

CALL FOR PAPERS: 65th Annual Conference of the German Association for American Studies (DGfA) – “American Counter/Publics” John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, May 24-27, 2018

Deadline: January 10, 2018

All members of the association and those interested are invited to submit paper proposals for the 2018 Annual Conference of the German Association for American Studies “American Counter/Publics”.

The “public sphere”—an idea with deep roots in the European enlightenment—has always been a contested concept in American culture and society. Almost by default, American intellectuals, artists, politicians, and activists have stressed the non-unitary, diversified, and oppositional dynamics of all things public. In this manner, the US Constitution, while based on enlightened principles of free debate and rational deliberation, already eschewed a philosophy of consensus building in favor of a philosophy of multi-interested checks and balances. Not the expressiveness of Rousseau’s *volonté générale* but the proceduralism of Madison’s extended republic stood at the beginning of American notions of democratic governance. As a consequence, “public opinion” in the United States could never easily be identified with the “public good,” but has always been open to multiple sub- and non-public (private, corporate, technological, etc.) influences.

Thus, from the early days of the American republic, competing interest groups and commercial mass media (first newspapers, novels, and the theater, then radio, television, and the internet) have worked to pluralize public speech and public action—and ultimately the notion of “publicness” itself. Numerous social, political, and aesthetic developments throughout American history can be (re)described against this background as struggles for publicity, waged against the power of elites to define or usurp the national agenda. Two of the most important American contributions to the theory of the public sphere—Walter Lippmann’s *The Phantom Public* (1925) and John Dewey’s rejoinder *The Public and Its Problems* (1927)—despite their ideological differences concur that the public sphere is not a realm of unbiased exchange and unanimous agreement. Rather, in the United States, the public sphere becomes visible as a multi-agential, commercially embattled, highly mediated, and eventually trans-nationalized aggregate of publics and counterpublics. Numerous later discussions of American counter/publics—from Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, and Michael Warner to Robert Darnton, Michael Hardt, and Catherine R. Squires—have further refined this self-conceptualization of democratic speech under the conditions of capitalist mass media. Recent accounts frequently stress the deterritorialized—though regularly Anglophone—nature of counter/public communication in global digital networks. In particular, the communication of public trust—within political contexts naturally inclined to distrust—has been a central topic in and for American culture.

The 2018 Convention of the German Association of American Studies (DGfA) will deal with questions of publics, counterpublics, publicity, and public (dis)trust in US politics, society, history, and culture, examined through the lenses of literary and cultural studies, political science, sociology, historiography, media studies, economics, and didactics.

For further information please consult the DGfA homepage: <http://dgfa.de/annual-meeting/>

Please send your paper proposals directly to the workshop organizers listed below. Each workshop will have six slots for presentations. A minimum of two presentations have been submitted in advance and will appear in the workshop descriptions below. The deadline for further submissions is **January 10, 2018**.

Speakers at the conference must be members of the Association or of one of its international sister organizations in American Studies. It is not necessary to become a member until the paper proposal has been accepted.

WORKSHOPS

1. **Muckraking 2.0: Activist Modes and Media of Documentary Revisited**
Astrid Böger (Hamburg), Christof Decker (München, LMU)
2. **The Prison as Counter/Public**
Birte Christ (Gießen), Andrea Zittlau (Rostock)
3. **Early Mass Cultures as Counter/Publics**
Aleksandra Boss, Kristina Graaff, Martin Klepper, Simon Rienäcker (HU Berlin)
4. **Counter/Publics and the Private Sphere**
Karsten Fitz (Passau), Stefan Hippler (JMU Würzburg), Katrin Horn (FAU Erlangen), Johannes Voelz (Frankfurt)
5. **Transnational Periodical Counter/Publics**
Florian Freitag, Tim Lanzendörfer (JGU Mainz)
6. **Electronic Agoras: Inter/Multimedial Dissensus and the Public Discourse of Islamophobia**
Elena Furlanetto (Duisburg-Essen), Frank Mehring (Nijmegen)
7. **Teaching Counter/Publics: American Studies and Digital Pedagogy**
Ingrid Gessner (Regensburg), Uwe Kuchler (Tübingen)
8. **When the Beacon Breaks: The End of Mass Media and the Rise of the Niche**
Torsten Kathke (JGU Mainz), Sabrina Mittermeier (LMU München)
9. **Taverns, Salons, and Vaudeville Theaters: Space and Public Spheres in Nineteenth-Century America**
Evangelia Kindinger (Ruhr-Universität Bochum), Dietmar Meinel (Duisburg-Essen)
10. **Rumor, Gossip, and Reputation in the American Counter/Public Sphere**
Pierre-Héli Monot (München), Florian Zappe (Göttingen)
11. **Public Feeling**
Heike Paul (Erlangen)
12. **(Trans)National Counter/Publics and the Politics of Humor in US Culture**
Erik Redling (Halle), Stefanie Schäfer (Jena)
13. **American Studies as Engaged Scholarship: Doing Public Humanities from the Local to the Transnational**
Regina Schober (Mannheim), Alexander Starre (FU Berlin)
14. **The Ableist Public/Crip Counterpublics**
Simon Strick (Free University Berlin), Olga Tarapata (University of Cologne)

