

Editorial

**Laura Oehme, Judith Rauscher,
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The Postgraduate Forum (PGF) and its annual conference offer young scholars of the German Association for American Studies (GAAS) opportunities to share, discuss, and publish their own research. Since its beginnings in 1989 the PGF has continuously grown in size. Over the years it has not only evolved into a forum that enables young Americanists to present and exchange their ideas, it has also allowed them to participate in debates concerning academic politics and practices in general and within the GAAS in particular. In 2015, the annual conference of the Postgraduate Forum took place at the University of Bamberg from November 6-8. It was the first PGF conference to be jointly organized by a team of doctoral students from two different universities, the University of Bamberg and the University of Bayreuth.

The articles in this issue of *Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies (COPAS)* are extended versions of papers delivered at the 2015 PGF conference in Bamberg. They represent a selection of the twenty-eight contributions to the conference, which were organized in seven panels and covered a range of different topics: (1) Challenging Heteronormativity; (2) Social Change and the Media Through the Ages; (3) Political Discourse and American Culture; (4) Rethinking Race and Ethnicity in North America; (5) American Literature in Global Contexts; (6) Trauma and the Body in American Literature; and (7) Illness and Gender in American Culture.

Apart from the topical panels, the PGF team Bamberg/Bayreuth organized an author reading and a roundtable discussion, which were open to the public, just like the rest of the conference. During the author reading, emerging poet, literary critic, and pop culture blogger Laura Passin presented a selection of her poetry, scholarly work, and essayistic writing to shed light on the limits and potential of these genres and their respective cultural frames from the perspective of an outspoken, young, female, queer, and feminist writer. The roundtable discussion focused on career opportunities outside of academia and was organized in response to a growing demand among members of the PGF to make alternative career paths for graduates of American Studies a more prominent part of the professional

conversation in the field. Three panelists with PhDs in American Studies – Dr. Annette Bickmeyer, Dr. Fatim Boutros and Dr. Silke Schmidt – came to Bamberg to answer questions by the conference participants and to share their experiences of building a career and working in the private sector. Individual advisory sessions offered by Dr. Marion Hacke of the Bamberg Scientific Career Service (SCS) supplemented the roundtable discussion.

Whether during the panel discussions, the extra events, or the social activities accompanying the conference, the annual PGF meeting once again proved to be a productive space for the exchange of scholarly ideas. As guest editors of the issue 17.1 of *COPAS*, we are proud to be able to make some of the research presented and discussed in Bamberg available to a larger audience with the following ten contributions by postgraduate scholars of the GAAS:

In her article “Constructing ‘Arab Terrorism’—The Slow Emergence of Terrorism Discourse in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s,” **Annika Brunck** traces the beginnings of the discourse on ‘Arab terrorism’ in the U.S. after World War II. She argues that the discourse emerged during the early 1970s out of political concerns in the aftermath of the 1972 “Munich Massacre” and analyzes novels by Leon Uris and Thomas Harris as prominent cultural products that contributed to the vilification of Arab populations in the Middle East.

Alexandra Hartmann introduces the concept of black humanism in her article “‘I Believe in Nothing If Not in Action’: African American Humanism and (Embodied) Agency.” She contrasts black humanism with Enlightenment humanism, anti-, and post-humanism and argues that black humanism facilitates the representation of moments of freedom and agency in African American literature. Consequently, her analysis of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1995) focuses on how such moments of agency are conceptualized in the novel.

Veronika Hofstätter’s article “‘But cutting off the Scalps of the Ten Wretches’: Reading Hannah Dustan’s Captivity Narrative through the Body” traces and analyzes constructions of the body in Cotton Mather’s narrative of Hannah Dunstan’s captivity. Her analysis compares the depiction of white and Native American bodies within the text and argues that the construction and presentation of different bodies within this narrative deviates from conventions that dominate the genre of captivity narratives.

In her article “The Heroine and the Meme: Participating in Feminist Discourses Online,” **Svenja Hohenstein** examines the relationship between feminist participatory culture and online activism, arguing that memes involving popular fictional female heroes constitute an

effective means to celebrate female empowerment, agency, and equality, and thus contribute in significant ways to contemporary digital feminist culture and discourse.

In her contribution “Bargaining for Prestige: The Ambiguous Relationship between Economic and Non-Economic Capital in the *Hide/Seek* Exhibition,” **Wiebke Kartheus** uses the example of the first major museum exhibition on LGBT art in the US to discuss the transactions that illustrate the tenuous relationship between economic and non-economic capital within the art world. Based on an unwavering belief in the validity and legitimacy of its own practices, she suggests, the artistic field tirelessly reproduces its own value, a process in which anxiety becomes an influential structuring impetus.

