.

Bionote:

Lilian Tabois obtained both her B.A. and M.A. degrees in English Language and Culture at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. During her studies, she focused on early nineteenth-century and contemporary English and American literature. Her Master's thesis investigates the role of fiction, history and myth in the construction of national identity in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Leatherstocking Tales*. She is currently teaching English and Intercultural Skills at the NHL University of Applied Sciences in Leeuwarden, The Netherlands.

Jerry Varsava

University of Alberta

Abstract:

The Best Years of Our Lives? Generational Identity and the Quest for Community in Paul Auster's *Sunset Park*

Great economic paroxysms such as that suffered by the United States during the Great Recession (2007-2009) typically strain the bonds of community through a general precaritization that renders large fractions of society unable to help either themselves or others. Yet, paradoxically, economic crisis can also serve as a catalyst for new social formations and a strengthening of the sense of community when individuals come together to form collectivities during their time of mutual need. Something like this occurs in Paul Auster's novel, *Sunset Park* (2010). Set in 2008 and 2009, during the depths of the Great Recession, the novel depicts a group of four twenty-somethings who come together in Brooklyn, New York, to illegally occupy an abandoned house and to give shape to an embryonic micro-community operating off the grid and beyond the reach of those neoliberal forces that have occasioned the Great Recession. As the novel unfolds, an extended comparison is developed between these beleaguered members of Generation Y and a precursor generation, America's "Greatest Generation"—those who defeated totalitarianism in Europe and East Asia in World War Two. As captured in William Wyler's award-winning film, *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946)—and as discussed at length in the novel—members of the Greatest Generation confront uncertainties around interpersonal relationships and economic futures, against the backdrop of wartime trauma, but nonetheless persevere to integrate themselves within peacetime society. For their part, the *Sunset Park* Four struggle to find their way, ultimately questioning their future in an America where historical notions of national "progress" have been compromised. While Wyler's film compellingly demonstrates that problems can be over-

come through resolve and volition, Auster's novel suggests that not all generations are created equal.

Bionote:

Jerry Varsava is Professor of Comparative Literature and English at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. He has published widely on twentieth and twenty-first century fiction. His current major project examines representations of capital in contemporary global fiction.

Boris Vejdovsky

University of Lausanne

Abstract:

The Performance of American Culture:

Rhetoric and Symbolic Forms in American Western Movies

The Western has been often read as a quintessentially American form of popular art, a genre that has expressed over the decades the moods and anxieties of the nation. While many studies have shown that the Western metonymically expresses the social, political, racial and sexual tensions of the nation, relatively little attention has been paid to its forms. In other words, many critics have paid attention to *what* the Western says, but not so much to how it does it; while it is always dangerous to seek to oppose form and content, this essay does not focus on the semantics of the Western, but on its rhetoric and prosody. By referring to the vocabulary of Erwin Panofsky (*The Perspective as Symbolic Form*) proposes that the Western establishes symbolic forms that have had a performative effect in shaping American culture well beyond the circle of moviegoers. By further drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida (*Of Grammatology*), but also Judith Butler (*Bodies the Matter, Excitable Speech*), this paper proposes that the symbolic forms put in place by the Western not only operate performatively in American popular culture, but that they also participate in the way this culture has had a political impact on our contemporary world. The paper will show how, in the vocabulary of Roberto Esposito, these symbolic forms create a sense of community and of immunity for the nation and beyond. This essay also seeks to show that the genre is paradigmatic for popular American culture where the actual performance of the culture is not in what the culture says, its semantics, but in *what it does*, namely its rhetoric and its prosody. This point finally leads the essay to a reflection on the role of American studies and on their responsibility to focus on the prosodic and performative aspects of American culture.

Bionote:

Boris Vejdovsky, Ph.D., is Maître d'enseignement et de Recherche I at the University of Lausanne Switzerland and teaches American literature and American studies. His teaching and research focus on aesthetic, ethical, and political cultural formations in the U.S. and the American world. In his work he has been seeking to read the rhetorical constructions that have been shaping the U.S. public and private spheres and influencing the world beyond

domestic borders. He has worked on the metaphors of race, sex and gender, in particular, as well as on questions of masculinity and the definitions of U.S. space and territory.

His publications include articles on American authors such as Cotton Mather, Herman Melville, Wallace Stevens, Tony Kushner and Ernest Hemingway. He is the author of *Ideas of Order: Ethics and Topos in American Literature* (2009) and of *Ernest Hemingway, la vie, et ailleurs* (2011). The latter was published internationally and translated into five languages including British and American editions titled, *Hemingway: A Life in Pictures*. He is also the editor of several collections of essays and the General Editor of the series *Transatlantic Aesthetics and Culture* (Peter Lang). His current research project is titled "Framing the American West." It explores the aesthetic and political formation of the landscapes of the American West and their political significance.

James Whittle

University of Hull

Abstract:

Community Problems and Work Solutions in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul is Not a Smithy' and *The Pale King*

Various critics, such as A. O. Scott³, Marshall Boswell⁴ and Allard den Dulk,⁵ have stressed the social motivation in the work of David Foster Wallace. *Infinite Jest* has repeatedly been shown to explore the personal and political troubles affected by the passivity induced by the seductive and addictive pleasures of the modern world. This problem is given even more explicit treatment in *The Pale King*, an extensive exploration of the IRS and boredom.⁶ The text's engagement with political withdrawal, however, has not yet received full enough consideration. The proposed paper will address this shortcoming by reading Wallace's short story 'The Soul is Not a Smithy' alongside the unfinished novel.⁷ It will be highlighted, through Wallace's use of childhood imagery and narrative forms in 'The Soul' (wherein the unnamed narrator recalls being oblivious to being taken hostage by a Civics teacher), that he views disengagement from civic and political responsibility, as discussed in *The Pale King*, as both infantilizing and dangerous. Further, its intertextual relations with James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* will be shown to suggest that Wallace sees the solution not in the arts, or personal ventures, but instead, as demonstrated through *The Pale King*, in the world of work. Certain work, Wallace suggests, forms a community itself, one simultaneously de-

³ A.O. Scott, 'The Panic of Influence', *The New York Review of Books* (Online edition), February 10, 2000. Available online: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2000/02/10/the-panic-of-influence/>

⁴ M. Boswell, 'Trickle---Down Citizenship: Taxes and Civic Responsibility in *The Pale King*', in M. Boswell ed *David Foster Wallace and The Long Thing* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 209.

