

POSTHUMAN ECONOMIES

Literary and Cultural Imaginations
of the Postindustrial Human

13 & 14 April 2019

English Department
University of Basel



SATURDAY, APRIL 13

12.30–01.00 pm Registration

01.00–01.15 pm A. Elisabeth Reichel, Conference Opening

01.15–02.45 pm Panel: Finance Capitalism and Debt: The Last 100 Years

Chair: Philipp Schweighauser

Martin Leer: "Human Economies and Narrative Exchange in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and William Faulkner's *The Hamlet*"

Christian Kloeckner: "Everybody wants to own the end of the world: Dreams of Immortality and the Biofinancial Order in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*"

02.45–03.15 pm Break

03.15–05.30 pm Panel: Human-Machine Interactions

Chair: Balázs Rapscák

J. Jesse Ramirez: "Harry Braverman's Humanist Philosophy of Automation"

Marlon Lieber: "Fully Automated Luxury Pastoralism: Rereading Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilization*"

Morgane Ghilardi and Scott Loren: "Technandrogyny—A Symbolics of Human-Machine Interaction in the Postindustrial Paradigm"

05.30–06.00 pm Break

06.00–07.15 pm Plenary: James Dorson: "Posthuman Humanism: The Progressive Era, Humanistic Management, and the Rise of the Network Self"

Chair: A. Elisabeth Reichel

07.15 pm– Dinner at Cantina Don Camillo

SUNDAY, APRIL 14

09.00–10.15 am Plenary: Kalpana Seshadri: "Post-Human Economics: An Overview"

Chair: A. Elisabeth Reichel

10.15–10.30 am Break

10.30–12.00 pm Panel: Animate Corporations / Inanimate Persons

Chair: Michelle Witen

Stefanie Müller: "Frankenstein, Inc.—Corporate Personhood in Twenty-First-Century Poetry"

Katharina Motyl: "Dehumanizing the Poor, *Anima*-ting the Corporation: Carceral Expansion and Other Paradoxes of the Neoliberal Age"

12.00–01.30 pm Lunch at Restaurant Kornhaus

01.30–03.00 pm Panel: Neoliberalism

Chair: Fabian Eggers

A. Elisabeth Reichel: "The Neoliberal Democratic Imaginary and Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*"

Joyce Goggin: "De Doctrina Neoliberali"

03.00–03.15 pm Break

03.15–04.45 pm Panel: Human Labor in the 21st-Century American Novel

Chair: Ridvan Askin

Juliane Strätz: "Speed and the Fragility of the Worker"

Fabian Eggers: "An Author Who Feels Their Pain: The Emotional Economy Underlying David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King*"

04.45–05.00 pm A. Elisabeth Reichel, Closing Remarks

05.00 pm– Farewell Reception

**FINANCE CAPITALISM AND DEBT:
THE LAST 100 YEARS**

Panel | Saturday, 01.15–02.45 pm

Chair: Philipp Schweighauser

**Human Economies and Narrative
Exchange in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The
Great Gatsby* and William Faulkner's
*The Hamlet***

This paper examines what David Graeber in *Debt: The First 5000 Years* called “human economies” and which for Graeber are those incalculable human interrelationships, essentially of debt, which underlie the social institution of money. But my concern is not with the pre-state societies, where Graeber musters such well-studied anthropological relationships as bride wealth and blood money. Rather I wish to examine these relationships in two classic American novels about full-blown and emerging financial capitalism: how residual human economies influence, if they do not determine, both *mythos* and *diegesis*, plot and narrative discourse. Whereas financial capital in nineteenth century novels, from Thackeray and Dickens to Zola and Dean Howells, is an imposition or a parasite on the real world, it appears integral to human life and human relationships in the two modernist novels, written after Hilferding and others had begun to observe and theorise the change from industrial to finance capitalism.

The Great Gatsby (1927), often seen as

the quintessential novel about 1920s New York, is narrated by a bond trader and concerns the obsession of a self-made character, Gatsby, who borrows against the fiction of himself in an attempt to gain the financial stability which he has eroticised in something as fleeting as Daisy's voice. The novel turns, in my reading of it, on the inherent self-contradictions in the classic tripartite definition of money as *store of value*, *measure of value* and *means of exchange*. Absolute commitment to the first of these makes the third impossible, in economic as well as human relations.