1) Muckraking 2.0: Activist Modes and Media of Documentary Revisited

In a famous statement, John Grierson defined documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality”. Coined in the 1930s with regard to film, Grierson’s oft-cited formulation has much broader implications and, as this workshop proposes, may be applied to different modes and media of documentary, among them films, television programming, literature, theater, performance art, comics, blogs, digital platforms, or photo-books. All of these involve factual narratives referencing reality and presenting truth claims that use aesthetic means creatively and move beyond the confines and norms of news reporting. Arguably, they are among the most important genres and formats claiming to address and represent the public interest.

In contrast to earlier decades, some of these modes became big business in the 21st century with Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* setting a new record by earning more than 100 million dollars. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, global terrorism, ecological disasters, the crisis of the financial system, fears of surveillance, and the contentious 2016 presidential race challenged documentarians to create new ways of expressing and promoting political engagement. Moreover, alongside traditional forums, web-based platforms further helped to radically re-define the public sphere of technologically mediated modes of documentary.

These changes inspired new aesthetic approaches and forms of digital distribution, resulting in a surge of partisan and activist productions ranging from 9/11-conspiracy theories to ecocritical blockbusters, documentary satire, or new attempts at general consciousness raising. This activist tradition has a long history in American culture beginning in the 1930s and evolving through the civil rights and countercultural periods. The workshop addresses the remarkable burgeoning of various new modes (and media) of documentary in the last two decades against this historical backdrop and relates it to different theoretical debates, among them the new documentary rhetoric and poetics, and the increasing convergence of documentary and activism.

Organizers:

Astrid Böger (Universität Hamburg), astrid.boeger@uni-hamburg.de

Christof Decker (Universität München, LMU), decker@lmu.de

Speakers:

Julia Faisst (Universität Eichstätt), “Homelessness 2.0: New Documentary Modes of Precarious Habitats in Late Capitalism”

Babette B. Tischleder (Universität Göttingen), “The Inconvenience of Loving Gaia: On the Style and Sentiment of Ecocritical Documentaries”

2) The Prison as Counter/Public

Organizers:

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Currently, 2.3 million people are incarcerated in prisons, jails, juvenile detentions centers, and other correctional facilities in the United States. The entire population of the American corrections system, which includes individuals on parole and probation, amounts to 7.3 million. The institution of prison and its population, this panel suggests, constitute an important American counter public for at least two reasons. One, because prison's basic function is to keep a large population outside of the public sphere. Moreover, the corrections system as a whole has more than two percent of the population live in the liminal space between "inside" and "outside" of prison – or on the margins of the public sphere. Two, the prison, its margins, and the discourses produced about it from within and without constitute a counter public because they engage in forms of resistance against mainstream public discourses about justice and the nexus between crime and punishment. At the same time, however, the line between "inside" and "outside," between counter public and public(s) is porous, and often characterized by either strictly policed or resistant exchanges.

In this panel we investigate the prison as a space that creates its own counter public domain. We invite papers that, on the one hand, analyze the prison's construction of this discrete counter public and the exchanges between "inside" and "outside," between counter and public/s. What are the rules and internal regimes of the prison as counter public? When, where, and how does exchange happen between inside and outside, and what does it produce – resistance, affirmation, critique, modes of compliance, ...? And what are historically specific versions of the prison as a clearly demarcated counter public with its own coherence and its exchanges with the public? Papers may be grounded in empirical sociological or anthropological work, but also employ literary and cultural studies perspectives to focus on activist and aesthetic engagements with the prison's "inside" and "outside."

