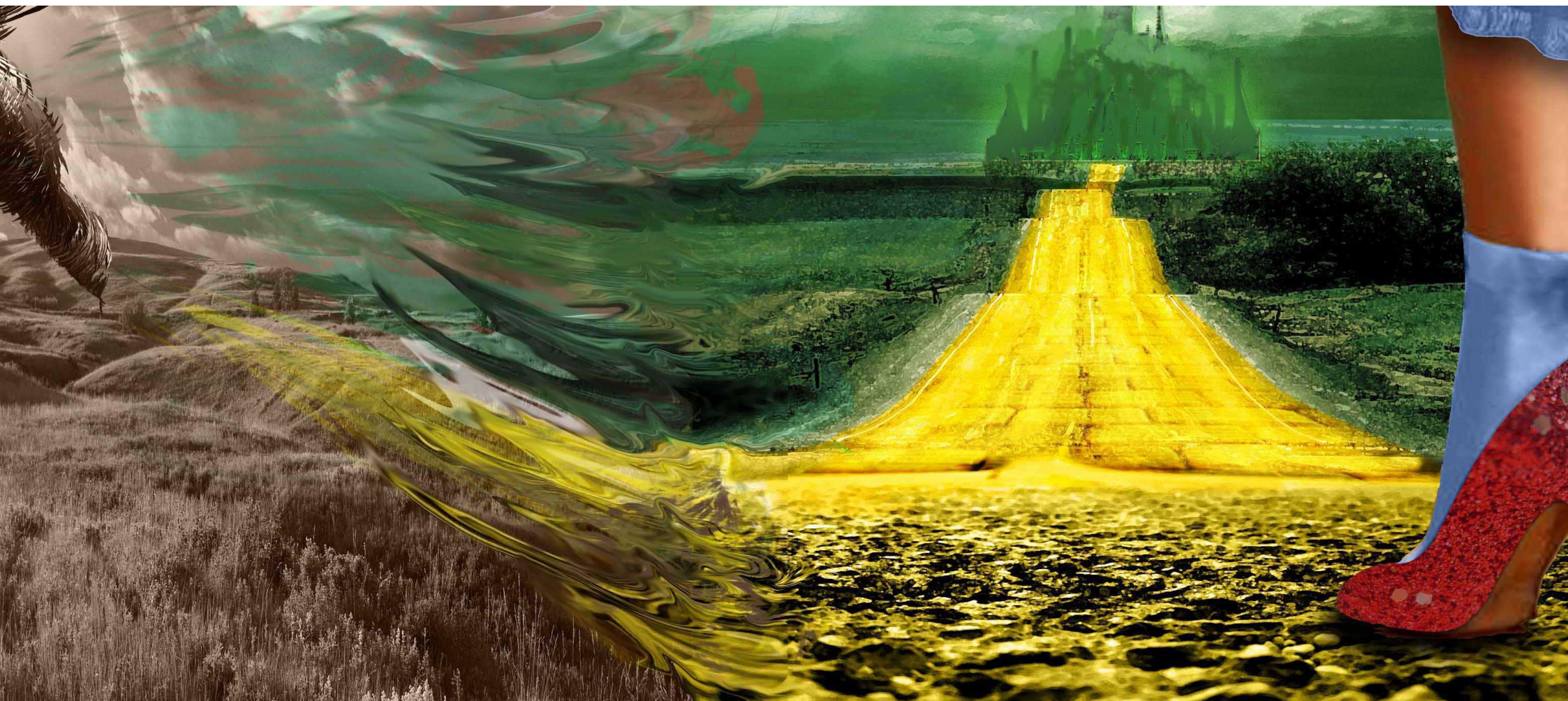


## FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD?

Challenging Approaches to Progress in North America





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## Welcome Address: 2018 Organizing Committee

“Progress” can be identified as an underlying concern for most branches of North American Studies; yet it continues to be a term whose meaning is frequently taken for granted, despite divergent understandings across disciplines and schools of thought. It is typically associated with notions of “improvement” – whether of specific societal structures or one’s overall quality of life. However, even such a basic framing opens the concept up to several questions: Whose life improves? Does one life’s improvement require another’s deterioration? Who decides what constitutes an improvement? Is improvement always measurable? Is it an inevitability or an ideological construct? What are the factors that condition improvement? How exactly does improvement come to pass?