The Hamlet (1940) is set in the period of the gold standard in the 1890s when money supply was so restricted that much of rural America did not have the monetary wherewithal for the simplest economic exchanges and the value of money reached mythic proportions. The novel, in some ways a collective anti-novel, narrates the often desperate attempts by a small-town lawyer, Gavin Stevens, and a travelling sewing-machine salesman named Ratliff, but with the evidence of a number of other witnesses, to account for the rise of the financial, debt-based empire of the Snopeses, who to Faulkner's moral consciousness (Stevens, Ratliff and the voice of community) are not merely predatory, but posthuman, outside any moral order. When Flem Snopes arrives in Hell, a very irritable Satan can find no way of punishing him,

despite the immense harm he has caused other people, because he has no soul. In his classic study of Faulkner, Cleanth Brooks hired an accountant to make sense of Ratliff's impossibly complicated dealings with the southern part of Yoknapatawpha County, which operate in the borderlands between money and barter. To the accountant they made no economic sense. I hope to present a reading where they make sense as human economy, conserving Yoknapatawpha dollars in the county, but even more preserving the human economy of narrative outrage.

Martin Leer is *Maître d'enseignement et de recherche* at the University of Geneva. He did his undergraduate degree at the University of Copenhagen and his PhD at the University of Queensland, Australia. His research interests are in colonial and postcolonial literatures, literary geography, literature and the environment, the history of reading and poetry and poetics, and he has published widely in these fields and as a literary translator. He is the co-editor of *Economies of English* (Narr, 2016; with Genoveva Puskas).

**“Everybody wants to own the end of
the world”: Dreams of Immortality and
the Biofinancial Order in Don DeLillo's
Cosmopolis and *Zero K***

At the end of Don DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis* (2003), billionaire Eric Packer sees his own death foreshadowed on his digital watch, strangely fulfilling his old dream of “transcending his body mass”: “The idea was to live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void” (206). An allegorical figure of finance capitalism, Packer understands that the ultimate “master thrust of cyber-capital” will be “to extend the human experience toward infinity as a medium for corporate growth and investment, for the accumulation of profits and vigorous reinvestment” (207). In DeLillo's latest novel *Zero K* (2016), another billionaire who made his fortunes by calculating the financial risks of natural disasters is one step closer to this dream. Funding the “Convergence,” a secret cryonics facility somewhere in Russia where the wealthy freeze their aging and ailing bodies in anticipation of future cures and immortal lives, Ross Lockhart embodies finance capitalism's embrace of risk, futurity, and limitless accumulation and circulation of money flows.

In my presentation, I will take up one of the Convergence spokespersons' exhortations to their clientele, “Think of money and immortality,” to consider not only

the claim that “Life everlasting belongs to those of breathtaking wealth” (76). I will also more systematically explore DeLillo’s financiers’ dreams of immortality in the context of what Marc Aziz Michael has termed the “biofinancial order,” an ongoing re-imagination of capitalism that blurs the boundaries of capital and life, sees money as endlessly reproductive, and seeks to regulate and extend life in an effort to maximize debt repayments in the global ‘creditocracy’ (Ross). While *Cosmopolis* stakes out the significance of posthuman (virtual data) systems of contemporary global finance capitalism, *Zero K* more closely examines its biopolitical implications, including the temptation and traps of its transhumanist aspirations. Amidst these forces, DeLillo’s writing and a few of his novel’s characters struggle to salvage humanism in close observations of everyday life.

Christian Kloeckner is an assistant professor of American literature and cultural studies at the University of Bonn. A visiting research fellow at Barnard College/Columbia University from 2016 to 2018, he is the co-editor of *Finance and Society’s* special issue “Financial Times” (4.1 (2018)) and is currently working on a book project entitled “Financialization and Nostalgia in US Culture.”

HUMAN-MACHINE INTERACTIONS

Panel | Saturday, 03.00–05.15 pm

Chair: Balázs Rapscák

Harry Braverman’s Humanist Philosophy of Automation

Harry Braverman (1920–1976) was a coppersmith and steel worker, an editor at Monthly Review Press, and perhaps his generation’s greatest theorist of automation in the American Marxist tradition. While his *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1976) is best known for sparking debate about the impact of industrial technology on workers’ skills, the book is also a rich elaboration of Marx’s ideas about the antagonisms between human labor and capitalist machines. Building on Marx’s famous analogy about the differences between a bee and a human architect, Braverman’s core argument is that human labor is uniquely characterized by the unity of “conception” and “execution.” Whereas animals labor instinctually—their labor is nothing but “execution”—the human mind is exceptional in its capacity to imagine the labor process prior to execution, and thus to guide execution on the basis of conceptual and aesthetic forms. This humanist philosophy of labor enables Braverman to critique automation as the class project to split workers’ conception from their execution, and to embed the capitalist manager’s conception in technical objects that dictate the work process

to the worker. In this talk, I want to revisit Braverman’s humanist philosophy of automation in light of contemporary critiques of humanist philosophies of labor in animal studies, and in light of contemporary developments in “smart” automation. In what sense can contemporary automation, in particular artificial intelligence, be characterized as the splitting of conception and execution? What happens to this core distinction in Braverman’s and Marx’s thought when held accountable to post-humanist critiques of anthropocentrism? How else might the critique of automation, and of the contemporary posthuman economy, ground itself if not in the Marxist concept of alienation?