Please send abstracts (ca. 300 words) to
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Confirmed Speakers:

Dr. Aylwyn Walsh
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Jayne Thompson, MFA
Creative Writing and English
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3) Early Mass Cultures as Counter/Publics

Aleksandra Boss, Kristina Graaff, Martin Klepper, Simon Rienäcker (HU Berlin)

In the 1920s, Walter Lippmann coined the phrase „the manufacture of consent“ (*Public Opinion*) to characterize one of the greatest challenges to democracy in his time. Two poles in his thinking are the individual mind and the mass. The individual produces a personal „fiction“ of the world. Ideally, the mass of conglomerate fictions is channeled towards reasonable consent. However, as Lippmann writes, „the mass is constantly exposed to suggestion:“ public opinion is volatile. Leadership may in reality not reside in politics, but, for instance, in „a powerful newspaper proprietor.“ The influence of mass media and cultures fascinated and worried intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century when reading, listening, and viewing publics became national and, perhaps, unpredictable.

This workshop explores forms of early mass cultures such as newspapers, magazines, radio, moving pictures, theaters, sport events or other spaces of consumption between 1890 and 1940. How did they become sites of public opinion? How did audiences respond to, navigate and participate in these spaces? In a narrower sense, of course, variety and minstrel shows, travelling theaters, the lyceum and an ever precarious market for magazines and books had always been manifestations of the public sphere. The reach and consequence of popular culture became more pronounced with syndication, national media, new printing techniques and self-reflective marketing tools. In the ages of Progressivism, New Nationalism, and the Great Depression these new public spheres had great opportunities to become, to an extent, counter publics.

We want to explore where mass cultural products were positioned between consent and dissent, how they were shaped along intersectional lines and which models of a public sphere they exhibited or projected.

Further possible topics for papers:

- The public in African-American newspapers in the 1920 and 30s
- Early radio shows as sites of consent and critique
- Department stores as public spaces
- Public intervention through pulps
- Maintenance of power structures and hierarchies in early mass cultures
- The public citizen as consumer
- Governance through mass cultures
- Mass cultural dissemination of emotion rules and affective control
- Whose public? Gender, race, class, ability, age, religion in mass culture
- Viewing practices as public/mass experience (movies, sporting events)

Please send abstracts (ca. 300 words) to
martin.klepper@rz.hu-berlin.de

4) Counter/Publics and the Private Sphere

If “[c]ounterpublics are, by definition, formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment,” as Michael Warner claims in *Public and Counterpublics* (63), how does this conflict play out for counter/publics which originate in what Jürgen Habermas considers the seed of all public interaction: “the intimate” and private sphere of domesticity and familial attachment? (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* 29). In an attempt to approach the conundrum of the principal relationality of public and private spheres, this workshop seeks to address private counter/publics as specific reactions to the interpellations of a public sphere that is constructed as political, accessible, and rational. We want to focus on counter/publics which emerge from the private sphere in the sense of intimate, familial, or affective and thus domestic affiliations, and furthermore investigate questions of how counterpublics relate to the private sphere and how they alter the understanding of the privacy.

Theories of counterpublics emerged in critiques of Habermas’ idealization of the white, male, bourgeois public sphere (e.g. Fraser). They are often understood to provide a corrective to homogenous and exclusive notions of the public sphere as well as to the very notion of the private sphere – both of which are seen as the pillars of a liberal conception of the social. They particularly emphasize the publicity of groups that are excluded from mainstream political discourses on the basis of gender, race, or sexual orientation (e.g. Warner). In these contexts, private counter/publics have become an effective means to fight for what Fraser calls “full parity of participation in public debate” (66).

We are interested in contributions from across the Humanities that address these concerns ranging from the 18th to the 21st century, from oral to digital culture, from race, gender, and queer studies to history of knowledge approaches, political science, sociology and cultural/literary studies. Inspired by Michael Warner, Nancy Fraser, and other scholars invested in the political and cultural potential of counter/publics and the boundaries between ‘the public’ and the supposedly diametrically opposed ‘private sphere,’ we seek to address the following questions:

- In how far does the existence of counterpublic discourses presuppose and/or engender the existence of diverse and oppositional forms of privacy?
- How can private counter/publics help to delineate the confines of the concepts of ‘private’ and ‘public’?
- How can private counter/publics contribute to the shape of democracy, foster participatory parity, and circumvent bourgeois power relations?
- What are the rhetorics, strategies, domains, and spaces of private counter/publics?
- Which conceptions of counterpublic and private spheres are implicit or explicit in American law, from the ratification of the Constitution over “The Right to Be Let Alone” to present enforcements of the Espionage Act?
- What are the figurations of public, counterpublic, and private spheres enacted by American social movements, including labor movements, women’s rights movements, LGBT movements, the American Indian Movement, the Civil Rights and Black Lives Matter Movements, and DREAM Act activism?
- How do different modes of communication transgress boundaries of the intimate and public sphere (e.g. gossip and rumor, scandal journalism, publicly accessible diaries, fan culture, mommy blogs, coming out vlogs)