Progress has been variously envisioned as a relentless march forward, a spiral-shaped dialectic, a neoliberal myth, etc. Which of these narratives appeals the most to which academic discipline, and why? As the charming protagonist and her friends in arguably *the* quintessential American fairy tale learn, following a clear-cut, yellow-bricked guideline towards ultimate improvement – the prospective fulfillment of one’s heart’s desire, be it more courage, more brains, more heart, or simply a way home – may yield results that look rather different than anticipated. *The Wonderful Wizard of*

Oz and its 1939 cinematic adaptation have not only been read as a satirical allegory for sociopolitical transformations throughout the late 19th-century United States (famously by historian Henry Littlefield, 1964); the tale also suggests that progress tends to be less straightforward than it appears, and that it can signify strikingly different things for different people.

Given the fundamentally interdisciplinary composition of the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, the goal of this 11th Annual Graduate Conference is to foster a better understanding of what exactly different disciplines mean when they address questions of progress in North America. How do economists work with concepts of progress as opposed to cultural critics, for instance? How do disparate approaches to this issue challenge, or perhaps even enhance each other?

To that end, we have clustered our speakers around five central aspects of North American life that are often viewed either as drivers or beneficiaries of progress. Our first panel examines the role of US institutions in the implementation of “progressive” policies. Our second panel focuses on transformative developments in the realm of sexuality, both in fiction and the medical sphere. This will culminate in Prof. Jack Halberstam’s keynote address “Trans\*: Histories, Bodies and the Unbuilding of Worlds”. The third panel critically evaluates various techniques and technologies that intend to facilitate everyday life. The fourth panel, prefigured by Prof. Jason Scott Smith’s keynote talk on the perils of postwar economic optimism, interrogates socioeconomic schemes on the macro-level, as well as their ties to (or breaks with) political progressivism. Our final panel centers on the prospects of selfhood, raising questions of international solidarity, emancipation, and the nature of the human. The conference will close with keynote speaker Prof. John Collins’s appraisal of progress in the context of US drug policies. We are

hoping for productive discussions that provide insights into how scholars from potentially unfamiliar disciplines grapple with the nature of progress in North America. Instead of railing against irreconcilable differences in our contrasting approaches, we may uncover some fertile common ground for future interdisciplinary work.



## Keynote Speakers

### **Jack Halberstam**

Professor of English and Comparative  
Literature at Columbia University

*Trans\*: Histories, Bodies and the Unbuilding of Worlds*

June 7, Thursday, 5:00 - 6:30 pm



### **Jason Scott Smith**

Professor of History at the University of New  
Mexico



*American Capitalism and Postwar Development: The Perils of Economic Optimism in the Long Twentieth Century*

June 8, Friday, 11:00 - 12:30 pm



**John Collins**

Executive Director of the  
International Drug Policy Unit at the London School of Economics

*Progress in U.S. Drug policy? Cycles in Government Drug Policy Intervention*

June 8, Friday, 5:00 - 6:30 pm



## **WORKSHOP I**

### **We the People? Revisiting the Politics of Change**

*Sally Chengji Xing*

#### **Madman and Sage: A New Evaluation of the Unfinished American Revolution through the Paradox of the “Two Toms”, Paine and Jefferson**

For those who delve into the history of the Early Republic, few would fail to notice that the “Two Toms” of the revolutionary era, Thomas Jefferson and “Mr. Common Sense” Thomas Paine, remained strikingly similar to each other, in terms of their common grounds on liberty and equality, castigation against the hereditary system, and a shared defense of the ordinary man’s rights. On the other hand, after the American Revolution, the image of Paine gradually turned into that of a lunatic vagabond, an insane hermetic madman, an alcoholic aesthetic, pest of society and ruffian of ingratitude, a fool, a lunatic, even a man of psychic disorders. If both men were fighting for an egalitarian society where “all men are created equal”, why was Paine so neglected and marginalized, whereas Jefferson increasingly became a demigod in America’s founding mythology?

A “natural aristocrat” as he was, Jefferson remained a plantation owner, slaveholder, and head of a patriarchal household, demanding deference and obedience from all his dependents. Tom Paine, on the other hand, destabilized and fought against the entire patriarchal system embodied in all aspects of social organization.

While Jefferson acculturated himself to fit into the paternalistic order of the household he was born into, and took inequalities based on race, class and gender for granted, Tom Paine deconstructed the system, calling for the abolition of monarchy as well as social hierarchy. My research attempts to unfold Paine and Jefferson's nuanced, discrepant ideological differences from a domestic perspective. It argues that far from being ideologically identical to each other, Paine was fighting against the patriarchal society that Jefferson embraced, and that their discrepant social standings as shaped by their life trajectories starkly contradict their ideological similarities.