The article “Hawthorne and Antebellum Theories on Hereditary Insanity” by **Maria Kaspirek** argues that antebellum medical and social thought prefigured twentieth-century concepts of hereditary insanity and social Darwinism. To further explore these nineteenth-century theories and the way in which they shaped the literature of their time, she analyzes Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) with a special focus on domesticity and its relationship to theories about insanity and acquired character.

Maartje Koschorreck, in her article “Analyzing the Network of Traumas in Colum McCann’s *Let the Great World Spin*,” examines Colum McCann’s novel *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) through the analytical prism of network theory. She argues for network theory as a new approach to trauma narratives, presenting a reading that moves away from traditional Caruthian theories and explores how a network of traumas and its effects are presented throughout McCann’s novel.

Claudia Trotzke, in her contribution “‘Modern Medicine Had to Start Somewhere’: Performing Health and White Privilege in *The Knick*,” analyzes the U.S. American medical drama *The Knick* (2014) with regard to the interrelated constructions of health and white privilege. The article argues that the television series makes white privilege visible by contrasting the deeply racist society in early twentieth-century New York with the television series’ rhetoric of modernity and that the performative dimensions of the series and everyday life as presented in it actively define health and its surrounding discourses.

Gesine Wegner focuses on the representation of trauma and disability in graphic novels in her article “Making the Unspeakable Seen? Trauma and Disability in David Small’s *Stitches*.”

She challenges claims that multimodal trauma narratives can make the unspeakable seen and audible with an analysis of David Small's *Stitches* (2009). Wegner integrates the work of disability studies into her reading of graphic trauma narratives and points to the ambivalent and critical work performed through the visualization of disability and trauma in graphic narratives.

In his article "Making a *Fun* Home: The Performance of Queer Families in Contemporary Musical Theater" **Florian Weinzierl** examines representations of the queer family in the Broadway musicals *Falsettos* (1992) by William Finn and James Lapine and *Fun Home* (2015) by Jeanine Tesori and Lisa Kron. In doing so, he traces figurations of idealized non-traditional family formations in queer thinking from the 1980s to the present moment, arguing that they go back and forth between optimism and pessimism as well as between relational and non-relational understandings of sexual identities.

The PGF conference and this issue of *COPAS* would not have been possible without the help of a number of people and institutions. We would therefore like to conclude this editorial with a few heartfelt words of gratitude to the following individuals and organizations: We thank the American Studies departments of the University of Bamberg and the University of Bayreuth for their support. We are indebted to Prof. Dr. Christine Gerhardt (Bamberg) and Prof. Dr. Jeanne Cortiel (Bayreuth), who supported our work as the 2015 PGF team from the beginning, helped us with crucial advice, and provided the departmental resources that allowed us to host the conference. Special thanks go to Jeanne Cortiel for her opening address and to Prof. Dr. Carmen Birkle (Marburg), the acting president of the GAAS, for welcoming the participants of the PGF conference with a video message.

Furthermore, we would like to thank the German Association for American Studies and the individual members of the board for the continued support of the PGF and their help with this year's PGF activities; the Embassy of the United States and the University of Bamberg for their generous financial support of the speakers and the conference as a whole; the University of Bayreuth Graduate School for providing the means necessary to organize the roundtable discussion on career options outside academia; Annette Bickmeyer, Fatim Boutros, and Silke Schmidt for participating in the panel discussion; the Women's Office of the University of Bamberg and the Women's Representatives of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Bamberg for supporting the poetry reading; Laura Passin, for sharing both her poetic and her critical work with us; the Winter Publishing House for their donation of

books on current topics of American studies; our colleagues and student helpers for their support and the great work before, during, and after the conference; Marion Hacke from the Bamberg Scientific Career Service for sacrificing her weekend to offer individual career advice sessions for participants of the conference; the previous PGF team from Mainz for their support and invaluable advice; all participants, speakers, and panel chairs at the PGF in Bamberg for their good spirit, collegiality and great work.

Finally, we would like to thank the current *COPAS* editorial team, Nathalie Aghoro, Katharina Fackler, Johanna Heil, Stephen Koetzing, and Klara Stephanie Szlezák for their expertise and for giving us the opportunity to work with them in putting this issue together; and last but not least, all contributors to this *COPAS* issue for their interesting and insightful articles.

Organizing the 2015 PGF conference and planning the PGF events at the annual meeting of the GAAS in Osnabrück has been an unforgettable and rewarding experience for us. We are glad to have had the opportunity to act as this year's PGF organizing team and to join the departments of American Studies in Bayreuth and Bamberg for this adventure. It is thus not only with immense gratitude but also with a touch of regret that we hand over to the next organizing team. The 2016 PGF conference will take place in Hamburg, again as a cooperative effort between doctoral students of two universities, the University of Hamburg and the University of Bremen. We are very much looking forward to this year's conference and wish the new team the greatest possible success with this great event for young scholars of American Studies in Germany and beyond.

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Bamberg/Bayreuth, May 2016