Please send your abstracts of no more than 250 words and a short biographical statement to

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Invited Speakers:

Cedric Essi (Bremen): "Queer Memoirs on Interracial Adoption: Domestic Intimacies, Public Interventions, and the Rise of Multiracialism"

Bärbel Harju (München): "Privacy in the Age of Hyper-Publicity"

Stephan Kuhl (Frankfurt): "Private Language and American Literary Publics"

Pia Wiegink (Mainz): "Domestic Publicity in Antebellum African American Women's Life Writing"

5) Transnational Periodical Counter/Publics

Florian Freitag / Tim Lanzendörfer (JGU Mainz)

From their beginnings as the new media of their day to their contemporary, mass-medial and digitalized guise, periodicals have participated in and shaped American public life as both makers and reflections of public opinion and concerns. As such, they have become almost epitomical of the public sphere and of transnational engagement. As Nancy Fraser has claimed, “it is commonplace nowadays to speak of ‘transnational public spheres’” (2014, 8): our workshop seeks to historicize this claim within the realm of periodical production, but also to extend it to the issue of periodicals’ relationship to counterpublics. We wish to think through the connections beyond the nation that North American periodical production had and still has, and to begin to uncover its role in the contestation of both publics and counterpublics. At the same time, we would like to pay attention to the limits of this terminology, especially in the context of what may appear a declining usefulness of either term. Reading periodicals, our contention is, permits us to understand more clearly what we mean when we speak of the “transnational” as well as the “counter/public”.

We thus seek papers that read periodicals—from the Early Republic to the present and from popular to radical magazines—at the boundary between transnational publics and counterpublics. Case studies of individual magazines and newspapers as well as theoretical arguments as to how periodicals engage the use and usefulness of these terms themselves are both welcome.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Can periodicals instantiate a counterpublic, and if so how, and what happens when counterpublic discourses become hegemonic?
- What means have periodicals used to position themselves within a public / counterpublic matrix?
- What specific role do their materiality and their processes of production and distribution play in this?
- How do periodicals produce internal counterpublics, as suggested by recent Op-Eds in the *New York Times*, for example?
- In what ways are the transnational and the targeting of counterpublic(s) related, both generally and in the case of specific periodicals?
- How has the digitization of the periodical market interacted with its ability to reflect and constitute counterpublics?

Set Speakers: Matthew Pethers; Michael C. Jackman

Please send an abstract (max. 300 words) and a short bio-bibliographical note to both freitagf@uni-mainz.de and lanzendo@uni-mainz.de by January 10, 2018.

6) Electronic Agoras: Inter/Multimedial Dissensus and the Public Discourse of Islamophobia

Prof. Dr. Frank Mehring
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Dr. Elena Furlanetto
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This workshop investigates the predisposition of multi- and intermedial narratives to complicate expressions of consensus or dissensus, and their ability to offer plural, even dichotomous responses to public debates. Films and television broadcasts in particular offer a privileged surface for medial interactions and collisions. A single text containing diverse media – each pervaded by its own mythologies – gives rise to multivocal narratives and may display dynamics of internal accord and disaccord.

Our workshop will concentrate on Islamophobia, a public narrative that became ubiquitous in film and TV productions since the early 2000s. Scholarship has extensively documented the stereotyping of Islamic cultures and geographies in post 9/11 cinema; few however, have commented on how post 9/11 Islamophobia has fragmented into more complex micronarratives, dispersed throughout a film's multimedia structure. Post 9/11 Islamophobia in film and television begs us to modify Richard Dyer's statement that "the effectiveness of stereotypes resides in the way they invoke a consensus" (12) to make room for a new wave of stereotypes that thrive on in-text dissensus. We invite papers that critically investigate the public discourse of Islamophobia by turning to multi- and intermedial narratives of American film and television culture. Contributions may include, the following topics:

