

BRIDGING THE IVORY TOWER AND THE STREETS

ACADEMIA AND ACTIVISM

IN TIMES OF CRISIS ORDINARINESS

LMU AMERIKA-INSTITUT WORKSHOP

co-organized with Ca' Foscari University

June 8–10, 2023

at Ca' Foscari University

and Venice International University

In his seminal 1967 essay, Noam Chomsky argues that ostensibly “responsible” intellectuals’ self-serving views and “failure of skepticism” have dominated public discussions on American interventionist politics. Nevertheless, he insists that academics “always have a choice” and encourages us to engage more critically with governmental decisions.

Since then, much of the political, economical, social, and environmental circumstances have, of course, shifted. In the midst of global pandemics and the threat of collapsing healthcare systems, fake news, racism, queer- and transphobia, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, economic crises and exploitation, continuing American interference in the Middle East, the rise of fascist rhetoric and governments, the ongoing effects of (neo-)colonialism, environmental disaster and destruction, intense hostility against refugees and migrants, however, Chomsky’s analysis still strikes an apt chord.

This workshop seeks to interrogate the relationship between academics and activism and the particular relevance of the resulting questions to American Studies and the humanities at large.

AT A GLANCE

Date	Time	Presenters/Activities	Location
THU, 8 June	1 pm– 4.45 pm	Welcoming Remarks – Klaus Benesch – Guest Speaker: Burcu Toğral Koca – Dan Rees – Bryan Banker	
FRI, 9 June	10 am– 5.15 pm	Ca' Foscari Student Roundtable (chaired by Mena Mitrano): Anna Margeti, Benjamin Lewin, Lucia De Zio, Alejandro A. Mendez, Elena Scaggiante, and Margherita Lanza LMU Student Reflections on Academia and Activism I: Finn Lee Wiens, Joe Bamford, Anna de Riggi, and Theresa Hilz	Università Ca' Foscari: Ca' Bernardo (Dorsoduro, Calle San Bernardo, 3199), Sala B
		Lunch Break	
	6.30 pm– open end	LMU Student Reflections on Academia and Activism II: Inti Crisanto Guder and Steve Dio – Loredana Filip – Guest Speaker: Michael Wutz	
		Conference Dinner (self-paid)	OKE Zattere (Dorsoduro, 1414)
SAT, 10 June	10 am– 1.15 pm	Mark Olival-Bartley – Maren Lutz – Alex Schenke – Guest Speaker: Maryna Shevtsova – Closing Remarks	Venice International University, San Servolo: Main Building, 1-G

PROGRAM

DAY 1 (Thu, 8 June)

1 pm – 1.30 pm: Arrival

1.30 pm – 1.45 pm: Welcoming Remarks

1.45 pm – 2.15 pm:
Klaus Benesch:
“The Crisis of Intellectuals”

2.15 pm – 3.15 pm:
Guest Speaker
Burcu Tođral Koca: “Borders/bordering
and Refugees across and beyond Europe:
Reflections on Practices and Agency”

3.15 pm – 3.45 pm: Coffee Break

3.45 pm – 4.15 pm:
Dan Rees: “Changing the Narrative:
Viewing Crisis as an Opportunity”

4.15 pm – 4.45 pm:
Bryan Banker: “‘Why All This Anger? Well,
There Is a War On’: Theorizing the
‘Subversive Intellectual’ and Radical
Pedagogy through Ruth Wilson Gilmore,
Fred Moten, and Sara Ahmed”

DAY 2 (Fri, 9 June)

10 am – 11.30 am:
Ca’ Foscari Student Roundtable chaired
by Mena Mitrano with Anna Margeti,
Benjamin Lewin, Lucia De Zio, Alejandro
A. Mendez, Elena Scaggiante, and
Margherita Lanza

11.40 am – 1 pm:
LMU Student Reflections
on Academia and Activism I:
Finn Lee Wiens, Joe Bamford, Anna de
Riggi, and Theresa Hilz

1 pm – 2.30 pm: Lunch Break

2.30 pm – 3.15 pm:
LMU Student Reflections
on Academia and Activism II:
Inti Crisanto Guder and Steve Dio

3.15 pm – 3.45 pm:
Loredana Filip: “Academia, Capitalism,
and the Intimate Outsider”

3.45 pm – 4.15 pm: Coffee Break

4.15 pm – 5.15 pm:
Guest Speaker
Michael Wutz: “The Activist
Classroom/The Political Classroom?
Reflections on Teaching in a Conservative
State (of Mind)”

6.30 pm – open end:
Conference Dinner (self-paid)
at OKE Zattere

DAY 3 (Sat, 10 June)

10 am – 10.30 am:
Mark Olival-Bartley: “Poets of
Maxvorstadt, Muses of Venice”

10.30 am – 11 am:
Maren Lutz: “African American Anti-
Vietnam War Protest Music as an
Example of Class- and Race-Based Bias
in Historiography?”