*Sally Chengji Xing is an Americanist at the History Department of Columbia University interested in "the US in the world", intellectual history and the writing of transnational history. She comes from Shanghai and studied at Tsinghua University as an undergraduate, where she met the best Chinese intellectuals who inspired her to join Columbia University's graduate school. Her bachelor's thesis "The Readership, Reception and Transnational Impact of Alexis de Tocqueville's 1835 edition of Democracy in America", an exploration of democracy in Jacksonian America from an Atlantic perspective, earned a UA International Award. At Peking University, she wrote about Thomas Paine's transatlantic experiences in Britain, France and the United States, and this research (also her MA thesis) recently led her to become a resident fellow at the Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies.*

*Dr. Andy J. Gawthorpe*

## **Trade Liberalization, Progress and Populism, 1968 – 2001**

As Destler has argued, US trade policy in the second half of the twentieth century rested on a paradox: Liberalization of trade was the subject of an “overwhelming” elite consensus among the political and business elite, yet “unappealing” to other social groups. However, historians of trade policy have usually focused on pro-liberalization elites, treating opposing social movements with historiographical disregard or normative disdain. At the center of this attitude has been the idea that trade liberalization represents teleological progress towards greater wealth and peace between nations.

My research project seeks a reinterpretation of the politics of trade in late twentieth-century America through interviews and archival research into the origins and evolution of movements opposed to trade liberalization across the political spectrum, including in trade unions, the conservative grassroots, and the broad anti-liberalization campaigns of the 1990s. Just as scholars of the “New Right” enabled us to move beyond a view of conservative forces in U.S. society as merely irrational enemies of progress doomed to eventually be eclipsed, my project argues that a similar reappraisal of opponents of trade liberalization is necessary.

My project also engages with the literature on “populism”, a concept often used to describe opponents of trade liberalization. Historical research is lacking on the extent to which movements opposing trade liberalization have shared the characteristics commonly ascribed to populists, such as people vs. elite discourse,

focus on impending societal catastrophe, and taboo-breaking. Hence, my project contributes to our broader understanding of populism and its relationship to ideologies of progress in the late twentieth-century United States.

*Dr. Andy J. Gawthorpe is a historian of the United States. He received his PhD from King's College London in 2015 and then held a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard University. Since 2016 he has held his current position at Leiden University. His first book, a history of US nation-building in the Vietnam War, is forthcoming from Cornell University Press in 2018.*

Verena Reiter

## **Legislation With(out) Representation: Judicial Activism as Driving Force Behind Sociocultural Progress**

The 2015 US Supreme Court landmark decision *Obergefell v. Hodges* left some Americans overwhelmed by how quickly the country had evolved on the issue of marriage equality. Conservative Americans felt threatened by a wave of liberalization. They had the impression that their deeply held conservative values and religious beliefs were under attack.

In the aftermath of controversial cases such as *Obergefell v. Hodges*, Supreme Court judges increasingly face accusations of being an activist court because they contribute to propelling progress in the country with their liberal rulings. Critics of the decision impute that the judges overstepped their jurisdiction by not only acting as legal interpreters but as policymakers. As a consequence, the court allegedly force-fed Americans certain cultural and social values and passed changes in traditional concepts of marriage and family off as progress. Such progress creates a fear of a loss of conservative American identity as well as national stability. Judges walk a fine line between protecting the rights of minorities and the expression of majority preferences. They may even occasionally misread public opinion because of their elite socioeconomic status and underestimate the impact of their decisions on concepts of national identity of the American public at large.

The aim of this paper is to scrutinize why the impression of judicial activism is created and to reveal which American values play a role in promoting or preventing progress. By analyzing the

landmark civil rights case *Obergefell v. Hodges* and the public response to this ruling, the power of courts as driving forces behind sociocultural progress can be explored. Such an analysis explains why it tends to be problematic if progress is achieved through judicial or legislative work but not as a result of a change in people's attitudes on a certain issue.

*Verena Reiter is a PhD candidate at the Goethe-University Frankfurt (Germany) where she is currently working on her dissertation "Un-Americanism, the Polarization of American Politics, and National Identity during the Obama Era". She graduated with a master's-level degree (state exam) in American Studies, German Studies, and Education from the University of Regensburg in 2015. In the 2016/17 academic year, she was a visiting scholar at the Department of Political Science at the University of California, Davis. Her research interests include American politics, contemporary cultural history, concepts of national identity, as well as architecture and urban development.*

## **WORKSHOP II**

### **Bodies of Resistance: Sex, Drugs and Gender Roles**

*Edward Belleville*

#### **The Other Little Blue Pill: PrEP on the Road to Sodom and Gomorrah**

Since receiving FDA approval in 2012, Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis has emerged as the latest biomedical intervention on the road to a post-AIDS national space, where the ambition for viral management represents a dream of inclusivity and social cohesion. The US National HIV/AIDS Strategy sets out its vision for “a place where new HIV infections are rare, and when they do occur, every person, regardless of age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or socio-economic circumstance, will have unfettered access to high quality, life-extending care, free from stigma and discrimination” (HHS website, January 2017). Towards this goal, PrEP prescription became one of the National Strategy’s indicators of progress in 2015, aiming to increase uptake by 200% by 2020.