- Perpetuation or contradiction of Islamophobia in recent films and television series;
- The public discourse of Islamophobia, building consensus, dissensus, or both;
- Interpictorial and intersonic patterns of stereotyping Muslims in recent Hollywood films and television series;
- The afterlives of post-9/11 Islamophobia;
- Film as "audio-visual/electronic agoras" and movie theatres as public spaces of dissent;
- Internet responses to TV/film productions

Invited Speakers

Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt, University of Graz: "'Fear of an Islamic Planet?' Intermedial Exchange and the Rhetorics of Islamophobia"

Dr. Martina Pfeiler, Ruhr University Bochum: "'1700% Project: Mistaken for Muslim': Intermedia Interplay and Challenging Islamophobia in Anida Yoeu Ali's Performance Poetry Clip"

Prof. Brigitte Georgi-Findlay, TU Dresden: "Inter/Multimedia Constructions of Islam in Contemporary TV Series"

7) Teaching Counter/Publics: American Studies and Digital Pedagogy

Ingrid Gessner (Regensburg) ingrid.gessner@ur.de

Uwe Kuechler (Tübingen) uwe.kuechler@uni-tuebingen.de

This workshop aims to connect Foreign Language Education and American Studies teaching about counter/publics, (engagement in) the public sphere and digital pedagogy. We take our cue from Randy Bass, who advised American Studies digital media practitioners to understand “pedagogy and learning as possible sites of resistance” (2008, 187-88). The onset of the Trumpian presidency shockingly demonstrates the increased importance of education about social, racial and gender justice. Transferring knowledge about counter/publics, mostly produced in the academic ‘ivory tower’, to teaching and learning environments causes as much friction as to acknowledge and support social, cultural and political change.

We invite papers, projects and case studies on Foreign Language Education and the teaching of American literature, culture and media that focus on the public sphere and/or feature modes of digital collaboration, both within and outside digital learning environments. Proposed papers for this workshop may focus on, but are not restricted to, the exemplary keywords— North American counter/publics, Foreign Language Education, Professionalization, the Digital Classroom, Critical Digital Pedagogy—and the following questions:

- How are we teaching American writers’, artists’, and activists’ responses of dissent? Can the necessary reflective dialogue flourish within digital media? How do we think critically about our tools, how we use them, and who has access to them?
- What implications does digitalization have for content and knowledge production, public educational requirements and counter/publics, for material development and methodology of foreign language education, for the inclusiveness of digital classrooms and the professionalization of teachers?
- How exactly do digital learning environments add value to the knowledge of and interaction with counter/publics, to (foreign language) learning and to American Studies? How does the digital classroom include and blend different ways of knowing, learning and experiencing languages, literature and cultures? How do those digital teaching and learning concepts interlace the opportunities provided by digital media with requirements of curricular and (latest) teaching principles, and the pragmatic real-life conditions and experiences?

Confirmed Speakers:

Horst Tonn (Tübingen): “New Formats for Digital Teacher Trainings”

Sebastian M. Herrmann (Leipzig): “Questioning the Authority of the Linear Form? Leipzig’s Social Hypertext Reader SHRIMP and the ‘Introduction to American Studies’”

A proposal should include your contact information, the title of your paper, an abstract of about 300 words, a brief biographical statement, and a note on any audio/visual requirements.

Please submit your abstracts and supporting information to both:

Ingrid Gessner (Regensburg/Feldkirch) ingrid.gessner@ur.de

Uwe Kuechler (Tübingen) uwe.kuechler@uni-tuebingen.de

8) When the Beacon Breaks: The End of Mass Media and the Rise of the Niche

Torsten Kathke (JGU Mainz) & Sabrina Mittermeier (LMU München)

During the 1980s and 1990s, the media space in which national discourses in the United States played out changed fundamentally. By 1995, the “Year of the Internet” (W. Joseph Campbell), the world wide web went live, it had become clear that the way (news) media was consumed would become altered irrevocably. While the spread of new information technologies in the beginning and middle of the twentieth century had meant an increasing massing of audiences, new technologies now in contrast led to more and more clearly and thinly defined niches.

Tom Nichols contends that in US culture, expertise is not only no longer valued, but actively rejected and contested by citizens. The political climate of "fake news" and opinions purporting to be facts that made possible the election of American president Donald Trump, has arisen not only out of the new space of media consumption, but also because of this erosion of expertise. Niche targeting of audiences by news media ranging from merely partisan coverage of current events to the perpetuation of conspiracy theories and lies has led to a severely fragmented public discourse. In that context, this panel wants to foreground questions such as:

- How do changes in mass media influence public discourse? Which longer historical trajectories for such changes can be discerned?
- Which role have experts or “public intellectuals” played in establishing public trust?
- How has a “participatory culture” shaped by social media influenced the way we consume news? How does it influence the relationship between politicians and the public?
- What was the meaning of “free speech” in changing media environments?
- What role did emerging technologies play in this context?
- How have recent political movements made use of new media?