11 am – 11.30 am:
Alex Schenke: “‘Let’s Make America Great
Again’: Delineating Conservative
Responses to Post-Vietnam Crises of
National Identity”

11.30 am – 12 pm: Coffee Break

12 pm – 1pm:
Guest Speaker
Maryna Shevtsova: “The Right for
Emotions: Being an Academic and Activist
in the War Times”

1 pm – 1.15 pm: Closing Remarks

SPEAKER ABSTRACTS & BIOS

BAMFORD, JOE:

“Towards the Postcapitalist Intellectual: Forming a Climate Vanguard through Violent and Radical Protest”

This paper begins with a simple accusation: that the public intellectual has abandoned the streets and activism in favor of comfy armchairs and apolitical stances. Further still, this paper explores the innate contradictions of multinational climate change agreements like the 2015 Paris Agreement; I instead argue for the necessity of a radical and violent response to the failure of the Fossil Economy to solve its problem. It proposes the concept of “postcapitalist intellectuals” as both writers and active participants in a climate vanguard. This concept is explored by examining the historical failures of leftist revolutions: France, May 1968; Allende's Chile, 1973; and most importantly, the present and looming climate catastrophe. To evaluate these failures, this essay synthesizes Jean-François Lyotard's 1974 *Libidinal Economy* and Mark Fisher's unpublished theories from “Acid Communism” and *Postcapitalist Desire*. These texts inform the formation of the “postcapitalist intellectual” through revisiting failed revolutions and cultivating desire as a positive pulsion (drive) for radical structural change. This paper aims to demonstrate the necessity of forming a climate vanguard through radical and violent protests to achieve a post-carbon, postcapitalist future.

Joe Bamford is an English literature BA student at the University of Exeter on Erasmus exchange at LMU Munich. Joe developed an interest in applying critical theory to literature. Through his degree, Joe has taken a keen interest in applying 1968 radical French philosophy to modernist and contemporary literature. Alongside his degree, Joe actively participates in a worldwide Marxist reading group. Joe has developed a keen interest in Marxism, specifically, Eco-Marxism, climate activism, and climate fiction.

BANKER, BRYAN:

“‘Why All This Anger? Well, There Is a War On’: Theorizing the ‘Subversive Intellectual’ and Radical Pedagogy through Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Fred Moten, and Sara Ahmed”

Fred Moten, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Sara Ahmed, influential scholars in cultural theory, geography, abolitionism, and feminist scholarship, have argued that universities are deeply entrenched in and perpetuate systems of power, inequality, and exploitation. They contend that neoliberal ideologies and market-driven practices have increasingly shaped universities, prioritizing profit and managerialism at the expense of the well-being of students, staff, and the pursuit of knowledge. This trend, they assert, has led to the erosion of academic freedom, exploitative labor practices, the commodification of education, and the reinforcement of racist, sexist, and classist ideologies. Imperatively, Moten claims that “the only possible relationship” with the university a scholar or academic intent on inclusivity and equality can have is “a criminal one.” He asserts that one must become a subversive intellectual to envision a more emancipatory and equitable learning environment. Gilmore and Ahmed similarly advocate for alternative epistemologies and learning spaces that empower students, academics, and administrative staff to envision the university as a site of justice and equality. Following these thinkers, I suggest the necessity of subversiveness within the university and propose a radical pedagogy that has the potential to dismantle racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies, resist neoliberal influences, and challenge authoritarian knowledge production in academic settings.

Since 2020, Bryan Banker has been an assistant professor of English language and literature at TOBB University of Economics and Technology in Ankara, Turkey. He has a PhD in American Literature from LMU-München and a MA in American Studies from Universität Heidelberg. He studies and teaches American literature and culture, postcolonial world literature and culture, philosophy, science fiction, music, and television. He has published on themes such as race and class in science fiction television, race and racism in antiquity and video games, Neanderthal ontology, and dialectical philosophy in African American aesthetics. Most recently, his article on John Coltrane as philosopher appeared in the *Jazz Research Journal* earlier this year.