⁵ A.d.Durk, *Existentialist Engagement in Wallace, Eggers and Foer* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁶ D.F. Wallace, *The Pale King* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

⁷ D.F. Wallace, 'The Soul is Not a Smithy', *Oblivion* (London: Abacus, 2005), 67 – 114.

voted to the wider community of the nation.⁸ Thus, Wallace's indictment of modern American political community, his ideal of community, and an original reading of an understudied short story will all be presented.

Bionote:

James Whittle is a second year PhD student at the University of Hull in the United Kingdom. His thesis explores the representation of adulthood and ideas of sociological and political maturity in the contemporary American fiction of David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen and A.M. Homes. So far this year, he has spoken at the French Association for American Studies' graduate symposium, the University of Oxford's postgraduate conference 'Progress' and the 2016 'David Foster Wallace Conference' at the University of Illinois.

Martina Witt-Jauch

Trier University

Abstract:

Enemies of the Peasant Community in Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*

As Edward Said has claimed in his work *Culture and Imperialism*, all those writers belonging to what he terms the "poets of decolonization" struggle "to announce the contours of an imagined or ideal community, crystallized by its sense not only of itself but also of its enemy." In Carlos Bulosan's Filipino-American novel *America is in the Heart*, this enemy is malleable and refracted in the perspective of the characters, particularly the narrator's point of view. His position in his native land is slowly but surely deprived of its qualities regarding the financial situation and a feeling of home, until the family is eventually destroyed completely. Despite the occasional desire to set oneself apart from the tribal people from the mountains of Luzon, the danger to the narrator's family originates mostly in the anonymous, middle-class, and invisible landowners, who "humiliated (his father) to hire himself out to someone." Arguably, nature itself is not the benevolent caregiver either, but becomes involved in the cycle of pressure that leads to the peasant family's decline – literally another enemy to be confronted. This essay will shed light on the numerous ways in which Bulosan's novel constructs a community which is a trove of subversive contradictions and "a place where nativity (...) lapsed into meaninglessness", as Benedict Anderson elaborates. In an attempt to draw out the position of Filipino culture amid Asian American immigrant groups, it will debate the relationship between imagined fraternities, their socialist impetus, as well as patterns of victimization and trauma to assess the various meanings of community in the novel and, in consequence, to American culture as a whole.

⁸ J. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London, Penguin Classics, 2000).

Bionote:

Martina Witt-Jauch received her PhD in Comparative Literature from Purdue University (Indiana, USA) in 2010 for a study on “Gothic Villains and Criminal Detectives”. In addition to completing her Habilitation on the topic of trauma literature in the 19th and 20th century, she has been teaching Business English and English for Professional Purposes at both Trier University and Trier University of Applied Sciences for four years. She has published on Theodor Fontane’s gothic fiction, infanticide in 18th-century Germany, early 20th-century film, and on Heinrich Böll’s war novellas. In addition, she presented her research at numerous national and international conferences.

Eva-Sabine Zehelein

Goethe University Frankfurt

Abstract:**Community as Commodity: Gated Geritopias and Other Collective Attempts to Lead a Private Life**

“55+ communities” are not only real estate investments, but also fabricated communities built around a preconceived commodity package sold to the consumer: a rather homogeneous pre-selection of housing options, leisure and a set of emotions or visions: safety, security, harmony, communal belonging in a group of similarly minded and comparatively affluent. This example is perfect to ask questions about the state of the idea of “community.” If the Puritan concept of community was based on a religious congregation consisting of extended family structures, here Golden Agers chop off their roots and revoke the trans-generational contract. This contract is substituted by highly regulated life with common interest groups to celebrate the Golden Years individually. After all, singles younger than 55 are excluded from permanent residence and family members can only visit for a limited number of days per year! What does this collective attempt to lead a private life imply? What does it mean for a society if ever more special interest groups retreat from the American social contract to follow their individualistic lifestyle choices in a privately owned and company-run “experiment in communal living”?

Bionote:

Eva-Sabine Zehelein is currently Adjunct Professor at Goethe University Frankfurt. She has also taught at the College of New Jersey and the Universities of Jena, Bonn, Essen, Erfurt, Tübingen and Regensburg. She has published broadly in the field of North American Studies with an edited volume on Alice Munro as well as contributions on e.g. the Starbucks brand, 55+ communities, neo-slave narratives, Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoirs and the state of the American family. Her dissertation (“Space as Symbol”: John Updike’s “Country of Ideas” in den “Rabbit Romanen”) was completed and published in 2003 (Essen: Die Blaue Eule). Her post-doc study *Science: Dramatic, Science Play in America and Great Britain, 1990-2007* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2009) has been widely reviewed as only the second monograph in its

field. She has given invited talks on that topic among others at CUNY, Stanford U, and the Austrian Academy of Sciences. She has been a visiting researcher at Emory U (2015) and the U of Calgary (2013) as well as a visiting professor at the U of Alberta (2013). Time permitting, she plays the sax.