

Contents

Issues Published in 2015

Amst 60.1 (2015)

Network Theory and American Studies

ULFRIED REICHARDT, HEIKE SCHAEFER, AND REGINA SCHOBER

ULFRIED REICHARDT, HEIKE
SCHAEFER, AND REGINA
SCHOBER

Introduction: Network Theory and American Studies

ULFRIED REICHARDT

The Network as a Category in Cultural Studies and as a Model for Conceptualizing America

ABSTRACT: The article presents a short survey of the definitions, areas of use, and terminological properties of ‘the network.’ Networks are understood as empirical entities as well as conceptual models, and the network is conceived of as a descriptive as well as an analytical category. Its main properties are recursive interconnectivity, nodality, as well as distributed agency. The links are at least as important as the individual nodes, and networks are always dynamic and emergent entities. The essay discusses representations of networks as well as the network itself as a form of representation. It looks at the Internet as the master network of our times, at knowledge networks, as well as at globalization—which can be conceptualized within the model—and then discusses the ways in which ‘America’ can be better understood by thinking about it in terms of network structures. This concerns early uses of the metaphor in literature, the shift to relational and processual thinking in Pragmatism, as well as political structures. Finally, network structures are explored in narration, painting, as well as music. The article introduces the conceptual tools and framework for the more specifically focused essays that follow in this issue..

WENDY HUI KYONG CHUN

Networks NOW: Belated Too Early

ABSTRACT: What is it about networks that makes them such a compelling, universal concept? How has ‘it’s a network’ become a valid answer: the end rather than the beginning of the analysis? Why and how has it become the diagram for both global capital and contemporary U.S. society? This article addresses these questions by arguing that networks have been central to the emergence, management, and imaginary of neoliberalism, in particular to its narrative of individuals collectively dissolving society. Tracing the ways in which networks, or more precisely the mapping of networks, were embraced as a way to evaporate the postmodern confusion that dominated the late-seventies and early-eighties, this article reveals that the force of networks stems from how they are imaged and what they are imagined to do. Networks allow us to trace and to spatialize unvisualizable interactions as flows: from global capital to environmental risks, from predation to affects. To begin to imagine networks differently, this article argues that, rather than focusing on network maps and connections, we need to think about new media in terms of habitual repetition and leaks.

HANJO BERRESSEM

Déjà Vu: Serres after Latour, Deleuze after Harman, ‘Nature Writing’ after ‘Network Theory’

ABSTRACT: In today’s academic landscape, network theories are gaining in discursive and operational currency. In his book *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, for instance, Graham Harman introduces Latour’s actor-network theory into what Harman calls “object-oriented philosophy.” In order to understand the success of recent network theories and to put them into both historical and conceptual perspectives, this essay revisits some network theories *avant la lettre*. Such an ‘archaeology of the future’ is needed because neither Latour nor Harman reference important precursors of network theory, such as Gregory Bateson, Gilles Deleuze, or Michel Serres, in any serious manner. First, the essay describes some of the main characteristics of Latour’s actor-network theory in the light of and against Harman’s argument in *Prince of Networks*. Second, it shows in what ways the practice of ‘nature writing’ could be thought of as a precursor of network theory. Third, it delineates some Deleuzian concepts that might be helpful for future network theories. In its conclusion, this essay argues that ‘doing network theory’ implies a number of fundamental changes in the practice of literary and cultural studies, as well as in the practice of the humanities in general.

SABINE SIELKE

Network and Seriality: Conceptualizing (Their) Connection

ABSTRACT: Just as the concepts of networks and networking, the principle of seriality and forms of series production have enjoyed much currency lately in divergent fields of scholarly and scientific inquiry. Moreover, both networks and series are increasingly recognized as viable structural patterns of media and media formats. Why is it, then, that we embrace the trope of the network wholeheartedly and tend to downplay the insistence of seriality? This essay first addresses a few possible answers to this question to subsequently explore the proximity of the two concepts.

REGINA SCHOBER

America as Network: Notions of Interconnectedness in American Transcendentalism and Pragmatism

ABSTRACT: The network represents a prevalent figure of thought in U.S. American culture. This essay argues that American Transcendentalism and Pragmatism, as precursors to current network theories, share a particular mode of ‘networked thinking’ that relies on concepts commonly associated with ‘America’ or ‘Americanness’ such as decentralization, informal associations, mobility, adaptation, and distributed power relations. The reading of some exemplary texts by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, William James, and Gertrude Stein examines the various ways in which they propose and negotiate visions of interconnection in relation to notions of the self, creativity, and geographical/cultural space. As a more or less explicit conceptual model, the network allows these texts to explore epistemological, aesthetic, and political questions in relation to conceptions of the U.S. as a constantly shifting, yet integrative configuration.