BENESCH, KLAUS:

“The Crisis of Intellectuals”

In a 1967 essay, “The Responsibility of Intellectuals,” Noam Chomsky called upon academics to speak out against the war in Vietnam. Given their privileged access to information untainted by political interests, Chomsky argued, American intellectuals had an obligation to intervene in public discourse and to disprove widespread lies about the war. What is the responsibility of intellectuals today? How can and how should the humanities respond to overlapping global crises, including a perceived crisis of their own legitimacy? In his introductory note, Klaus Benesch will discuss the challenges that the humanities and intellectual life face today.

Klaus Benesch is LMU International Research Professor (Harvard University/ENS Lyon) and Professor of English and American Studies at LMU, the University of Munich. His research interests include American literary and cultural history; architecture, urbanism, and the history of technology; mass media and cultural theory. From 2006 through 2013, he was Director of the Bavarian American Academy, Munich. He served as member of the Editorial Board of the Encyclopedia of American Studies Online (published by Johns Hopkins University Press) and is general editor (with Miles Orvell, Jeffrey Meikle, and David Nye) of Architecture/Technology/Culture (ATC), a monograph series published by the University of Pennsylvania Press.

CRISANTO GUDER, INTI : “Cancel Culture and Scholar Activism at U.S. Universities: The Importance of Competing Narratives in the Academic Field”

The presentation is going to explore the status quo of academic freedom regarding research and discourse at universities in the United States. It argues that this freedom is clipped to a certain extent due to a fraught and polarized atmosphere between the political camps. These limitations can be reflected in the cancellation of academic scholars who hence are suspended from their positions at their respective universities, suffer from a damage of their reputation and academic integrity, and sometimes even lose their livelihoods. By outlining current examples of cancelled professors from the humanities as well as natural sciences the paper intends to depict that several disciplines are affected and the cases in question can be, if applicable, contextualized throughout the entire political spectrum. While there should be of course space for discussion about the reasons for the individual cases of cancellation, which is also the goal for the group discussion following up this presentation, having them and attempting to understanding each position better, especially for the sake of education and a vivid discourse, should always be chosen rather than excluding individuals from the conversation. The presentation argues that establishing a complex academic sphere that allows for disagreements and discomfort will allow for societal progress and approximating true scientific findings which should ultimately be the goal of the work done in universities everywhere.

Inti Crisanto Guder holds a Bachelor's degree in American Studies from LMU Munich and is currently enrolled in the university's graduate program. In 2021, she wrote her Bachelor's thesis on Edward Albee's play *The Zoo Story*, in which she discussed the aspect of loneliness. Her research interests lie in the field of American post-war literature, especially J. D. Salinger's work, as well as contemporary American literature and the present state of academic research and discourse.

**DE RIGGI, ANNA:
“An Intellectual Traitor”**

In this personal essay, Anna de Riggi addresses her experience coming from a working-class migrant family and entering the field of academia—specifically studying literature and media, in which there is no solid, pre-established career path to follow. It delves into the paradoxes between the two clashing worlds of “the Ivory Tower” and “the Streets.” It explores the emotional whiplash one gets from academically discussing a systemic issue, while being personally affected by the raw reality of it, showcases the immense dissonance added when one takes into account personal markers. It also discusses the different roles one slips into when trying to navigate these two worlds, the need for constant code-switching, and the impact some carelessly uttered words from a fellow student can leave in the mind of someone who still does not fully feel like they belong in their same world. All in all, it is the story of trying to achieve the dream of upward mobility through hard work and dedication, and the anger about the truth of this dream: that if you abandon the hardships of your childhood home and become an intellectual, you might also turn into a traitor to your roots.

Anna de Riggi is a student of North American Studies, pursuing a bachelor of Arts at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich. Her studies are primarily focused on American Fiction with supernatural/mythical/gothic and queer themes. She also works as an editor and radio host at the Student-Radio M94.5 and in the Social Media Department of the Bavarian News Station BR24. Being the first person in her migrant Croatian/Italian family to enter academic spaces, the theme of the workshop convinced her to join and use it as a space to share parts of her personal experience through creative writing.