J. Jesse Ramirez holds a PhD in American Studies from Yale University, and is currently Assistant Professor/Assistenzprofessor of American Studies and co-director of the Technologies concentration in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of St Gallen. He is currently working on two book manuscripts: “Un-American Dreams: Apocalyptic Science Fiction and Bad Hope in the American Century,” and “What is Automation? A Cultural History of the Present in Six Technologies.” This talk elaborates on his articles “Marcuse Among the Technocrats” and “Marx vs. the Robots,” both published in *Amerikastudien/American Studies*.

Fully Automated Luxury Pastoralism: Rereading Lewis Mumford’s *Technics and Civilization*

The title of my paper evokes the phrase “fully automated luxury communism” that is often used among Leftists—though sometimes ironically—to refer to the utopian vision of a complete automation of social production that would result in a life of leisure and luxury for all (cf. Aaron Bastani’s eponymous book forthcoming in 2019). Yet, speaking of automation and pastoralism should raise concerns—for the pastoral vision of a harmonious rural society seems deeply incompatible with technologies of automation. My paper will provide a reading of Lewis Mumford’s 1934 book *Technics and Civilization* in order to resolve this apparent contradiction. While writing about the use of technologies that replace human labor, Mumford uses the metaphor of the “machine-herd” to articulate the new role of humans in the production process and the pastoral figure of the herdsman. Drawing on Leo Marx’s classic study of the pastoral ideal in American literature and culture, I will argue that it is precisely Mumford’s turn to a metaphor drawn from pastoral imagery that allows him to express a commitment to technological progress without simultaneously affirming the destructive qualities he associates with “the machine.” To this end, Mumford resorts to two discourses, a scientific one and a literary one (cf. Leo Marx on Thomas Jefferson); the latter, then, while only making up a min-

iscule part of his book is actually crucial for his project of sketching a technological utopia that is, paradoxically, also pastoral. In my paper I will contrast Mumford's account with another influential discussion of automation, namely Karl Marx's so-called "Fragment on Machines" (in the posthumously published *Grundrisse*). While Marx uses language rich in metaphors to emphasize the way large-scale machinery subsumes and degrades workers, he also offers a utopia of automation that destroys the capitalist law of value from within. The latter, however, while very influential (e.g. in Italian *postoperaismo*), rests on a one-dimensional commitment to progress—and was tacitly renounced by Marx himself when he published *Capital* ten years later. Unlike the undialectical affirmation of progress, Mumford's use of the pastoral design makes his text more attuned to the ambivalent nature of technological development. Moreover, it is a way of introducing another way of measuring wealth or "luxury"; neither the capitalist form of abstract wealth nor mere material wealth in the form of an abundance of use-values, but a wealth of social relations—a "communal luxury" (Kristin Ross)—that includes solidary relations between humans but also between humans and nature.

Marlon Lieber is assistant professor of American Studies and Cultural and Media Studies at the English Department at Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel. In 2018

he completed his doctoral dissertation (*Reading 'Race' Relationally: Embodied Dispositions and Social Structures in Colson Whitehead's Novels*) at Goethe-Universität Frankfurt. In 2015 he spent six months as a visiting research scholar at the English Department at University of Illinois, Chicago. He is currently beginning to work on a postdoc project on social and aesthetic forms that will focus on postwar American art. With Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich he has recently guest edited a special issue of *Amerikastudien / American Studies* on Karl Marx and the United States.

Technandrology—a Symbolics of Human-Machine Interaction in the Postindustrial Paradigm

Thinking revolution as a reversal in the order of things, Foucault pointed toward the status of literature changing in its relationship to knowledge during the nineteenth century, when it "ceased to belong to the order of discourse and became the manifestation of language in its thickness" (Foucault 1998, 265). Where knowledge in the Classical period is characterized by narrative continuity, with the rise of institutionalism and industrialism it was reconstituted as "a sort of general and systematic taxonomy of things" (ibid. 264). This reversal in order sets the stage for reflexive modernity as a fundamentally economic paradigm. Insofar as we can speak of social scientific functionalism in modernization processes (Haber-

mas 1996), we might think of the economic paradigm as constituting a systemization of processes according to principles of automation; particularly in the relational dynamics of human-machine interaction (HMI). This was true for the period Foucault addresses, as it is throughout the postindustrial period up to and including our present moment of technosocial transition.