PrEP has also been characterized, however, as short-sighted and a step “backwards”. Read as disruptive of the safe sex norms that have structured gay male identity since the 1980s, gay PrEP users have been accused of “tempting fate” (Murphy, July 2014: New York Magazine) and forgetting the legacy of the AIDS crisis. Such views distance a self-ascribed “modern” gay identity, positioned as respectable subject of LGBT rights discourse and mainstream



cultural recognition, from unruly queer desire that has failed to learn the lessons of history.

This paper explores how these two progress narratives, one as a public health imaginary of data and targets, the other as a struggle for liberation and acceptance, diverge on the uses and abuses of this little blue pill. I situate my analysis within a wider historiography of HIV/AIDS discourses, to ask how rethinking HIV in the era of PrEP might plot a new road ahead – between statistics, memory and pleasures of the flesh.

*Edward Belleville is an MA student in English Studies and DAAD scholarship holder at the Freie Universität Berlin. He has written on representations of HIV/AIDS for a forthcoming edition of On Curating magazine, and his research interests include the cultural production of health crises, within wider frameworks of queer, postcolonial and globalization studies. His thesis specialization is post-apartheid South African literature.*

## **The Indeterminate Future of Reproductive Rights: Challenges to Narratives of Progress in *The Handmaid's Tale***

Prominent ideas on progress revolve around an assumption that societies typically move in a politically progressive direction, as things “naturally” get better until we reach a seemingly perfect world or utopia (Mayr, 1992). George Kateb (1972) described the utopian tradition in Western thought as a world without strife or poverty. Over the past decade, there has been a resurgence of interest in themes of utopia and dystopia in North American Young Adult fiction. Dystopian fiction extends the idea of utopia to its most extreme point to “caution against the destructive politics of the present” (Basu, Broad and Hintz, 2014: 2). Studies on dystopian literature and film often consider the possibilities for critiquing current socio-political systems (Booker, 1994).

Despite connections established between critical social commentary and dystopian worlds, few studies have considered a broader critique of models of “progress” within dystopian film and television. Dystopian films and TV shows, often set in an indeterminate future, question teleological assumptions of progress and allow more critical, feminist considerations of the present, and ways to prevent or reimagine alternative futures. Following this concept, I will apply a discursive textual analysis to television show *The Handmaid's Tale*, focusing on the use of flashbacks and the episode entitled “Late”, to consider the extent to which conventional frames of progress are questioned alongside broader contemporary debates around reproductive rights, cuts to Planned Parenthood, and control of women’s bodies. Tying the focus to alternative timeframes, I will look at Elizabeth Freeman’s (2010)

study of queering temporality that relates the past to the present in transformative ways to criticize the chronobiopolitical and ideals of progress under neoliberalism. I will argue that dystopian fiction such as *The Handmaid's Tale* complicates assumptions of teleological progress and brings attention to the fluctuating nature of progress in the struggle for reproductive rights.

*Kate Meakin completed her two-year "Masters of Excellence" in Women's and Gender Studies in 2014, studying at the University of Hull and Central European University, where she achieved an award for the highest GPA in her class (4.0 overall). Her Master's thesis, entitled "Que(e)rying Women's Prison Systems in the U.S.: A Discursive Textual Analysis of Orange is the New Black", interrogated the recently released popular TV show as a representation of a US women's prison system, for which she received the Best Social Sciences Dissertation Award. She is now undertaking her PhD at the University of Sussex, supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, considering contemporary feminist, queer and anti-racist activism in the UK alongside recent North American dystopian fiction in film and television.*

*Carly Crane*

## **(Un)Doing the Privatized Self in Maggie Nelson's *Bluets***

My talk examines the memoir *Bluets* (2009) by American writer and scholar Maggie Nelson. I argue that her memoir functions as / is a site of potential resistance to neoliberal individualism and its narratives of patriarchal progress.

My paper follows the lead of Mitchum Huehls (see *After Critique*, 2016) and Rachel Greenwald-Smith (see *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism*, 2015) and seeks to find potential resistance or alternatives to neoliberalism from within the neoliberal imagination itself – from within, that is, the American memoir. While the memoir is often read as a symptom of the cultural and ontological force of neoliberalism and a cultural vehicle for its ideology of entrepreneurial individualism (the ultimate progress genre), I join Daniel Worden in insisting that the memoir “need not signal one relation to the neoliberal conditions that have occasioned their ubiquity” (2017).