DE ZIO, LUCIA:

“The Politics of Beauty: A Feminist Critique of the Evolution of the Concept of Beauty in Western Culture”

The quest for beauty has been an enduring pursuit of humanity, spanning generations and inspiring countless works of art and literature. However, in Western culture, the pursuit of beauty has taken a troubling turn, becoming an all-consuming obsession that profoundly affects women's lives. Examining how beauty norms have shaped women's experiences from ancient Greece to the present day, I aim to uncover the parallelism between beauty standards and gender oppression. Drawing on feminist theory and analyzing key works by Susan Sontag, John Berger, and other scholars, I intend to reveal how beauty standards have functioned as tools of social control over women, leading to self-objectification, body shame, and self-esteem issues. I will argue that prevailing beauty ideals have originated from the male gaze and have been perpetuated by the beauty industry's promotion of unrealistic standards. These ideals serve to police women's bodies and shape their identities, leaving them trapped within a “golden cage” of unattainable expectations that emphasize physical attractiveness above all else. As a result, women are left feeling inadequate and struggling with self-doubt, perpetuating a cycle of oppression. In light of this, it is crucial to dismantle oppressive beauty ideals to meaningfully advance women's empowerment and achieve transformative social change.

Lucia De Zio is a Master's student in Comparative International Relations at Ca' Foscari University in Venice. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Languages from the same institution, with a focus on political and international subjects. Lucia's research interests stem from her passion for feminist theory and human rights. Drawing inspiration from her love of literature, Lucia employs a unique perspective to examine the intricate connections between cultural, political, and linguistic elements that shape notions of gender, sexuality, race, and identity. As she progresses in her academic journey, Lucia is enthusiastic about furthering her studies and actively participating in discussions to foster a more just and equitable global society.

DIO, STEVE:

“I'm Sitting Right Here, in the Middle of a Pyramid, Telling You That': The University's Limits on Activism”

In the public imagination, universities are bastions of free speech. Anyone who has worked in one would tell you otherwise. Whether it's due to state law, federal law, university politics, or public (donor) backlash, university scholars find vocational interests to be in conflict with career interests. These will be viewed through the lens of a number of controversies at the University of Georgia from 2016 through 2020, most notably the university's response to COVID-19 and its handling of an investigation into whether or not a campus building had been constructed on slave remains. While these issues obviously happened in a state with a certain political leaning, they also bring to light that the limitations imposed upon the university scholar are as much an issue of labor as of political tribalism and national myths. If traditional academic approaches seem ill-equipped to address this problem due to these limitations, I hope to make explicit and analyze the ways in which these obstructions at multiple levels through the conventions of the personal essay, eventually pointing towards something that hopefully isn't obvious to anyone who works at a university.

Steve Dio is a student in the Master's Program for American Studies at LMU Munich. He mostly focuses on the literature and media parts of that. Because it's relevant to this presentation, he began his studies at the University of Georgia in 2016, which is more telling than when he graduated. He is interested in interrogating national narratives which make us comfortable. Steve is marginally more creative than academic—which is to say nothing of the quality of either. He is a former exotic shrimp and catfish breeder, the latter of which he learned German for. No, he didn't eat them.

FILIP, LOREDANA:

“Academia, Capitalism, and the Intimate Outsider”

This paper explores the interplay between academia, capitalism, and the concept of the “intimate outsider.” Through an analysis of TED Talks and contemporary speculative fiction, it investigates the potential of these mediums to challenge power structures within an “economic totality.” First, it begins by analyzing the rise and influence of TED Talks, acknowledging their impact in disseminating knowledge, but also presenting intellectuals as charismatic figures and oversimplifying complex subjects. Second, it explores how contemporary speculative fiction, such as Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*, introduces intellectuals as intimate outsiders. Intellectuals are portrayed not as detached geniuses but as individuals who are intimately embedded within societal systems and norms, while also positioned outside of them through their writing. They possess a dual voice that allows for critique and reflection, questioning established values and offering alternative perspectives. This paper explores the significance of writing and language as tools for the intimate outsider, enabling characters to navigate the complexities of their worlds and challenge societal norms. Finally, this paper delves into the metaphorical understanding of academia as a public garden, a space that fosters inclusivity, open discussion, and collaborative learning. It considers academia not solely as a locus of power and knowledge, but a space for cultivating, sharing, and debating ideas.

Loredana Filip is a doctoral candidate at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and a fellow at the Collaborative Research Centre “Cultures of Vigilance.” She holds a Master's degree in North American Studies from Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, where she has served as a lecturer, research assistant, and tutor for international students. Her dissertation focuses on TED Talks and speculative fiction, highlighting the unique contribution that the humanities, particularly literary studies, can make to a transdisciplinary understanding of life. Her research interests encompass affect theory, the history of science, postcolonial and environmental studies, and critical posthumanism. Filip has published several journal articles, book chapters, and blog entries. In her free time, she curates the stories of plants on her Instagram account @plantdiaries365 and writes short stories exploring the perspectives of the nonhuman, such as “Confessions of a Speckled Rock.”