JAN D. KUCHARZEWSKI

“The Irreducible Complexity of the Analog World”: Nodes, Networks, and Actants in Contemporary American Fiction

ABSTRACT: Using Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory as an interpretative framework, this paper discusses Daniel Suarez’s *Daemon* (2006) and Richard Powers’ *Gain* (1998) as two contemporary novels that attempt to represent (and ultimately map) a world governed by social/technological/economic networks. Both texts investigate what happens to our notions of agency and self-determinacy when characters and environments are conceptualized as distributed processes of

interconnectivity and recursiveness. Whereas *Daemon* largely relies on particularized and psychologically coherent characters who have to navigate a networked world in which a decentralized computer system begins to take over the United States, *Gain* pushes the network trope even further by suggesting that the individual itself (both as a social and as a narrative construction) is actually a complex network and that fiction must respond to this paradigm by reevaluating both realistic and postmodern modes of representation.

HEIKE SCHAEFER

The Novel as “the Most Complex Artifact of Networking”: The Relevance of Network Theory for the Study of Transcultural Fiction

ABSTRACT: While the study of networks has proliferated in the information, social, and natural sciences, literary critics to date have been hesitant to examine the theoretical implications of network analysis for literary and cultural studies. This essay explores the contribution that network theory can make to the study of transcultural fiction and, hence, by extension, to transnational American Studies. Transcultural narratives aim to forge new connections between diverse literary and cultural traditions. They privilege connectivity, reciprocity, and processuality to undermine notions of cultural purity, autonomy, and stability and to undo the essentialist concepts of identity and alterity these give rise to. Taking Junot Díaz’s novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) as its test case, this essay argues that the concept of the network provides a productive heuristic tool for the analysis of the discursive concerns, representational strategies, and cultural relevance of transcultural fiction.

BIRGIT M. BAURIDL AND
PIA WIEGMINK

Forum

Toward an Integrative Model of Performance in Transnational American Studies

ABSTRACT: This essay argues for a deeper and more theoretically funded integration of Performance Studies approaches into the field of (transnational) American Studies. It suggests that issues which have become central to the American Studies agenda in the wake of the transnational turn can be fruitfully and at times more adequately addressed by the study of ‘cultural performances.’ We explore theoretical parameters rooted in both fields and link them to conceptual (hypo-)theses that call for and highlight the potential of such an interdisciplinary and integrative approach. Based on the idea of culture as a corporeal, communal, and dynamic event rather than a stable textual product, we position the local particularities of cultural performance vis-à-vis the dynamics of global mobility. For this purpose, we propose a twofold

understanding of ‘cultural performance’ that fuses two disciplinary trajectories: First, we need to examine the role and impact of ‘cultural performances’ as particular *acts of cultural expression* (like daily rituals, festive occasions, or theatrical events) in transnational contact zones—sites in which cultures meet, grapple with each other, and inevitably negotiate questions of socio-political agency, representation, and power. Second, we need to develop and evaluate ‘cultural performance’ as a *methodological approach* for the study of transnational processes.

Amst 60.2/3 (2015)

KERSTIN KNOPF

The Turn Toward the Indigenous: Knowledge Systems and Practices in the Academy

ABSTRACT: Since the late 1990s, Indigenous scholars have called for an ‘indigenizing of the academy’ (Mihesuha and Wilson 2004), integrating Indigenous knowledges into discourses and practices of institutions of higher education worldwide. The calls to integrate Indigenous and Western knowledge discourses and practices mainly come from Indigenous researchers throughout the world. They indict the ‘self-evident’ primacy of Western knowledges and presumptuous disregard for Indigenous knowledges in universities that re-produce colonial dominance and epistemic violence. This article analyzes the relationship between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems and practices. It also discusses the Indigenous concepts of *Saytk’ilhl Wo’osim* (resource-sharing), *Enowkinwixw* (consensus-finding), *Tsawalk*, and *Haḥuulism* (a synthesis of Indigenous and Western philosophies articulating the unity of creation) and suggests their applications in the political and social sciences, economics, and environmental studies.

