

## **Workshop 13: American Studies as Engaged Scholarship: Doing Public Humanities from the Local to the Transnational**

Regina Schober (Mannheim), Alexander Starre (FU Berlin)

Sustained engagement with the wider public has been a long-stated goal of the modern university. Most institutions in American higher education actively foster community outreach, encouraging both students and faculty to become involved in local schools, cultural societies, arts initiatives, and other community organizations. Recent years have seen the swift ascendance of new humanities-related approaches to this interface between scholarship and the public also in Europe. Often crucially inspired by the work of American Studies scholars and activists and closely tied to innovative trends in research communication developed in the Digital Humanities, these approaches seek to challenge traditional, hierarchical relationships so as to spark dialogic partnerships and collaborative knowledge creation. In their report on the increased relevance of what is now labeled the “Public Humanities,” Ellison and Eatman (2008) define this new ideal of publicly engaged scholarship as “scholarly or creative activity integral to a faculty member’s academic area” that encompasses “different forms of making knowledge ‘about, for, and with’ diverse publics and communities.” In an effort to initiate transatlantic conversations on the epistemic potentials and the strategic values of Public Humanities work in transnational American Studies, we invite presentations on exemplary practices and/or theoretical approaches to ‘knowledge production’ and ‘the public.’ Questions debated will include the following:

- Who is the ‘public’ in the Public Humanities and in how far do theories of the public sphere influence the design of Public Humanities projects?
- Which underlying cultural assumptions and political claims are attached to the call for public engagement? Do the Public Humanities challenge or reproduce the elitist cultural authority that the humanities have traditionally fostered?
- How do the Public Humanities prompt us to remodel our research infrastructure, adapt to new media usage, and modify reward systems within the university?
- What can the transnational perspective of European Americanists contribute to the Public Humanities? How do institutional (public vs. private higher education) and funding-related (NEH, ERC, DFG, etc.) differences affect modes of public engagement?

### Confirmed Speakers

- Antje Kley (Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg): “The Public Humanities and Literary Knowledge”
- Susan Smulyan (Director, John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities, Brown University): “What Can Public Art Teach the Public Humanities?”

Abstracts of 300 words and a short CV (listing relevant theoretical and/or practical work in relation to the Public Humanities) should be sent to

Alexander Starre (alexander.starre@fu-berlin.de) and

Regina Schober (rschober@mail.uni-mannheim.de)

by January 10, 2018.