The current moment of reversal has been facilitated through the conjoined affordances of digital media convergence, inclusive network recursion, data stockpiling, user complicity, and free algorithmic labor. In an expansive machine environment where traces of human presence appear as transient networks of synaptic association and loops of programmatic action, we work in conjunction with intelligent machines and infrastructures to produce resources for the real evolution of those machines and infrastructures. If this peculiar reversal in HMI economies heralds a "second machine age" (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014), then this late- or post-anthropogenic turn must be accompanied by representational practices seeking to make sense of the turn. We propose the neologism *technandrology* to demarcate a specific set of aesthetic strategies identifiable in contemporary hybrid media cultures and concerned with the intelligibility of HMI. Our focus will be on filmic representations of HMI in three successive periods of technologized economic liberalism: material wealth and mass-consump-

tion culture (1980s), embodied technologies and hegemony (1990s), debt and symbolic capital (post-subprime crisis cinema after 2008). Through the identification and historicization of period-specific tropes, our analysis seeks to contribute to an initial symbolics of HMI in the postindustrial paradigm.

Morgane A. Ghilardi is a Research and Teaching Assistant to Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Bronfen. She holds a B.A. in English Literature and Linguistics, Hermeneutics, and Film Studies as well as a M.A. in Gender Studies and English Literature from the University of Zurich. In 2016, she completed her MA thesis titled *Do Androids Dream of Sex? Gender, Desire, and Power in the Representation of Androids and Artificial Intelligence in Her, Automata, & Ex Machina*. Her PhD thesis further focuses on the complex and meaningful ways in which technology and gender intersect, and how these crossings are represented in various cultural texts. She is also active as a freelance culture writer.

Scott Loren teaches new media and language studies at the University of St. Gallen and the University of Zurich. He received a PhD in English Literature with a focus on American Studies from the latter in 2005 and is currently writing a post-doctoral thesis on representations of technosocial transition. His research interests include gender, genre, media hybridity, posthumanism, psychoanalysis and visual culture. He is

coeditor of the volume *Screening Economies: Money Matters and the Ethics of Representation* (Cuonz, Loren, Metelmann; transcript, 2018).

POSTHUMAN HUMANISM: THE PROGRESSIVE ERA, HUMANISTIC MANAGEMENT, AND THE RISE OF THE NETWORK SELF

Plenary | Saturday, 05.30–06.15 pm

James Dorson

This paper asks how we might rethink critical posthumanism if we replace the liberal humanist tradition that it defines itself against with another humanist tradition that arose during the Progressive Era and which was institutionalized through management discourse in the 1960s. The self-mastering, possessive individual of liberal humanism that critical posthumanism renounces was already fragmented and emptied out as a result of industrialization by the late nineteenth century. Although the myth of the autonomous self retained its tenuous hold on US culture, it was widely ridiculed by writers and intellectuals during the Progressive Era. In place of possessive individualism, progressives reimagined the human in terms of two master tropes from evolutionary theory: growth and kinship. Rather than defined by bounded self-possession, humans were redefined by a potential for ceaseless growth and the web of relations in

which they existed. This expansive model of the human emerged in contradistinction to both the obsolete myth of bourgeois individualism (the human as a bounded whole) and industrial mechanization (the human as consisting of parts). It was simultaneous “post” liberal humanism in its emphasis on human interconnectivity and humanistic in the distinction it made between humans and mechanistic processes. Beginning with the human relations movement in the 1920s and culminating with the self-actualization psychology of humanistic management in the 1960s, this posthuman humanism—defined by a search for meaning, inner growth, and relational identity—was institutionalized by a post-Fordist management regime. In this light, the interrelationship of humans, machines, and animals stressed in critical posthumanism looks less like a departure from the privileged model of subjectivity in postindustrial capitalism than the extension of a network model of the self already articulated in management literature and needed for the reproduction of capital. How, then, this paper asks, might we rethink critical posthumanism in an age of posthuman humanism?