I argue that in *Bluets* Maggie Nelson instrumentalizes the hegemonic discourse of memoir to trouble a neoliberal notion of the self. I also interrogate her fulfillment of the radical feminist potential that the memoir has always possessed: that of bringing the personal to the political, of bringing the body to the intellect. She develops an erotic intellectualism – a dialogic engagement with literature, art, and canonical philosophy alongside scenes from her sexual and domestic life – that I explore as a potential mode of refusal of those patriarchal progress narratives attendant to a neoliberal selfhood.

*Carly Crane is a Research Assistant for the Goethe-University Frankfurt Schreibzentrum and the Department of English and American Studies at Goethe-University Frankfurt. She is a candidate for a Master of the Arts in American Studies from Goethe-University Frankfurt, and she graduated magna cum laude from Barnard College of Columbia University in the City of New York with a Bachelor of the Arts in American Studies (2015).*

### **WORKSHOP III**

## **The Perils of Enhancement: Visions of Betterment and their Regressive Potential**

*Lee Flamand*

## **Opening Pandora's Cable Box: Rethinking the "New Golden Age of Television"**

Since the turn of the century, critics and journalists alike have celebrated the advent of a "new golden age of television". This narrative is at once techno-evangelical, pro-capitalistic, and liberationist: Disruptive technologies occasion a proliferation of industry players. Competition between them primes an arms race for stand-out programming. Therefore, creators are given free-reign to experiment with narrative complexity and previously taboo themes, offering an expanded menu of "niche" programming choices, freed from the constricting schedules of network programming and the domestic tyranny of the boob-tube. Technological advancements and industrial competitiveness unleash creative energies, untether consumer choice, and bring cultural distinction to a previously much-maligned medium.

I propose to complicate this orthodox view by reconsidering both the economic and cultural logics which generate, sustain, and challenge this narrative. The economic imperatives driving TV production are themselves historically contingent; as conditions change, the "quality" boom may be followed by a bust. Industry insiders, while often promulgating the "new golden age" narrative for PR purposes, have worried about the present moment's economic sustainability. Upstarts like Netflix have begun showing signs of monopolistic behavior, and big brands like HBO may soon begin crowding out newcomers. Meanwhile, traditional broadcast

networks have already begun to incorporate “quality” elements into their nightly schedules; as a result, programming has begun to settle back into a reliance on the reproduction of winning genre formulations. Finally, new technologies such as the Amazon Fire Stick and digital TV sets have re-established the centrality of the TV screen in our most intimate domestic spaces. I will argue that while TV programming has indeed continued to develop aesthetically, the golden age narrative is best seen not as an accurate diagnosis of progress in our contemporary cultural moment, but rather as an agent in the authorization and legitimization of TV’s own distinctly commercial prerogatives.

*Lee A. Flamand is a PhD Candidate at the Graduate School for North American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin. He received is BA from UC Berkeley and his MA from the John F. Kennedy Institute in Berlin. His dissertation explores the mutual entanglements of contemporary television and social epistemologies in the age of mass incarceration.*

*Matthew Blackwell*

**Technological Progress and the “End of Editing”: Definitive vs. Digital Editions of American Authors**



In 1965, the National Endowment for the Humanities funded an initiative called the Center for Editions of American Authors, whose stated purpose was to use a new technology, the Hinman Collator, to gather data on printing errors in nineteenth-century texts. This done, CEAA editors would sift through the variants in original editions in order to “purify” them of these “corruptions”, thus restoring the authors' original intentions. The CEAA argued that after their pseudo-scientific editing process was complete, nineteenth-century American authors would never have to be edited again. During the editing process, however, CEAA editors introduced additional variants, further complicating the history of each text.

The large grants apportioned by the NEH to the CEAA anticipated the recent founding of the NEH's Office of Digital Humanities. Then as now, this funding has called into question the relationship between technology, science, and the humanities, inspiring polemical discourse on both sides. As professors first built careers on CEAA-funded scholarly editions and then on ODH-funded digital projects, academics outside these funding structures have criticized the changes that data-driven research entails for interpretative disciplines. These critics argue that despite the seeming novelty of these technologized approaches, they impose limits on interpretation that are politically and academically conservative. My presentation will compare the rhetoric used by the CEAA with the rhetoric surrounding ODH digital editions in order to examine the narrative of technological progress that underwrites such large-scale, government-funded projects. Both organizations claim that they represent the 'end of editing' in different ways: the CEAA by creating definitive, authoritative editions and the ODH by creating online archives that can host, index, and link all relevant materials. By interrogating this narrative of progress toward an end-

point of editing, I will reveal the professional-academic concerns that determine the shape of the texts we read, study, and teach.