HILZ, THERESA:
**“Environmental and Social Justice Education on the Ground:
Growing Communities through Urban Gardening (from the South Bronx to Munich)”**

In 1977, President Jimmy Carter walked through Charlotte Street in the South Bronx and declared the neighborhood the “worst slum in America.” While the South Bronx has risen out of its ashes after the fire rampages of the 60s and 70s, today, New York City’s only inland borough is still plagued by its legacy of redlining, disinvestment, and the concentration of industry. Paradoxically, the greenest borough in NYC is a lethal place to live in, surrounded by highways and expressways, with the most asthma hospitalizations in the city, and the country’s poorest congressional district. A Professor from Pratt University has turned to green, community-based initiatives, like urban gardening, with an emphasis on cultural enrichment fostering neighborhood ties, and promoting self-empowerment. Brook Park in the Mott Haven neighborhood can be seen as a support system for the neighborhood fighting incarceration from school age, giving students a place to reconnect with themselves in an environment that lets them breathe fresh air, eat healthy food, and see their own abilities flourish by making something grow. By teaching about the interconnectedness of issues relating to housing, food insecurity, environmental injustice, and health, and trying to find solutions on a community-based level like turning abandoned lots into activist green spaces, the garden in Brook Park is an excellent example of where academia and activism meet.

Theresa Hilz is a B.A. student enrolled in the North American Studies program at the LMU in Munich and currently works as a student assistant at the Historisches Kolleg, an Institute for Advanced Study in History. She developed a strong interest in social and environmental issues during her studies and in 2023 wrote her B.A. thesis on nuclear colonialism in Canada and the effects of uranium mining for U.S. nuclear weapons on indigenous lands and lives. Her contribution in Venice focuses on the legacy of redlining and environmental injustices as she looks at a South Bronx community garden where academia and activism meet to stop the school-to-prison pipeline and combat food insecurity.

LANZA, MARGHERITA:
“Gender Roles in War”

In my section I will try to explain the reasons why gender roles are so extremely controversial in war and history. My aim will be to explore the different roles men and women have, focusing especially on female figures, such as Susan Sontag, and the evolution of women’s activism. Goldstein, in his book *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, explains that usually all fighters in war are male. Women’s roles, on the other hand, have less uniformity, and usually change from culture to culture. Nevertheless, since the end of the cold war, female activism has gained an increasingly high and respected profile. As a matter of fact, there has been increasing interventions made by women and women’s organizations on mediation, peace negotiations, and processes of post-conflict reconstruction. Women activism needs to be acknowledged because women’s experiences add to the scope of peace, because their activism points to the psychosocial, relational, and spiritual, as well as the political and economic side of conflict transformation. As a matter of fact, examining the intersections between ‘gender’ and ‘violent conflict’ raises important questions for feminism, which I will try to explain in my part of the roundtable.

I am Margherita Lanza, a student of English and American Studies, a Double Joint Degree Master Degree between Ca’ Foscari University of Venice and Bamberg University. During my Bachelor Degree I studied Languages (literature and culture curricula) at Ca’ Foscari University, also participating in an Erasmus+ mobility at LMU University in Munich. I have always been interested in gender studies. Namely, my bachelor dissertation focused on sexuality and gender identity in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. I just now have terminated an overseas mobility at the University of Exeter, always aiming to better myself and to gain an international view on literary studies.

LEWIN, BENJAMIN:
“Public Queerness and the Freedom to Position Yourself”

The organic intellectual is a traveller, one who goes between their own periphery and the center. The hinge between the center and periphery can only be articulated when neither center nor periphery are denied or refused. The periphery-center hinges explored here will be the America/Europe, and queer/straight hinges as they relate to Susan Sontag. The way she relates her peripheral positions to the center varies widely depending on which identity is at play. Sontag was an American in Europe for much of her life. Yet she often came and went, and did not adopt the European aura of some of her American predecessors and contemporaries. This differs significantly from how she positioned her queerness. The choice to obfuscate queerness, not queerness itself, is what is notable when compared to the role of the organic intellectual. I’m interested in the act of accessing neutrality and naturalness by letting others apply heteronormativity. How Sontag positioned herself in these two important hinges reflects both her own comfort, and the difference between the hinges themselves. While Europe was positioned as an intellectual center, America is hardly a periphery. The cultural mode of straightness is a much more dominant center. One which, from the perspective of heteronormativity, is at times denied an alternative.

