

Editorial

The annual conference of the Postgraduate Forum (PGF) of the German Association for American Studies (DGfA/GAAS) is always a highlight for junior American Studies scholars in Germany. It offers the time and space to meet fellow Ph.D. students and post-docs as well as the opportunity to present work in progress and discuss issues pertaining to American Studies (in Germany) in general and individual research in particular. In an encouraging atmosphere, participants can present their work to a sympathetic and interested peer audience. After the PGF, they return home with a pocket full of new questions and inspiration, useful suggestions, and good advice for the progress of their projects.

The PGF 2012 took place from November 02-04 on the premises of the Department of English and American Studies of the Philipps-University Marburg. Our warmest thanks goes to Prof. Carmen Birkle, chair of North American Studies in Marburg and vice-president of the GAAS. She always supported our organizational activities and offered advice whenever necessary. Of course, the PGF conference would not have been possible without the generous support of the GAAS and the U.S. Embassy. Our gratitude extends far beyond financial considerations. Over the years, the PGF has become a stable division within the GAAS, not least because of the structural and conceptual support that the Association has been offering. Prof. Udo Hebel, president of the GAAS, also underlined these efforts in his welcome address and encouraged us young scholars in our endeavors. On the part of the Association, Prof. Miriam Strube, board member of the GAAS, thankfully attended the conference in Marburg to introduce the organization, work, and politics of the GAAS to the attentive group of postgraduates and to discuss the future of the PGF with us. Her input prepared the ground for a most fruitful discussion of doctoral and post-doctoral research and Germany's research landscape. Both the thematic contributions of the participants as well as the structural and organizational concerns and visions behind them form an integral part of the PGF experience. These impulses create the very mind-set of *COPAS* as a unique publication platform seeking to promote doctoral and post-doctoral research.

Almost needless to mention is the fact that without its active participants, the PGF could neither exist nor continue its work. Because of its loose structure and ever-changing personnel, we should never take the PGF for granted; it only works because young scholars

dedicate their time and commitment to it. This is why we want to thank the many hands and minds that have contributed to the PGF's success, from the group that initiated the Forum to previous organizing teams and presenters to its many participants. Last but not least, we especially thank Ingrid Gessner, Susanne Leikam, Sascha Pöhlmann, Klara Stephanie Szlezák, and Juliane Schwarz-Bierschenk, the general editors of *COPAS*, for sharing their expertise and experience in matters of the PGF and of *COPAS*. They form a continuing net of support for the organizing teams as well as for the contributors of *COPAS*.

The goal of the PGF conference is to give young scholars the opportunity to present their work in progress, which is why the organizers have always refrained from assigning a theme to the annual meeting. As a result, the conference program is quite diverse and mirrors the vast field of American Studies in Germany on the level of doctoral and post-doc research. The 2012 meeting was structured into eight panels representing the focal points of the presenters' current research: "Marginalized Bodies," "Gender & Masculinity Studies," "The Construction of History & Memory," "Experimental Forms," "Race and Hyphenated Identities," "Structures of Power," and "The Double and the Uncanny." Of the 23 papers, six participants decided to contribute to this issue. We, as the organizing team and guest editors of the current *COPAS* issue, are more than happy to present this selection of articles based on the 2012 conference. While the six articles share an interest in works of fiction, the approaches used and media scrutinized demonstrate the large variety of American Studies. The most striking link between the articles in this issue is their focus on contemporary productions of American culture, be it novels, fanfiction, TV series, or movies. The themes discussed areas diverse and prominent as American culture itself; among them are race, class, gender, marginalized social groups, power structures, and identity crises.

In her article "Present Women/Absent Men in Siri Hustvedt's *The Summer without Men* (2011)," Britta Bein analyzes the connection of illness and fiction writing and its implications for the gender identity of the female first-person narrator who claims authorship of the novel. Dealing with an entirely different kind of authorship, Alexandra Herzog in her article "The Power of *AH*, *E/B*, *Very OOC*: Agency in Fanfiction Jargon" discusses the community-building functions of 'fanspeak,' an including as well as excluding kind of fiction writing produced by fans using a specific jargon. The topic of exclusion and marginalization is also investigated by Claudia Müller, who in "The Welfare Mother and the Fat Poor: Stereotypical

Image and the Success Narrative in Sapphire's *Push*" shows how the novel employs and simultaneously challenges the form of the success narrative in the telling of a story of the fat and poor in their doubly marginalized position in society. While Stefanie Mueller also deals with economic aspects in fiction, her article "Corporate Power and the Public Good in Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*" argues for the importance of the family and patrimony for a functioning civil sphere. Turning away from the novel, Stefan Schubert is interested in the narrative characteristics of recent American film, which he discusses in "'Lose Yourself': Narrative Instability and Unstable Identities in *Black Swan*" by demonstrating the work's narrative instability as a new form of expressing (post-)postmodern cultural instability. Eleonora Ravizza also focuses on filmic data, yet within the realm of television, providing in "'We don't want life to look difficult, do we?': Representations of the Fifties and Self-Reflexive Nostalgia in *Mad Men*" an analysis of how the image-focused advertising in the series is complicated by the nostalgia and conservatism of the 1950s.

The present issue shows that the research of young American Studies scholars in Germany continues in the tradition of the academic field of American Studies but also adds new forms and media to the corpus of texts. Because of this range of topics, we do not intend to find one central or recurrent theme in the following contributions. Instead, we hope that you will enjoy the results of our three-day conference and join one of the PGF meetings in the future. We look forward to continuing the lively academic exchange among Germany's young American Studies researchers in such an open and stimulating way as started by previous PGF organizers.

Britta Bein, Johanna Heil, Janina Rojek, and Silke Schmidt

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