James Dorson is an Assistant Professor at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin. His first book, *Counternarrative Possibilities: Virgin Land, Homeland, and Cormac*

McCarthy's Westerns, was published with Campus in 2016. Among his publications are essays on posthumanism, genre fiction, emotional labor, and American literary naturalism. His research interests include critical theory, new formalism, labor fiction, and economic criticism. His current book project looks at competing visions of social and economic organization in American literary naturalism at the turn of the twentieth century.

POST-HUMAN ECONOMICS: AN OVERVIEW

Plenary | Sunday, 09.00–10.15 am

Kalpana Seshadri

Kalpana Seshadri's forthcoming book *Post-Human Economics: Earth, Epistemology, Ethics* is a theoretical exploration of the perceived opposition between the spheres of the economic and the political, and their respective subjects (homo economicus and homo politicus) as a mode of “forgetting” the complex systems that sustain life. I focus mainly on the logic of neoclassical economics in its various contemporary guises (Neo-Keynesian synthesis, behavioral economics, complexity economics) to understand how these perspectives articulate “the economy” and “nature” thereby defining and shaping our sense of reality and possibility. *Posthuman Economics* is a proposal for an epistemology that refutes the partitions of economy,

politics, and nature in order to delineate the emergence of a posthuman subject as a dynamic, passing bio-spiritual form that appears momentarily within complex adaptive systems. Specific chapters deal with concepts such as interest, externalities, tipping points, and value to explore the conceptual articulations of nature and economy.

Seshadri's paper will offer a summary overview of this book project. More specifically, she will outline the argument of the book pertaining to the relation between the epistemology of Neo-Classical economics and climate change from the perspective of complex systems theory. The paper will address the significance and implications of the post-human in relation to economy.

Kalpana R. Seshadri is Professor of English at Boston College where she teaches courses in contemporary theory with attention to the history and cultures of British imperialism and globalization. She is the author of *HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language* (Minnesota UP, 2012), *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race* (Routledge, 2000), and co-editor of *The Pre-Occupation of Post-Colonial Studies* (Duke UP, 2000). Her current book project is entitled *Post-Human Economics: Earth, Epistemology, Ethics*.

**ANIMATE CORPORATIONS /
INANIMATE PERSONS**

Panel | Sunday, 10.30 am–12.00 pm

Chair: Michelle Witen

Frankenstein, Inc. — Corporate Personhood in Twenty-First-Century Poetry

When the US Supreme Court affirmed the right of corporations to free speech in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* in 2010, cartoonists depicted the legal person at the center of the ruling as Frankenstein's monster. Almost a century earlier, critics of corporate legal personhood had already had the same idea: in 1933, in *Louis K. Liggett Co. v. Lee*, Justice Louis Brandeis warned of the dangers of "the Frankenstein monster which states have created by their corporation laws." What connects these two moments is not just the fact that both rulings were handed down after a recent financial crisis and at the beginning of a significant economic depression in the US. While these historical realities account for part of the valency of the Frankenstein-trope, I want to argue that they can also be read as responding to a changing legal understanding of agency in the public sphere. Focusing on the metaphor of the "marketplace of ideas" in *Citizens United*, I show that the ideal of democracy stipulated by the Court relies on economic rather than political models and, ultimately, on the ideal of the homo economicus. Yet, if the site of democratic

participation is designed to accommodate rational actors, I argue, then corporations as legal subjects are much better suited to citizenship than natural persons. Turning to the poetry of Jena Osman and Timothy Donnelly, I show how both poets trouble the concept of personhood and the ideal of "the human" as transcending materiality by bringing its animal origins to bear on it: both Osman and Donnelly anchor their lyric voices in a physical experiences and challenge the legal persona in particular by bringing it in the company of animals. In this way, I think, Osman's and Donnelly's poetry can help us to explore new ways of thinking about corporate power in posthuman economies.

Stefanie Müller is the author of *The Presence of the Past in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2013), which was nominated for the Toni Morrison Society Book Prize in 2015. With Christian Kloeckner, she has edited a collection on "Competing Temporalities in the Age of Financial Capitalism" that was published with *Finance & Society* in 2018; with Birte Christ, she has edited a collection of articles addressing the state of scholarship on the intersection between poetry and law, published with Winter-Verlag in 2017. Her current monograph project studies the business corporation in the American imagination from the 1830s to the beginning of the twentieth century.