Benjamin Lewin is a Master student in Environmental Humanities at Ca’ Foscari. His main topics of study include human/non-human relationship building, and the (re)positioning and voices of non-humans inside naturecultures. He is furthermore interested in concepts such as queer utopia and futurity in a multispecies context. He has a history in both Environmental Science and Earth Science, and in Art and Design. His research is therefore often interdisciplinary. Next to working on these topics in academia, he’s active in artistic projects both as artist and as curatorial assistant.

LUTZ, MAREN:
“African American Anti-Vietnam War Protest Music as an Example of Class- and Race-Based Bias in Historiography?”

The Vietnam War has generated protest songs produced by men and women of different ethnicities and even nationalities, to an extent never before or since. Particularly, African American artists dissented from the Vietnam War with a striking immediacy. The abundance of African American anti-Vietnam War protest music, amplified in various forms, contents, and genres, emphasizes that opposition to the Vietnam War had never been a marginal issue in the African American community, who was disproportionately affected by the consequences of the war. However, both contemporary and historical accounts tend to focus on white Americans in their portrayal of anti-war protest and music, often centering narratives of protest on white, male college students. The public memory of the Vietnam War era is filled with images of white-dominated mass protests, concerts, and festivals. Meanwhile, African American contributions to the anti-war movement, including performances and songs, have been largely overlooked and arguably under-researched by academia. This discrepancy in conservation and research suggests a class- and race-based bias that has shaped the historiography of anti-Vietnam War protests. In contrast, the analysis of African American antiwar music would contribute to cultivating a more comprehensive understanding of this period in history, and in adding diverse perspectives and voices to the history of protests against the Vietnam War.

Maren Lutz completed her Bachelor’s and Master’s degree in North American Studies at the University of Munich. She worked as a Student Assistant for the ERC Starting Grant “The Arts of Autonomy” chaired by Prof. Dr. Pierre-Héli Monot. Working at the Goethe-Institut Chicago and experiencing the city’s diverse music culture, she developed an academic interest in American music history, particularly blues and soul. Her further interests are Cold War and Protest Culture and the Vietnam War. Maren Lutz is currently working on her dissertation, which examines African American Protest music against the Vietnam War.

MARGETI, ANNA:
**“(Photo)journalism and Climate Action:
Bridging Climate Science and Politics”**

It can be seen that journalists have been turning to the climate crisis for headlines. In their effort to attract attention, they have become reliant on photojournalism. As climate photojournalists often capture people in pain to produce a news-worthy story, I consider the case of the 2019 Evia wildfires as a starting point to argue that climate photojournalism itself does not help the cause of the climate movement. In this way, Susan Sontag's views on photography become extremely relevant. Sontag argues for the desensitization and overall paralysis that images of suffering can induce. Many cases exist that reinforce her argument, including the presenting one. As climate photojournalism promotes superficiality, immediate victims are disregarded by an ever-strengthening norm that shocks and ultimately disempowers the public, in moments when immediate action is necessary.

Anna Margeti is an MA student in Environmental Humanities at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. She is currently writing her thesis on urban sustainability, focusing on the urban regeneration project of “The Ellinikon” in Athens, Greece. Anna holds a BA in English Language and Literature from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Her interests are interdisciplinary, defined by her passion for political and civic action.

MENDEZ, ALEJANDRO A. :
**“The Colombian Peace Process:
National Imaginary, Representation and Truth”**

After more than 50 years of continuous guerrilla warfare, Colombia came to terms with the oldest and biggest guerrilla in the southern part of the American continent, FARC-EP (Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia). Thus, the success of the negotiation table not only meant the beginning of a new chapter in Colombia's modern history but the opportunity to both, raise questions about different sets of discursive constructions that spread over the timelapse that the armed conflict lasted, and the flourishing of all sorts of intellectual tools to explain and enlighten the events that occurred during the armed hostilities. Following this line of thought, I am interested in understanding the Colombian conflict and peace process from within American Studies as a compelling case of reconciliation and reparation. Over the last two decades, American Studies has provided and nourished critical thought, offering theoretical tools and a cluster of concepts that can be applied and further developed in the study of the Colombian case. For instance, Mary Louise Pratt's Contact Zones theory affords us an array of possibilities to track down the cultural and political influence that has shaped Colombia's and the United States' national and international policies, and their national imaginaries (Narco novelas such as *Narcos* is a perfect example of the portrayal of a recurrent national-lasting trope in United States history, i.e., the reconfiguration of Manifest Destiny through the simplistic dichotomy between the good willing police officers and the despicable narco bosses). Also, the contribution of scholars such as Mena Mitrano with her idea of “Weak thought, Weak theory,” Walter Mignolo and the Decolonial Theory, Roberto Esposito and his “Immunizzazione” paradigm or Lisa Lowe's effort to disentangle and deconstruct the racial categorization that is in United States National Core are a group of ideas that can help us to get a grip on the Colombian toil to construct a lasting peace and democracy around truth and reconciliation as the central axis of its national project.