BRIAN GLASER

The Implied Reader and Depressive Experience in Louise Glück’s *The Wild Iris*

ABSTRACT: This essay examines the role of mental illness in contemporary poetics, arguing that it is often overlooked through denial or repressed through misunderstanding. Specifically, it argues that what Wolfgang Iser called the “implied reader” is, in the case of Louise Glück’s *The Wild Iris*, constructed as depressed. The essay offers close readings of her poems, which demonstrate the way a depressed implied reader leads the speaker of the poems to a moment of transformation. The second half of the essay looks at how most contemporary theories of reader-response inadequately describe the disability Glück’s work

references. It offers a critique of the phobia of mental illness in contemporary apologies for literary reading, and argues that even work that acknowledges readers as potentially mentally disabled might benefit from the concept of the “implied reader” in overcoming ableism.

GERFRIED AMBROSCH

American Punk: The Relations between Punk Rock, Hardcore, and American Culture

ABSTRACT: The punk culture has its roots on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite continuous cross-fertilization, the British and the American punk traditions exhibit distinct features. There are notable aesthetic and lyrical differences, for instance. The causes for these dissimilarities stem from the different cultural, social, and economic preconditions that gave rise to punk in these places in the mid-1970s. In the U.K., punk was mainly a movement of frustrated working-class youths who occupied London’s high-rise blocks and whose families’ livelihoods were threatened by a declining economy and rising unemployment. Conversely, in America, punk emerged as a middle-class phenomenon and a reaction to feelings of social and cultural alienation in the context of suburban life. Even city slickers such as the Ramones, New York’s counterpart to London’s Sex Pistols and the United States’ first ‘official’ well-known punk rock group, made reference to the mythology of suburbia (not just as a place but as a state of mind, and an ideal, as well), advancing a subversive critique of American culture as a whole. Engaging critically with mainstream U.S. culture, American punk’s constitutive other, punk developed an alternative sense of Americanness.

STEFANIE SCHÄFER

Phenomenal Woman: Michelle Obama’s Embodied Rhetoric and the Cultural Work of Fashion Biographies

ABSTRACT: Michelle Obama’s role as the first black First Lady of the U.S. is contextualized in discourses of feminism and race, in the historical meaning of the First Lady, and in the world of fashion and celebrity. Her strategy in engaging these discourses is described here as an ‘embodied rhetoric,’ in which she caters to media attention but refuses to comment on her fashion choices, thereby creating a void for interpretation that is filled by a plethora of readings. Drawing from biography and iconicity theory as well as fashion and First Lady Studies, this article discusses three iconic appearances of Obama that demonstrate her stances on the First Lady’s role, black female stereotypes, and fashion as empowerment, respectively. It examines the cultural work of two genres of celebrity texts, biographies and fashion biographies, in order to extrapolate her ‘real’ character and historical

meaning for American womanhood. Obama's case illustrates the interdependence between iconic persona and public mythmaking: The First Lady 'office' serves as a template for the creation of an American fashion icon. As a consequence, the Presidency is no longer a solitary office, but one occupied by a First Couple ruling by political and fashion power. This article discusses three iconic appearances of Obama that comment on her First Lady role, on black female stereotypes, and on fashion as empowerment, respectively. It examines how biographies and fashion biographies interpret these appearances in order to extrapolate her 'real' character and historical meaning for American womanhood.

ANNA PEHKORANTA

Displaced Desires: The Dislocated Self and Melancholic Desire in Chuang Hua's *Crossings* and Fae Myenne Ng's *Steer Toward Rock*

ABSTRACT: This essay investigates two aesthetically innovative Chinese American prose narratives, *Crossings* (1968) by Chuang Hua and *Steer Toward Rock* (2008) by Fae Myenne Ng, which have so far inspired relatively few scholarly readings. Although published forty years apart, both texts convey a melancholic image of displaced desires – loved ones who are lost, beyond reach, or unresponsive – that is echoed by their complex narrative structure and rich stylistic repertoire. Drawing from the psychoanalytically informed notion of racial melancholia, this essay argues that in Chuang's *Crossings* and in Ng's *Steer Toward Rock*, the dynamics of melancholia manifest most prominently in the ways their dislocated characters negotiate between a melancholic desire to preserve a lost object of love, on one hand, and a persistent quest for an integrated sense of self, on the other. By examining their dislocated Asian American subjects, transnational love affairs, and melancholic desire, this essay suggests that both writers contribute to a particular aesthetics and ethics of melancholia, in which identificatory and narrative boundaries alike are contested and transgressed. It further argues that melancholia is present in these two narratives not only as an ethical or political construct, but equally as an aesthetic element that significantly adds to the ethical import of Chuang's and Ng's fiction.