The panel seeks entries from historians, as well as those working on culture, media, and their intersection more generally. Please send abstracts (ca. 250 words) of proposed presentations and a short biographical blurb by January 10, 2018 to: kathke@uni-mainz.de

Confirmed Speakers:

- Martin Lüthe (FU Berlin): *When the Ticker Ticks: Telegraphic Fiction, Media Change, and Infatuating Communication*
- Sabrina Mittermeier (LMU München): *“From The WELL, Actually”: How Partisan Websites Flooded Public Discourse*

(9) Taverns, Salons, and Vaudeville Theaters: Space and Public Spheres in Nineteenth-Century America

Evangelia Kindinger (Ruhr-Universität Bochum), Dietmar Meinel (Duisburg-Essen)

In one of his *Temperance Tales* (1848), Timothy Shay Arthur imagines the gathering of so-called drunkards in “a moral pest-house” (2). In this tavern, the “little band pledge themselves to each other, never again to drink any kind of intoxicating drink” even as the group breathes “the tempting fumes of the potations they loved” (2). Eventually, “men of all ages, mostly mechanics and working-men” (3) renounce their individual struggle with alcohol and pledge to lead a life of temperance. They thus turn the “moral pest-house” into a space of social reform, and establish a civic community similar to what scholars deemed a public sphere.

However, while the “bourgeois public sphere” has shaped cultural, political, and social life in capitalist societies (see Habermas), the concept also marginalized or excluded vast groups of people – women, immigrants, workers, and enslaved people – who have always participated in “subaltern counterpublics” (Fraser 67). The all-male, working-class space of the tavern exemplifies the privileges and entanglements of (counter)public spheres, yet also speaks to the centrality of space in their formation. This panel aims to explore this centrality of space in the development and transformation of public (counter)spheres in North America, specifically in the nineteenth century. It is inspired by Miriam Hansen’s work about nickelodeons and vaudeville theaters that shows how participation in a shared viewing experience enabled audiences, particularly women and immigrants, to negotiate and subvert the hierarchical modes of production, distribution, and screening while registering an increasing incorporation of these counterpublics into an American middle-class consensus.

As we see a plurality of spheres that co-existed, competed, and interacted with one another, we particularly welcome papers looking at their formation, interactions, and entanglements. The “publics” needed space: where were they located, how did specific spaces become settings for “the” public, and who participated in acts of making a space public? We seek an interdisciplinary interrogation and invite scholars from various disciplines to participate. Spaces that are of special interest include the tavern, the church, the library, the steamboat, the salon, the gallery, the theater, the beach, or the park.

Workshop Organizers

Dr. Evangelia Kindinger, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, evangelia.kindinger@rub.de

Dr. Dietmar Meinel, Universität Duisburg-Essen, dietmar.meinel@uni-due.de

Speakers

Prof. Dr. Laura Bieger, “Toward a Definition of Public Space” (University of Groningen)

Prof. Dr. Daniel Stein, “Crime Scenes as Popular Public Spheres in Antebellum City Mystery Novels” (University of Siegen)

10) Rumor, Gossip, and Reputation in the American Counter/Public Sphere

Florian Zappe (Göttingen) & Pierre-Héli Monot (Munich)

Although gossip is and has always been ubiquitous in the American public sphere, it has only occasionally come to the attention of scholars of American culture. However, in the current historical context in which rumor often assumes the traits of ('alternative') fact, in which the distinction between hearsay and substantiated information increasingly appears to be faltering, and in which conspiracy theories are lifted from obscure counterpublics to the center stage of cultural, social and political debates, a thorough investigation of the role of gossip in the American public sphere seems to be more than necessary. This workshop provides a framework for this discussion based on the premise that gossip is never neutral. In his study *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1985), James C. Scott notes that gossip

is almost by definition a story told about an absent third party; once launched, it becomes an anonymous tale with no author but many retailers [*sic*]. [...] Gossip is never "disinterested"; it is a partisan effort (by class, faction, family) to advance its claims and interests against those of others. (282)

Being "a partisan effort" by definition, gossip can serve emancipatory purposes when it is used as a form of subaltern resistance by segments of society that are otherwise excluded from hegemonic public discourse, as it allows the emergence of subversive or alternative counterpublics. On the other hand, hegemonial structures have frequently employed forms of gossip (malicious gossip, character assassination etc.) to frame and discredit the reputation of counter/publics for repressive or disciplinary goals.

