

Editorial

**Corina Wieser-Cox, Whit Frazier Peterson, Juliann Knaus, Florian Wagner,
Gulsin Ciftci, Fenja Heisig**

The 33rd annual Postgraduate Forum (PGF) conference titled, “Spaces of Affect in the Americas,” was hosted and organized by Stefan Dierkes, Katerina Steffan, and Lujain Youssef at Leibniz University Hannover and took place from November 9-11, 2023. The conference consisted of five panels and eighteen paper presentations from emerging scholars within American Studies. The presentations demonstrated a variety of topics: the first panel, “Centering Marginalized Voices in Affect Studies” focused on emotion, memory, Afrofuturism, and Indigenous queer subjectivities within literature. On day two of the conference, Anne Potjans from Humboldt University Berlin held the keynote address titled “The Sound of Anger: Black Feminist Frequencies.” In her talk, Potjans examined and discussed “Black anger as an important affective element of historical consciousness, shaped by the convergence of gendered and rationalized structures of oppression in which Black women’s emotional lives and responses are misrecognized and distorted” (105). During an excursion to the *Kestner Gesellschaft*, participants of the conference were able to attend exhibits such as Rebecca Ackroyd’s *Period Drama, A World of Dew, And in Every Drop of Dew, a World of Struggle* and Samson Young’s *Situated Listening*. The second panel of the conference focused on “Embodied Affects,” with presentations ranging from an analysis of women’s hysteria depicted in literature to abortion narratives within evangelical Christian literature. Day three consisted of the last three panels: 1) “Exploring the Emotional Landscape,” 2) “Crossing Boundaries of Space, Body, and Genre,” and 3) “Queering Affect: Exploring Emotional Landscapes in Queer Studies” which rounded off the conference and covered “a wide range of topics that clustered around the inclusion of marginalized voices as well as the notions of embodied affects, emotional landscapes, and affective boundaries” (111). Overall, the presentations of the PGF conference in Hannover led to enlightening and academically invigorating discussions concerning affect within American Studies. The articles in this issue of *COPAS* are all extended and revised contributions that were developed from the conference papers of four speakers of last year’s PGF conference and they thus reflect a broad range of topics and provide a glimpse into current research by emerging scholars from various fields of American Studies.

COPAS 25.1 at a Glance

In his article entitled, “Affective Boundaries: Death, Mediation, and Virtual Space in Ben Lerner’s *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011),” **Wesley Moore** uses Ben Lerner’s novel in order to question the presence—or perhaps, the absence—of affect in art, literature, digital encounters, and first-hand traumatic experiences. As Moore argues, the incredibly

multifaceted protagonist of the novel, Adam, thrives off inauthentic experiences, as he fabricates aspects of his life, which he steals from other's experiences of death and loss, using those affectual experiences to create a seemingly authentic self, which is in fact not authentic at all. Adam is someone whose virtual and material encounters with death obscure aspects of so-called authentic experiences, as he is relatively unfazed by both his digital interactions with viewing videos of death and war and his encounter with death in-person, as he experiences first-hand the Madrid bombings at Atocha Station in 2004. Due to the portrayal of Adam, who is critical of affect and the eliciting of authentic emotions, Moore suggests that it not through the surface-leveled content of art and literature more generally, but rather through the structure of the text itself, its metareferential nature, and its mediated content—aka the form of the novel—that we as readers are made aware of the complex presence of affect in the novel.

Maria Menzel's article "Animacy, Agency, and Animatedness: The Human-Animal Transformation in *Sorry to Bother You*" analyzes Boots Riley's dark science fiction comedy *Sorry to Bother You* (2018) through the lens of Sianne Ngai's racialized affect of animatedness. In the late-capitalist dystopian world of *Sorry to Bother You*, the young black telemarketer Cassius Green uncovers a corporate conspiracy where workers are transformed into grotesque human-horse hybrids called Equisapiens to make them stronger, more obedient, and ultimately more profitable. Menzel argues that in the film, workers' subjectivities are constituted by their labor and rendered plastic through different formal techniques (e.g., through the use of ventriloquization, claymation, and animatronics). Looking at the racialized dimension of animatedness, Menzel draws connections between this visual plasticization, the transformation into human-horse hybrids, and the dehumanization and exploitation of Black people, drawing parallels to chattel slavery and racial capitalism. However, Menzel argues that it is ultimately the shared animatedness of human and human-horse hybrids that allows them to form a successful resistance and revolt against their exploitation in the film's final scenes.

In his article titled "Deviant and Ashamed: Queer Indigenous Subject Formation in the Age of Grindr" **Can Aydin** explores the intricacies of Indigenous queer shame. By analyzing shame, but specifically 'queer shame' in Billy Ray-Belcourt's (Driftpile Cree First Nations) essay "Loneliness in the Age of Grindr" Aydin examines how Indigenous queer subject formation is influenced by shame within the context of settler-colonialism. In his article, Aydin has four major points of analysis: first he looks at how 'gay pride' is the antithesis to queer shame and then follows that with an examination of how the term 'deviancy' is used by queer subjects in an act of self-determination and opposition to hegemonic discourses regarding queerness and queer sexualities. Third, Aydin looks at how settler-colonialism informs the creation of settler sexualities within Canada, and uses this to analyze the performed sex roles and hierarchies between the Indigenous queer narrative subject and his white, settler hookup. Aydin ends his analysis with a look at the interactions between the queer Indigenous subject and (settler) Canadian public health personnel. He argues that Canadian public health institutes act as an "ideological state apparatus" in Louis Althusser's terms, which continues to oppress

Indigenous sexualities and gender practices. Thus, according to Aydin, “shame functions in [Belcourt’s] essay as an affect of self-making and complicating the self-positioning in Canadian society” [add page number].

Laura Handl reads Michelle Bowdler’s *Is Rape a Crime* (2020) as a case study for the “memoir manifesto,” which she sees as a subgenre of the manifesto, a genre that she argues is having something of a renaissance in American letters. Handl sees a wealth of potential for affect theory in the manifesto genre, and Bowdler’s text gives her an opportunity to explore this genre and its affective possibilities in depth. In order to do this Handl uses Linda Åhäll’s feminist theory, which argues that feminist thought is always political and always affective, in combination with Judith Roof’s investigations into the potential the manifesto memoir has for illuminating queer narratives by alerting the reader affectively to various self-reflective “nodal points” that cause an “affective dissonance” in the reading experience. Thus, Handl is expanding on the idea of the feminist slogan that the personal is political and combining these ideas in her analysis of Bowdler’s manifesto memoir, which she argues has an affective shift midway through that allows for her to experience catharsis through the writing of the book – a cathartic experience that the reader is able to share in as well. It is through this means of bearing witness that an affective relationship is established in the memoir manifesto between the reader and the “manifestor.”

Works Cited

Fischer, Holly, Simge Irmak Çinar, and Ioana-Marina Pantelici. “Conference Report: 2023 PGF Conference ‘Spaces and Affect in the Americas.’” *InProgress: A Graduate Journal of North American Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2024, pp. 103-111.