*Matthew Blackwell is a PhD candidate at the University of Iowa and a visiting lecturer at the Institute of British and American Studies at TU Dortmund University. He holds an MA from the University of Missouri and a BA from the University of Arkansas, both in English literature. His dissertation project is a study of the scholarly editing of American literature in the postwar years.*

*Marius Dahmen*

**The Progress of Regression – Delineating Emancipatory Potential in Contemporary Self-Help(lessness)**

Eva Illouz's fairly recent analysis of "emotional capitalism" sheds light on the way contemporary "self-help culture", despite the air of progressivity emanating from it, perpetuates "psychic misery" as a "feature of identity" (*Cold Intimacies*, 2007). The language of self-help, which, according to Illouz, constitutes the very essence of selfhood in emotional capitalism, is an ever-ongoing narrative of self-reflexive subjectivity that inherently proposes itself as progressive and emancipatory because it claims to be capable of identifying and resolving original traumata. At the same time it propels a notion of self-improvement that is deeply infused with instrumental rationality and directs emancipation towards functional integration into an (ever) renewed version of capitalism. Illouz finally identifies psychoanalysis as eventually providing the narrative's conceptual tools and calls for its abandonment (*Saving the Modern Soul*, 2008).

In original psychoanalytic terms, "self-help culture" signifies the collective manifestation of a regression to narcissistic ego cathexes; emancipation, cumulating in strengthening the ego through therapy, would be the exact opposite. Using Freud's emancipation conceptualization as a stepping stone, this paper traces Theodor W. Adorno's insistence on psychoanalytic theory, and his simultaneous rejection of *therapy*, to its roots: a dialectical extrapolation of Freud's drive theory. It aims to pick up Illouz's critical analysis of self-help narratives in order to mobilize what emerges as psychoanalysis's *negative emancipatory potential*, as it is inherent to Freud's "discontent in culture" (*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 1930) and condenses in Adorno's "damaged life" (*Minima Moralia*, 1951), against the overwhelming forces of instrumental progression. By doing so, it implicitly challenges Illouz's conclusion and urges for a serious reconsideration of Freudian concepts in sociological theory.

*Marius Dahmen is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the Graduate School of North American Studies.*

**WORKSHOP IV**  
**Engineering Progress: Perspectives on Capital,  
Consumption, and Crisis**

*Lasse Thiele*

## **Ceteris Paribus Progress? The Green Economy, Technology, and the Future of Work**

This paper argues that questions of labor and technology are particularly illustrative of the shortcomings of hegemonic *Green Economy* models as visions of progress for 21st-century societies, viewed in the context of current heated debates around automation, technological unemployment and the abhorred – or yearned-for – “end of work”.

The main components of institutional proposals for *green growth* – commodification of nature as “natural capital”, market-based regulation to internalize social and ecological costs and application of technological “solutionism” to ecological constraints – have been endorsed by influential liberal policymakers in both Canada and the US, including Justin Trudeau and Barack Obama, as a road map for the next decades. These proposals generally follow a technocratic, sector-by-sector, *ceteris paribus* (“all else being equal”) approach to progress towards social and environmental sustainability within the broader tradition of neoliberalism. The desirability and feasibility of conventional full employment is taken for granted. Despite their emphasis on technological solutions, these models pay scant attention to the conflicting requirements of capital, labor and ecology with regard to technology. While aspiring to accommodate capital accumulation as well as full employment *and* ecological sustainability, the *Green Economy* is saddled with deep structural contradictions that suggest powerful new externalizations.

Plenty of questions emerge around the capital/labor/ecology nexus, all of which the *Green Economy's ceteris paribus* attitude brackets out: Assuming increasing labor productivity in a resource-constrained, green-tech-overhauled world, will income eventually

have to be decoupled from (disappearing) employment? What about the trade-off, from an ecological viewpoint, between labor efficiency and resource efficiency? Beyond capitalist relations, is a “green” high-tech postwork economy realizable? By tracing some of these lines of thought, this paper seeks to problematize the simplistic notion of progress through technology underlying the *Green Economy* agenda.