This inherent ambiguity raises a number of fundamental questions: How have rumors helped to constitute counter/publics in American history? How has gossip been employed as an either top-down or bottom-up discourse by various counter/publics? Why has gossip *itself* been the object of such academic discredit, given its status as one of the preeminent discursive modes of the American public sphere? As this discussion will have to be conducted beyond disciplinary boundaries, we invite scholars of American literary and cultural studies as well as of history, sociology and philosophy to contribute to the debate.

Possible topics could include but are certainly not limited to:

- Theories of gossip(ing) in the public sphere
 - Gossip *as* counterpublic
 - Subversive gossip
 - Gossip in the 'post-factual' age
 - Gossip as character assassination in American cultural history (e.g. the Salem witch trials, the 'Red Scares', cybermobbing...)
 - Gossip, propaganda, and conspiracy
 - Representations of gossip in literature, film, and art
 - Gossip and 'minority' counter/publics (ethnic, gender, religious, sexual)
- Gossip as social sanction

Confirmed Speakers:

Prof. Dr. Sebastian Jobs (JFKI, FU Berlin): "Uncertain Publics. Loose Talk about Slave Revolts in the Antebellum South"

Dr. Katrin Horn (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg): "Creating a Public (from) Scandal: The Gossip Circles of *Town Topics: The Journal of Society* (1887-1923)"

Please send a short abstract (300 words) and a short bio-note to Florian Zappe (florian.zappe@phil.uni-goettingen.de) and Pierre-Héli Monot (pierre.monot@lrz.uni-muenchen.de).

(11) Public Feeling

Heike Paul (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg)

The presence and role of affect and political emotions in American culture and society have received much attention in a variety of disciplines, ever since Lauren Berlant has identified an „intimate public sphere“ (Berlant 2008) at the heart of US-American political discourse as it evolved during the Reagan era. In the midst of a recent change in political climate, Arlie Hochschildt (2016) has identified „anger and mourning“ as shared feelings of resentment and loss in response to the economic, social, and political depletion of postindustrial regions and the so-called heartland of the US. In dialogue with the work of Berlant, Hochschildt, and others in cultural studies, political science, and sociology, this workshop will examine “public feeling” within its larger conceptual framework that is also indebted to earlier Pragmatist, Marxist, and feminist scholars (among them William James, Raymond Williams, and Marilyn Frye, among others). We will use it as an umbrella term for a broad repertoire of different affective states displayed in public and as the central concept in a research design that integrates felt experiences with cultural critique and critical theory. This workshop seeks to explore the technologies of emotion and affect in American public life, both with regard to current phenomena in political and popular culture and with an eye to a diachronic perspective that identifies genealogies and trajectories of the workings of public feeling, past and present.

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Confirmed Speakers:

Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Bronfen (Zürich): “The Mimicry of Care: Representations of Female Politicians in *Homeland* and *House of Cards*”

Dr. Katharina Gerund (Erlangen): “Public Feeling on the Home Front: The ,Waiting Wives’ of US Wars Abroad“

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Please sent proposals of 300 to 350 words, along with a short cv, to: Heike.Paul@fau.de

12) (Trans)National Counter/Publics and the Politics of Humor in US Culture

Erik Redling (Halle), Stefanie Schäfer (Jena)

From its beginnings, American vernacular humor catered to multiple counter/publics. Yankee jokes and yarns, for instance, appeared in plays, songs, newspapers, and novels and entertained audiences across social, political, ethnic, and geographical (regional, national, and oceanic) borders (Schäfer 2017). Ethnic jokes and racist slurs, but also fraudulence and (self-)inflation in the public sphere (Cohen 2012) persisted from the Knickerbocker School through Sarah Hale's New England novels, navigating, for example, instances of national self-mockery and cultural Othering.