Before coming to Venice to pursue my Master's degree in American and Postcolonial literature, I received my Bachelor's degree in Latin American literature with an emphasis on literary theory and criticism from La Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (Medellín, 2020). From then on, I have taken different courses on Comparative Literature in both La Universidad Católica de Piura, Peru, and La Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín, where I worked on several topics such as the relationship between photography and literature, literature and ecology, literature and music, and narratology, with special intensity on Philip Roth's oeuvre. Currently, I am working on The Colombian Peace Process and the problems of representation, discourse, and political institutions during the Colombian armed conflict.

OLIVAL-BARTLEY, MARK:
“Poets of Maxvorstadt, Muses of Venice”

Channeling the geminal sprites of Ibsen and Morgenstern, Rilke and Ringelnatz, Pound and Eva Hesse (while invoking sonnets by Platen, Lingg, Heyse, and Rilke alongside quatrains by Däubler and Brecht), Mark Olival-Bartley tenders a triptych of verse to plumb—à la Friedrich Overbeck's *Italia und Germania*—the interpenetrations of Maxvorstadt and Venice against such dialogic touchstones as nature and artifice, disease and creativity, to say nothing of poetic form and the complexities of its translation.

Mark Olival-Bartley studied second-language pedagogy at Hawai'i Pacific University and creative writing at CUNY's City College. His recent verse and criticism have appeared in *EcoHealth* and *Athenaeum Review*. In his protracted dissertation, *On Shapes and Echoes of Duplexity*, he first posits that appositions of linguistic features and literary conventions entangle, explode, and emerge as synesthetic and resonant forms of poetry; he then applies this theory to a reading of E. A. Robinson's metasonnet.

REES, DAN:
**“Changing the Narrative:
Viewing Crisis as an Opportunity”**

If talk during a crisis tends to revolve around lamenting problems rather than advancing solutions, then it is often a sign that belief in the old, decaying system remains strong—despite glaring evidence that transformative changes are needed. In the case of the much-debated ‘crisis of the humanities,’ the situation is more complex. Crisis appears to be built-in to the humanities' approach to acquiring and evaluating knowledge, as unlike the sciences, humanistic study tends to yield uncertainty rather than certainty, and the kind of knowledge “that solicits its own revision in an endless process of refutation, contestation, and modification [...] Hence, the very nature of the knowledge produced by the humanities is inseparable from crisis as an uncertain and immediate threat” (Schmidt 2021:37). Yet rather than seeking to ‘normalize’ the crisis as a permanent state of affairs, one might acknowledge that crises in general tend to be driving forces behind innovation, providing timely opportunities for change. So, instead of focusing on the kinds of quick fixes that might lead to better funding or higher student enrolment numbers, this talk will consider questions of value: would adopting and mastering new ideas and practices also mean accepting different cultural values? And what compromises and sacrifices must be made along the way?

Dan Rees currently works as a lecturer at the Hochschule Fresenius, University of Applied Sciences in Munich. He completed his PhD in American Studies at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in 2015. His dissertation examines how hunger is deeply involved with concepts of modernity and modernist literature and is bound up with a writer's role in modern society. His research interests include Anglo-American and European literature of the modern and classical periods, as well as E-learning and the digital economy. He has worked as a freelance editor and translator since 2004 and contributed to journals in American Studies and the Social Sciences.