HELGA LÉNÁRT-CHENG

The Role of Indefinite Pronouns in Modeling Wholeness: Gertrude Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography*

ABSTRACT: This article contends that *Everybody's Autobiography* (*EA*) was part of Gertrude Stein's lifelong project to represent the wholeness of humanity. According to Stein, "Everybody's Autobiography [was] to be the Autobiography of every one" (*EA* 99). I propose to take this audacious claim literally, but not in the politicized

sense of Stein writing “for everybody,” “like everybody,” or “in the name of everybody.” Instead, I focus on the formal conditions of representing infinity to argue that the key to Stein’s experiment lies in the possibility of neutralized ascription offered by indefinite pronouns. Indefinite pronouns such as “someone,” “each one,” and “anyone” express degrees of unspecificity, distributability, and variability. By neutralizing ascription, these pronouns open up a space where the autobiographical “I” can expand towards the totality of “everyone,” without losing the intimacy and authority of the “one.” Indefinite pronouns thus create a space of intimate indefiniteness, which challenges our notions of autobiographical unsubstitutability.

LEONARD VON MORZÉ

Forum

Christian Jacob Hütter’s *Washington*: An Introduction, Commentary, and Translation of the Work

Amst 60.4 (2015)

Chance, Risk, Security: Approaches to Uncertainty in American Literature

JOHANNES VOELZ

JOHANNES VOELZ

Chance, Risk, Security: Approaches to Uncertainty in American Literature, An Introduction

Chance

PAUL GRIMSTAD

Providence and Contingency in Edwards, Emerson, and Dickinson

THOMAS DIKANT

The Spectre of Uncertainty”: Chance in Bellamy’s Utopian Fictions

ABSTRACT: Edward Bellamy's utopian novels *Looking Backward* (1888) and *Equality* (1897) imagine a new society of equality, justice, and a life of plenty, where no one has to fear for the security and wellbeing of their own or future generations. In Bellamy's utopian future, the "spectre of Uncertainty," which had been a permanent threat to the lives of people in the late nineteenth century, is presented as having disappeared. And yet, for all of its emphasis on security, Bellamy's utopian vision in fact does not exclude chance, risk, or accident. Placing statistics at the center of his utopian economy, Bellamy imagines a society that is based on probability rather than certainty. Bellamy's industrial workforce of the utopian future is modeled on the ideal of the army, which he envisions as both a rational organization and an organization predicated on risk. Meanwhile, the possibility of accident not only plays a considerable role in the smooth workings of the utopian system but is also the very precondition for the transportation of the novel's protagonist, Julian West, into the future of the year 2000. Thus, in both *Looking Backward* and *Equality*, the unpredictable event, the error, and the accident have to be possible for utopia to exist

MAURICE S. LEE

Necessary Chances: A Response to Grimstad and Dikant

Risk

KARIN HOEPKER

Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* – Risk, Fiction, and Insurance in Antebellum America

ABSTRACT: Published in 1853 as part of Julia Griffith's abolitionist gift-book and fundraiser *Autographs for Freedom*, the novella *The Heroic Slave* became canonized as Frederick Douglass's sole and somewhat negligible attempt at sentimental fiction. The novella offers a speculative account of moments in the life of Madison Washington, one of the ring-leaders of the 1841 slave revolt aboard the brig *Creole*. The following essay proposes a rereading of *The Heroic Slave* in light of the historic events of the *Creole* incident and the subsequent tort lawsuit *Thomas McCargo v. The New Orleans Insurance Company*. I outline how Douglass's novella taps into the probabilistic logic of the legal case and thus traces the lineage that historically connects slavery, risk, and marine insurance. My essay proposes a reconsideration of Douglass's novella as an aesthetic experiment; it shows how *The Heroic Slave* employs elements of genre convention, narrative form, and symbolically charged spaces to present the reader with a case for self-empowered, African American agency, which hinges on a newly emergent probabilistic paradigm rather than providential convictions. A radical and deeply ambiguous text, the novella confronts the reader with the racial bias of historiography; it struggles to find a form that reflect slaves' experiences of exposure to the seemingly aleatory uncertainties of the slave-keeping system, in which bodies became chattel and risks turned

human futures into tradable commodities. Douglass's text presents Madison Washington's heroism not primarily as based on escape and violent revolt but on his voluntary and self-conscious act of seizing self-ownership and charge of his future. Thus, the novella bears witness to the inherently Janus-faced nature of risk, which indelibly ties its historic function as an economic tool of profitable slave trade to the liberating potential a probabilistic paradigm may hold for individual self-empowerment