*Lasse Thiele is a doctoral candidate in Political Science in the GSNAS program. Their dissertation project is a critique of dominant Green Economy models recently advanced by major international institutions, analyzed from a world-ecology perspective. They hold both a B.A. and an M.A. in North American Studies from FU Berlin.*

*Dr. Molly S. Laas*

### **Meat for the Masses in America and Germany: Dietary Progress in Transnational Perspective**

In the late nineteenth century, one aspect of the “worker question” turned on whether the food supply available would be enough for workers to live on. This question was taken up with

avidity by scientists in the US and Germany who grafted natural science onto political liberalism in order to argue for the importance of ample nutrition in the struggle for social improvement.

This paper examines the origins of this argument in the US through analyzing the work of the American nutrition scientist W. O. Atwater. Trained in the US and in Germany as an agricultural chemist, Atwater was a keen observer of German debates in the 1870s about the worker question and the potential for science to solve it. As an institution builder and early popularizer of scientific ideas about diet, Atwater's vision for his science in America rested on a foundation of German liberal ideas about the relationship between science, society, and the state. By adapting and translating these ideas into an American context, Atwater tied German notions of how a strong state could ensure scientific and social progress to an American conception of how science could foster a national culture of democratic engagement and social renewal.

This paper will analyze Atwater's arguments for greater state involvement in science and in the people's nutrition from the analytic lens of transnational intellectual history, drawing connections between liberalism in Germany and America, US economic thought, and the development of science in the late nineteenth century. By examining American nutritional progress in transnational perspective, this paper sheds light on narratives of national improvement in this period and the proposed role of science in the facilitation of progress.

*Molly S. Laas is an associate researcher of the Department of Medical Ethics and the History of Medicine at the University of Göttingen Medical School. She received her PhD in the history of medicine from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and is currently at work on a biography of the American nutrition scientist W.O. Atwater.*



*Marc Adam*

**Liquidating Bankers' Acceptances: International Crisis, Personal Conflict and American Exceptionalism in the Federal Reserve, 1914–1932**

This paper looks at Federal Reserve interventions in the market for bankers' acceptances from 1914 to 1932 and investigates which ideologies and doctrines had an influence on monetary policy and reform. Why did the Fed help the market for acceptances to grow in the 1920s, but withdrew its support after 1931?

I show that labeling large parts of Fed officials, academics and politicians as “adherents of the real bills doctrine”, as in Meltzer (2003), misses insights about important political decisions on monetary issues. I distinguish between an active monetary policy of favoring real bills (the Warburg doctrine) and adherence to self-regulation (the Glass-Willis doctrine). From 1930 onwards, a conflict arose between the two camps that concerned the Fed's purchases of “foreign” dollar acceptances. The conflict had an impact on decisions on monetary intervention during the crisis year 1931 and paved the way for monetary reform from 1932 onwards.

I argue that the critique put forth against the purchase of foreign acceptances by Carter Glass and H. Parker Willis can be ascribed to a conservative economic nationalism that has its roots in the ideology of American Exceptionalism. The “excessive” growth of the acceptance market in the 1920s was used as a scapegoat for the depression of the 1930s. Ideological and personal conflict to preserve the legacy of the Federal Reserve motivated the choice of this scapegoat and ultimately caused the Fed to withdraw its support for the market after 1931.

This history of the Fed supplements historical accounts which narrate the early twentieth century as an eruption of American modernity onto a world stage and ascribe the instability of the interwar period to the failure of the US to assume leadership after WWI. The failure was caused by the desire to keep a distance from the violent forces unleashed in Europe and to preserve American continuity of progress, the primary source of which was nationalism.

*Marc Adam is a PhD candidate in Economics at the Graduate School of North American Studies.*

## **WORKSHOP V**

### **Selves of the Future, Futures of the Self: Speculations on Humanness, Solidarity, and Emancipation**

*Maxi Albrecht*

#### **Negotiating Humanness in a Zombie World – *The Walking Dead's* Politics of Intelligences and Challenging Progress**

Positing that the post-(zombie-)apocalyptic world of AMC's hit television series *The Walking Dead* (TWD) negotiates survival and the nature of humanness in the face of various antagonistic forces, my paper explores the notion of progress through human survival. TWD's storyworld – itself the antithesis of any notions of modern

progress – constantly forces the survivors of the zombie apocalypse to negotiate their humanness in the face of antagonistic characters, the hostile environment of post-apocalyptic spaces, and above all the omnipresent threat of the undead. I argue that the constant encounter with the zombie explores the humanness of the survivors in terms of their intelligences – here broadly understood as skills, abilities, and knowledges constructed to be part of human cognitive processes. By extension, a constant evoking of existential questions of the moral terms of survival challenges notions of human progress.