Dehumanizing the Poor, Anima-ting the Corporation: Carceral Expansion and Other Paradoxes of the Neoliberal Age

Carceral expansion in the United States was decisively propelled forth by the Reagan administration: while there were 474,000 prisoners in 1980, that number had climbed to 1,149,000 by 1990 (Justice Policy Institute). The administration of Bill Clinton, although nominally hailing from the rival political party, held course: by 2000, the number of prisoners had reached 1,966,000 (Justice Policy Institute). That is, carceral expansion was driven by the same administration that ushered in the neoliberal age in U.S. society (Reagan) by, amongst other things, dismantling the welfare state accompanied by devious poor-pejorative and implicitly racist rhetoric, and fuelled by the same administration that sought to "end welfare as we know it" (Clinton). Carceral expansion entailed an explosion of public expense and thus, had the very effect that Reagan and Clinton (at least rhetorically) sought to curb by rolling back the welfare state. While the proponents of the notion of the 'Prison-Industrial Complex' (cf. Gilmore 2007; Davis 2003) maintain that carceral expansion saw a large-scale privatization of prisons and thus, was driven by the profit motive, according to sociologist Loïc Wacquant, in fact, "what distinguishes punishment in America—as in other advanced societies—is the degree to which it has re-

mained stubbornly and distinctively public" (2010: 610).¹

Providing a discourse analysis of political rhetoric and legal texts, which I will supplement with statistical evidence, I will argue that the development of a carceral state under the neoliberal paradigm can be read as the epitome of the paradoxicality of neoliberalism, as denunciations of 'big government' and the concomitant rollback of the welfare state coexist with a strong state: it is more acceptable to put the 'underclass' excluded from the labor opportunities available in the neoliberal economic order (cf. Wacquant 2009b) behind bars, to have the fiscus pay for their maintenance, and, crucially, to have them *work*, than to have the public hand dole out assistance to 'welfare queens' or 'crack moms,' who allegedly idly lounge on sofas watching TV. I will refer to the ambivalent negotiation of said issues in *The Wire* to highlight the powerful hold that 'pull yourself up by your own bootstraps' ideology has even on progressive spectrums of the American cultural imaginary. In the talk's second part, I will argue that neoliberalism has resulted in a Posthuman moral-political zeitgeist in the United States: while the punitive turn as the *conditio sine qua non* of carceral expansion has resulted

¹ According to Wacquant, "After two decades of gusting ideological winds at their back, favorable economic and budgetary circumstances, frantic lobbying, and the pressing need to expand custodial capacity given grotesque overcrowding in existing facilities, private prison firms managed to capture only 6% of the 'carceral market' at their peak in 2000 (one-fourth of their projected goal of 1995)" (2010: 610).

in the fact that individuals from economically poor communities of color are increasingly locked away for life (cf. Gottschalk 2015), which betrays a view of such communities as unfit for rehabilitation and thus, as devoid of a soul as the necessary precondition of moral reform, neoliberalism has simultaneously *anima*-ted² corporations, since the Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Committee* (2010) not only upheld the notion of corporate personhood anchored in the Bill of Rights, but significantly expanded the rights of corporations. Thus, one could argue (perhaps somewhat hyperbolically) that neoliberalism has resulted in an affective regime in which corporations are to be afforded empathy (think of the publicly funded bailouts in the financial crisis of 2008), while the poor, particularly those racialized as nonwhite, are dehumanized (by being considered soulless) and not only denied empathy, but even punished for their poverty, for which, the neoliberal narrative maintains, they only have themselves to blame.

Katharina Motyl is Assistant Professor (*akademische Rätin a.Z.*) at the American Studies department of University of Mannheim. She obtained her PhD in American Studies from Freie Universität Berlin in 2013. In her second book project tentatively titled “Dependent in the Land of Liberty: Drugs, Addiction, and Pow-

² *anima*: Latin word for soul.

er in U.S. Culture from the Early Republic to the ‘War on Drugs,’ she is writing a cultural history of substance dependence which focuses on the loops of interaction between medical, legal, and cultural discourses/practices concerning substance use and dependence among social minorities. Her publications include the monograph *With the Face of the Enemy – Arab American Literature since 9/11* (forthcoming with Campus in early 2019) and the edited volume *The Failed Individual – Amid Exclusion, Resistance, and the Pleasure of Non-Conformity* (Campus, 2017). Her latest essays address the erosion of African American civil rights through ‘mass incarceration’ entailed by the “War on Drugs,” Colson Whitehead’s novel *The Underground Railroad*, and literary responses by Iraqi writers to the U.S.’ 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation.