CHRISTIAN KLOECKNER

Risk and Nostalgia: Fictions of the Financial Crisis

ABSTRACT: This essay reads novels responding to the 2008 financial crisis against the backdrop of competing definitions of risk and uncertainty in our financialized economies. Whereas finance produces profits by turning future uncertainty into stochastically modeled, tradable risk categories, Ulrich Beck's "world risk society" is haunted by the anticipation of non-computable catastrophes. Disavowing such radical uncertainty and allowing only for a probabilistically variable continuation of the present, financialization effectively forecloses the future while it also invades daily life. Financial risk-taking has been reframed as a precondition for success and self-acquisition—a promise that the recent financial crisis crushed for many. The representative contemporary subjectivities therefore alternate between the self-managing agent navigating global financial flows and the "indebted man" caught between the moral obligation to honor his debt and apparatuses of social control (Lazzarato). Paul Auster's *Sunset Park* and David Eggers's *Hologram for the King* address the interplay of risk and uncertainty, our cultural investments in the future, and the divergent and gendered poles of financial subjectivity in the wake of the financial crisis. Dwelling in an "aesthetic of uncertainty" (Heise) and presenting a crisis of masculinity, these novels' nostalgia is representative of a wider cultural response to the uncertainty brought on by the triumph of financialization and the failures of the financial markets. If finance transforms future uncertainty into present risk, nostalgia in these novels projects an idealized past to deal with present uncertainty. In turn, the nostalgia for an economy grounded in material production in these novels creates a space of resistance vis-à-vis the logic and temporality of finance and potentially generates alternative, open, and indeed uncertain, futures

ELENA ESPOSITO

The Presence of Risk in Finance and Fiction: A Response to Hoepker and Kloeckner

Security

MICHAEL C. FRANK

At War with the Unknown: Hollywood, Homeland Security, and the Cultural Imaginary of Terrorism after 9/11

ABSTRACT: Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Bush administration established a security discourse based on the paradigm of “uncertain threats,” characterizing the “war on terror” as a war against the “unknown.” From the point of view of this new security discourse, counterterrorism should not confine itself to the accumulation of data concerning the goals, strategies, and means of terrorist networks. It also depends on ingenuity on the part of security analysts in the imagination of possible present and future events. Besides analyzing facts, counterterrorism has to work speculatively through possibilities, to think in the subjunctive. Consequently, members of the Hollywood entertainment industry were invited by the Pentagon in October 2001 “to brainstorm about possible terrorist targets and schemes in America and to offer solutions to those threats.” The present article argues that the consideration of fiction as potential fact is symptomatic of the discursive response to terror, which oscillates between the real (actual incidents of political violence) and the imaginary (anticipated further attacks), both drawing on and contributing to what I propose to conceptualize as the cultural imaginary of terrorism. Although this dynamic became particularly salient after 9/11, it has a much longer history, going back to the first emergence of sub-state violence against public targets at the close of the nineteenth century, when several literary writers devised spectacular scenarios of attacks from the air or with biological weapons. What distinguishes these late-Victorian fictions from post-9/11 counterterrorist discourse, however, is that the latter has made the imaginary an integral feature of homeland defense and thus a basis for political practice

JOHANNES VOELZ

In the Future, Toward Death: Finance Capitalism and Security in DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*

ABSTRACT: This essay aims to come to terms with the cultural appeal of security, which—so this article contends—is better understood as a fascination with insecurity. The essay focuses on Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* in order to show that this novel stages the appeal of (in)security as resting on its promise to offer an alternative to the future-fixation of the risk regime of financial capitalism. In *Cosmopolis*, financial risk and the contemporary cult of security come together as two thematic axes. The future-mindedness of financial risk management is counteracted by the threat constructions that drive the concern with security and that emphasize finitude and mortality. The preoccupation with security enables a turn to existential matters that the virtual abstractions of finance have seemingly made inaccessible. While proposing an opposition between a logic of risk based on virtuality and a logic of security based on authenticity, DeLillo’s novel also suggests that it is impossible to break out of the logic of risk management pervading late modernity. The appeal of security articulated in this novel rather lies

in the promise to existentially revitalize life within the confines of financialized capitalism.

DONALD E. PEASE

**The Dialectical Enlightenment of the Security Imaginary:
A Response to Frank and Voelz**

STEPHANIE SIEWERT

Forum

**“America at Large?” Inter-American Studies,
Transnationalism, and the Hemispheric Turn: Research
Survey and Review of the Book Series Inter-American
Studies/Estudios Interamericanos (vol. I-V)**

.....
© Amerikastudien/American Studies
Impressum
Email: webmaster@amerikastudien.com
Letzte Aktualisierung: xx.xx.20xx