The emergence of a rigid cultural hierarchy towards the 1850s (Levine), however, diversified the open public sphere and its audiences. Dividing American culture into two discrete strata ("high" and "low") with distinct "genteel" and "mass" audiences, cultural arbiters like Charles Eliot Norton regarded American humorist writings as "lowbrow" or "popular", i.e. lacking artistic merit or value. This distinction was supported further when intellectuals and writers such as Thomas Chandler Haliburton, George Augustus Sala, or James Russell Lowell collected, anthologized, and edited American humor writings, anecdotes, and tales. Thus they distributed portrayals of the Downeaster, the Frontier Screamer or the self-inflating politician/speculator to reading audiences, canvassing the facets of an American national character and evoking an imagined past. Hence, the anthologies and character sketches inscribed humor in a folklore tradition that spilled over into 20th century debates around scholarly studies of American Humor such as the work of Constance Rourke (2004 [1931]) and Walter Blair (1937). The latter critic, for instance, contrasts the achievement of fiction writers and humorists (1937, 37), thus distinguishing different writing professions and readerships. From this division between humor and high culture resulted a correlation between a single cultural space and a particular audience that effectively hindered research into the multiple counter/publics addressed by American humorist writings.

This panel revisits the politics of humor and the formation of counter/publics in US culture. It explores how humor reengaged US counter/publics, how it struggled against a cultural elite, and how it negotiated a national character and identity. The focus will be on, for instance, short forms (vignettes, jokes, and "the funnies"); text/image relations (cartoons, literary sketches, and portraits); humorous Othering (minstrelsy, effeminacies, transnational figures, grotesque bodies); diachronic perspectives and alternative formats in/of print culture (mammoth newspapers, dime novels, and broadsheets).

Confirmed panelists

Prof. Holger Kersten (Halle): "'Court-Fools of King Demos': Finding an Audience for Political Humor in 19th-Century America"

PD Dr. Mischa Honeck (Washington/Berlin): "The Senator and his Satirist: Carl Schurz, Thomas Nast, and the Humorization of Ethnicity"

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.

14) The Ableist Public and Crip Counterpublics

Simon Strick (Freie Universität Berlin); email: strick@gsnas.fu-berlin.de

Olga Tarapata (Universität zu Köln); email: tarapata.olga@gmail.com

The public sphere has been shaped by and impacted on notions of dis/ability, ableism, and people with disabilities. The emergence of the modern public depended on the identification and exclusion of bodies deemed unfit to occupy communally shared spaces, both material and discursive: "ugly laws" around 1900 banned the physically disabled and the unsightly from urban space (Schweik, 2009); IQ-testing, eugenics and psychiatry removed masses of people labelled as "feeble-minded" into institutions, discounting them as citizens. Grounded in pathologizing approaches to human variation, these exclusive policies and practices systematically limited people's participation in the public, resulting in what this panel terms the 'ableist public.' Thus, the public achieves its meaning – free exchange, common sense, and rational discourse – over the stigmatization and exclusion of those labelled mentally ill, disabled, or cognitively impaired.

This enforced identification of the public with 'able bodies and minds' has also given rise to 'crip counterpublics:' in the 1960s and 70s, disability activists revolted against public bias, political neglect, ableist architecture and services, and protested the referral of people with disabilities into asylums, prisons, or hospitals. Claiming public visibility, activists demanded accessibility of material and discursive spaces, leading to the *American's with Disabilities Act* of 1990, the first recognition of disability rights in the US. Today's activism continues this critical tradition with interventions like #cripthevote, #NationalADAPT or the MAD-movement, raising awareness on disability rights and demanding public engagement with dis/ability issues like voter restriction, police violence, medical maltreatment, housing, (un)employment, and health care.

The panel invites papers that investigate how cognitive and physical dis/abilities have always been a constitutive part of the public, how narrations frequently equate "becoming public" with "overcoming disability", and what strategies activists have employed to overcome exclusion. We welcome reflections on the discursive and narrative patterns as well as artistic and political struggles articulating the discontents between dis/ability and the ableist public.

Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- Dis/ability Rights Movement and the Public Sphere
- American Eugenics and the Public Sphere
- Cognitive Disability and Citizenship
- Dis/ability as Trope in Narrations of the Public
- Mental Illness and the Public
- Dis/ability and Race (e.g. Intersections of Dis/ability Rights and BlackLivesMatter)
- Mad and Madness Studies
- Mental Disability in/and Academia

Confirmed Speakers

1. Moritz Ingwersen (Trent University, Canada)

“Disability and Geology in the Work of N.K. Jemisin”

2. Sharif Bitar (Universität Oldenburg)

“Witches, Voodoo, and Down's Syndrome: Disability as Intersectional Feminism's Blind Spot in *American Horror Story: Coven*”