As the characters of this serial narrative are constantly thrown in and out of situations, which push them to the brink morally and bodily, existential questions – including the worth of the individual versus the survival of the group, the necessity of killing other human beings, and the realization of the zombie's otherness – are continuously negotiated. These existential dilemmas and threats confront the characters with questions of ensuring their survival, but also the moral costs of this survival and the cognitive conditions, that is the living characters' intelligences, to ensure it. Such questions are intricately connected to questions of human progress, as the frame of this narrative is ultimately the continued survival of the human race and the improvement of its conditions.

*Maxi Albrecht current PhD project at the GSNAS, titled “The Cultural Politics of Intelligences in 21st-Century Dystopian and Post-Apocalyptic Survival Narratives”, is located in the field of Cultural Studies. Pursuing a Master in British and North American Cultural Studies at the University of Freiburg, she began to focus on intelligences as cultural entities and their representation in post-apocalyptic fiction. Maxi Albrecht completed a BA in Intercultural European and American Studies with specialization in Angloamerica and Latin America, and a minor in history at the University Halle-*

*Wittenberg. During this time, her research focus was transatlantic slavery studies and social reform movements of the antebellum era. Her bachelor's thesis with the title The Reception of the Haitian Revolution in the Antebellum USA: An Analysis of White and Black Abolitionist Discourse on the Haitian Revolution was published by the GILCAL working paper series at the Romance Studies Department at the University Halle-Wittenberg.*

*Verena Baier*

### **Negotiating Utopia in Autobiographies of the US-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement**

Drawing from my dissertation project in the field of American Studies with the working title "'Entrá nomás, Estás en Nicaragua': Negotiating Utopian (Counter-)Collectives in Life Writings of the US-Nicaragua Solidarity Movements, 1979-1991", this paper aims at highlighting how narratives of progress are renegotiated in autobiographies which use Nicaragua as a projection surface for Utopia. Far from being a mere idealized vision of the future, utopian thinking establishes a strong link to the present, which reveals its critical potential to reconstruct present realities.

The highly polarizing and seemingly contradictory 1980s, which celebrated strong individualism and optimism while simultaneously proclaiming the collapse of grand Western "progress" narratives, provided a context in which the dissent with the "Me-ism" of the decade and "Reagan's America" soared among

many US-American individuals. Nicaragua, coined as “political Disneyland”, then offered a parameter for utopian thinking. Thus, US solidarity activists, among others, traveled to Nicaragua to fight for the leftist Sandinistas’ cause providing a counternarrative to Washington’s official narrative of progress.

Narratives of the past and utopian thinking both serve as a bridge between the constructed self and the collective, since they renegotiate the subject’s place in the world and highlight the subjective construction of different realities. These mutual interests allow the use of the fruitful connection between research in autobiographical writing and theories of Utopia. My discussion of US-Nicaragua solidarity activists’ autobiographies, such as Deb Olin Unferth’s *Revolution: The Year I Fell in Love and Went to Join the Sandinistas* (2011), and Michael Johns’ *The Education of a Radical: An American Revolutionary in Sandinista Nicaragua* (2012) engages with the observation that utopian thinking means social criticism and desire. It furthermore shows how its mechanisms are used in the acts of re-plotting one’s life to tackle past and present realities, renegotiating notions of progress in the process.

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### **A Woman's Voice is a Revolution**

For over a century, Hollywood and US media have been perpetuating negative images of Muslim women, including the overly-sexualized belly dancer, the subjugated veiled woman and even the sneaky terrorist. These visual narratives have been connected closely with policy-making in the way they were used to justify invading countries in progressive “liberations” of their “oppressed” female population.

With the popularity of social media today, where one no longer needs the mainstream media to reach audiences, feminist Muslim women are utilizing several alternative platforms to take ownership of their narrative and represent themselves. They are using platforms like YouTube and Instagram to call out Hollywood and mainstream Western media for the misrepresentation of Muslim women, as well as the patriarchy in their own communities. Mona Haydar, a Muslim Syrian-American rapper, scholar and

activist, is one prominent example. In my paper, I am exploring how Haydar, through her music, reclaims her identity as a hijab-wearing Muslim-American woman. In her hit single “Hijabi”, Haydar criticizes the orientalist and exotic views of Muslim women and calls for an inclusive feminism that empowers women of all ethnicities and backgrounds through activism and collective work. In her second single, “Dog”, she takes on patriarchy in its various forms – especially the one justified by the misinterpretation of religious scripture – and tackles the sensitive issue of violence against women.

The election of Trump as US president has been devastating in many ways, but it also led to women coming together collectively to raise their voice against him and what he stands for. In this new environment, people of various backgrounds are opening up to the “other”, becoming increasingly interested in what someone like Haydar has to say. Today, a new dynamic of women’s rights activism is being shaped, one where Muslim women have a seat at the table.

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## **Notes**