NEOLIBERALISM

Panel | Sunday, 01.00–02.30 pm

Chair: Fabian Eggers

The Neoliberal Democratic Imaginary and Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom*

My project begins with the habitual gesture that opens much current scholarship on neoliberalism, that is, by noting the amorphous messiness of the term and its widely divergent uses. In particular studies that trace the history of the neoliberal movement are often strangely disconnected from research invested in present social

and cultural manifestations, especially the subject formations to which neoliberalism has given rise. This paper, then, presents a brief narrative that tries to untangle some of this mess and suggests that the disconnection between different branches of scholarship today is testament to the changing meanings of neoliberalism since it was conceived in the first half of the twentieth century. What emerges from this account, though, as a persistent source of attractive force is a peculiar neoliberal vision of democracy, at odds with such older conceptions of popular sovereignty as are at play in Wendy Brown, for instance. Turning finally to American literature, I argue that Jonathan Franzen’s 2010 novel *Freedom* takes this neoliberal democratic imaginary to its logical extreme when it plays out the idea of trading the environment as a scarce commodity in a free market. Franzen’s novel puts to the test a utopian fantasy of neoliberal governance where the issue of nature conservation is more effectively resolved by the price system in a free-market society than by a democracy that grounds popular sovereignty in electoral majorities.

A. Elisabeth Reichel holds a Dr. des. in Anglophone Literary and Cultural Studies from the University of Basel. Her first book is entitled *Writing Anthropologists, Sound-ing Primitives: The Poetry and Scholarship of Edward Sapir, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict* (Nebraska UP, accepted with

conditions). Her second book project, “After Free Markets,” examines liberal democratic imaginaries in the American novel of the Gilded Age and the Neoliberal Era. Besides these main research interests, she has also published and presented on audionarratology, the functions of music in critical theory, Vijay Seshadri’s poems, Irish film, and, most recently, psychoanalysis and ethnographic film.

De Doctrina Neoliberali

This paper follows Weber in discussing the spirit of capitalism in secularized society, and considers more recent work on spirituality and capital by Goodchild, Konings, Ramey, Martin and Taylor. This discussion is undertaken with the subsequent goal of outlining and critiquing what happens to the spirit of capital at our current post-rupture juncture, and answering the question of what kinds of spirituality rush in to fill that spiritual void in the neoliberal order. This is to say that, as Derrida argued in “Structure, Sign, and Play,” the epistemological centre previously thought to be occupied by some form of metanarrative or transcendental signified (i.e. God) was revealed to be empty, at least in part, through pronouncements by Nietzsche (“God is dead”), Heidegger (onto-theology), and Freud (fragmented subjectivity). Where money and finance are concerned, Mark Taylor equates this moment of rupture with “going off the gold standard [which] was the economic

equivalent of the death of God." So, as our belief systems—economic, religious, political—are deconstructed, and perceived as being empty or unmotivated, my paper looks at what now occupies the void left in their wake, particularly during the empty or ethically bankrupt Trump presidency. As Randy Martin wrote "the risk-driven accumulation of finance that distinguishes neoliberalism [...] would meet its moralizing faith in the neoconservative commitments to evangelizing intervention" and, as I will argue the kind of transactional faith for which evangelicals are known is joined by a number of other belief systems, all of which are intimately linked to finance and the circulation of wealth.

Joyce Goggin is a senior lecturer in literature at the University of Amsterdam, where she also conducts research in film and media studies. She has published widely on gambling and finance in literature, painting, film, TV, and computer games. Her most recent published work includes "Everything is Awesome": *The LEGO Movie* and the Affective Politics of Security" in *Finance and Society* (<http://financeand-society.ed.ac.uk/article/view/2574>), "Crise et comédie: Le système de John Law au théâtre néerlandais," in *La réception du Système de Law* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2017), "Trading and Trick Taking in the Dutch Republic: Pasquin's Wind Cards and the South Sea Bubble," in *Playthings*

in *Early Modernity: Party Games, Word Games, Mind Games* (Western Michigan University, 2017), and a co-edited volume entitled *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness* (Routledge 2017).

HUMAN LABOR IN THE 21ST-CENTURY AMERICAN NOVEL

Panel | Sunday, 02.45–04.15 pm

Chair: Ridvan Askin

Speed and the Fragility of the Worker

Labor in the West has been undergoing structural changes during the last decades so that it is now increasingly characterized by the use of information technology. Instead of working physically, workers are oftentimes in multiple ways of engaging in cyberspace. Acceleration and speed accompany these social and economic developments. As a consequence thereof, the individual has to become ever faster, more flexible and effective as well as always prepared. The fact that the worker is constantly confronted with the necessity to keep up with the pace underlines speed's relationship with power or, as Robert Hassan notes, its imperial nature. Speed represents an arena where power is negotiated and where continuous functioning is not considered as the ultimate goal but rather as the norm. Eventually, speed regulates how individuals are defined and valued.

Joshua Ferris' novel *The Unnamed* (2010) criticizes this "malady" of our times by hint-

ing at the limits and contingency of our physical bodies. Its main protagonist is a highly successful lawyer whose work life is disrupted as he experiences a condition that causes him to walk without stopping. Even though his mind protests against the uncontrollable walks, his body seems to react to stress with walking. While he literally becomes more physically mobile than ever before, he also removes himself from his previous stable, efficient, and ordered life and is no longer able to work. Depicting a protagonist whose physical pace cannot be controlled in a world that is becoming ever faster and who derives neither a sense of self nor meaning from it, ultimately distorts American narratives of mobility and success. It represents a counter-narrative that shifts the critical attention towards the embodied experience of working and the corporeal effects of keeping up with the pace of our times. While weakness, illness, impairment and other forms of "inadequacy" have no place in normalized configurations and descriptions of the contemporary workplace, the analysis of Ferris' main protagonist helps to highlight the fragility and precariousness of current configurations of efficient laboring bodies, which, even though they might be described in technical terms, can and should never function machine-like.

Juliane Strätz is currently working as an academic assistant at the University of

Mannheim and writing her dissertation thesis "Human Machines? Laboring Bodies in Late Capitalism." She holds a Master of Education from the University of Potsdam as well as a Master of Arts from Clark University, Worcester, MA. In 2015, she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship.

An Author Who Feels Their Pain: The Emotional Economy Underlying David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King*

David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King* has rightly been read as an insightful commentary on the wide-ranging economic and ideological changes throughout the US in the 1970s and 1980s. Paying meticulous attention to the individual, institutional and societal implications of these changes towards post-industrialism, the unfinished novel has been classified as a "study in the neoliberal transformation of American governance" (Godden and Szalay 2014) and even hailed as a template for future writing of the "American communist or left front" (Shapiro 2014). While its plea for civic virtue, meaningful communities and concrete labor over the alienating tendencies of financial proceedings or distracting entertainment regimes is widely recognized, the emotional economy underlying the text deserves more attention.

This talk examines *The Pale King* in the context of the convergence and mutual influence of economic and emotional spheres in post-industrial societies. In

the contemporary structure that Eva Illouz calls “Emotional Capitalism” (2008), the mandate to instrumentalize and rationalize (thus reify) the emotions of oneself and others is omnipresent. Seen through this perspective, Wallace’s programmatic effort to let his readership participate in the replacement of postmodern solipsism and mindless materialism with a “New Sincerity” (Kelly 2010) and a humanistic “felt value” (Severs 2017) reveals itself as a skillful navigation of this economic-emotional intersection. Indeed, as far as the novel’s narrative echoes “emotional labor” (Hochschild 1983) and valorizes the alleviating effects of work (however tedious), it is reminiscent of Emotional Capitalism’s therapeutic rhetoric—a finding that qualifies the novel’s assessment as politically subversive. While Wallace’s innovative take on the dialectics of individual gratification and social accountability remains valuable, an examination of such affinities to capitalism’s commodification of emotions not only widens the interpretative lens on *The Pale King* but also helps to place the remarkable success that Wallace’s writing enjoys in a larger sociocultural context.

Fabian Eggers is a PhD candidate at the Graduate School of North American Studies at the John F. Kennedy Institute (FU Berlin) in the field of Literary Studies. His research carries the working title “Aesthetics of Intimacy in Contemporary American Literature.”

VENUES

Conference

Grosser Hörsaal
English Department, University of Basel
Nadelberg 6
4051 Basel

Saturday Dinner

Cantina Don Camillo
Burgweg 7, 2nd floor
4058 Basel

→ Tram 1, 2, 6, or 15 to Wettsteinplatz. Turn west into Grenzacherstrasse. After c. 200m, turn right into Burgweg. Or...
→ Bus 31, 33, 34, 36, or 38 to Rosengarten. Walk east on Grenzacherstrasse, turn left into Burgweg. Or...
→ Let’s walk together!

Sunday Lunch

Restaurant Kornhaus
Kornhausgasse 10
4051 Basel

→ Exit the English Department, turn right on Nadelberg, turn right into Rosshofgasse, walk straight until you hit Petersgraben (c. 80m). Turn left on Petersgraben and walk straight until you hit Kornhausgasse (c. 50m).

REGISTRATION FEE

There is no registration fee, but your advance registration is appreciated.

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IMAGE CREDIT

Amazon Fulfillment Center in San Fernando de Henares, Spain (2013).
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