SCAGGIANTE, ELENA:

“Can the First Lady Be a Public Intellectual?: A Case Study with Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis”

The first lady is the wife of the President of the United States, and her role has never been officially codified. Yet, although she is an unelected figure, scholars such as Robert P. Watson and Karen O'Connor took interest in her, analyzing how several first ladies have indeed acted as presidential advisors for their husbands, taking central stage in the political and social life of America. However, those very scholars have dismissed the social and cultural influence of first ladies such as Jackie Kennedy, whose influence as first lady can paradoxically be better seen when she was a former first lady. In fact, after JFK was assassinated, she fought to pass the message that his death should represent the end of a time of idyllic happiness for the nation to Americans. I argue that the great impact that her actions had on the American audience make her figure comparable to that of the public intellectual. Not coincidentally, still nowadays popular products—such as the movie *Jackie* (2016) and the episode “Dear Mrs. Kennedy” from the popular series *The Crown* (2017)—represent Jackie Kennedy's actions after JFK's death, showing how they are still present in America's national memory.

Elena Scaggiante is a MA student of American Studies at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, where she is currently writing a thesis on text-to-screen adaptations. She got a BA degree in North-American and Latin-American Literatures in 2021, always at Ca' Foscari. There, she is currently working as tutor for the BA course 'Lingua Anglo-americana 1.' She got experience in teaching from her experience at 'Ugo Foscolo' Middle School, where she did an internship as English teacher from October 2022 to February 2023. Since 2016, she has also given weekly private English lessons to 10 students of different levels (from elementary school to high school).

SCHENKE, ALEXANDRA:

“‘Let's Make America Great Again': Delineating Conservative Responses to Post-Vietnam Crises of National Identity”

In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, U.S. society was faced with the disintegration of a national identity that was based, to a significant extent, on narratives of American victory and heroic masculinity. Waning confidence in American moral and military superiority threatened to destabilize a once proudly shared self-concept that had been key to U.S. foreign policy in the ongoing Cold War, and unprecedented criticism of hitherto mythologized martial imagery came to characterize cultural products of the time. With the onset of the Reagan Era, a growing conservative backlash spurred political as well as cultural responses to such criticism. In a notable combination of hard power strategies and soft power plays, the Reagan White House and prominent Hollywood filmmakers came to deliver renewed images of American heroism and strength to U.S. and international publics. Designed to restore national pride as well as credibility towards both allies and foes, such messages of specifically masculine American vigor appear not only synchronized, but at times intentionally orchestrated, effectively blurring the lines between political messaging and culture industry. Closer examinations of this well-established practice of collaboration as well as the strategic use of heroic masculinity in communications of American resilience potentially allow for a more conscious consumption and discussion of the rhetoric, visual politics, and cultural imagery that have shaped American discourses since the rise of conservatism in the 1980s.

Prior to her time at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Alexandra Schenke studied at New York Film Academy and Matthew Corozine Studios in New York. She has worked for international film and theater productions as well as dubbing studios as translator, dialogue writer, and voice actor. She completed her Bachelor's degree in North American Studies at LMU with a thesis on the impact of transatlantic relations on the German enemy image in Hollywood cinema and her Master's working on the concept of heroic masculinity in American filmmaking and visual politics of the Reagan era. Alexandra works as lecturer for American cultural history and is a doctoral candidate at the Amerika-Institut. Her dissertation examines Cold War culture and politics.

SHEVTSOVA, MARYNA:

“The Right for Emotions: Being an Academic and Activist in the War Times”

Should a scholar be also socially engaged and, if so, to what extent? As a young career researcher with the Central-Eastern European background aspiring to make herself a path towards a permanent position in the neoliberal Western academia in the 21st century, one is expected to be fully committed to the service. Bringing empirical data to the table is welcome, while being a part-time activist is still frowned upon. When approaching the object of our research, it is said we must get rid of our biases and strive to be as objective and detached from the topic as possible. Yet is it always the best strategy? Can we—and should we—keep being detached and strive for objectivity when human lives are at stake? The present talk will focus on the right for being emotional—and being angry—that one risks losing in academia; on the gendered nature of these rights and on possible feminist responses to it. The talk brings into the discussion an uncomfortable question of Western privilege and power imbalance in knowledge production within academia and beyond it. It explores the idea of global feminist solidarity and sisterhood while also reflecting on experiences of various (vulnerable) groups affected by Russia's war in Ukraine and other wars globally.

Maryna Shevtsova (PhD) is a EUTOPIA Postdoctoral fellow at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia and a Senior FWO Fellow with KU Leuven, Belgium. She was a Swedish Institute Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Lund (2020) and a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Florida, USA (2018/19). Her recent publications include the book *LGBTI Politics and Value Change in Ukraine and Turkey: Exporting Europe?* (Routledge 2021) and edited volume *LGBTQ+ Activism in Central and Eastern Europe. Resistance, Representation, and Identity* (with Radzhana Buyantueva, Palgrave Macmillan 2019). She is also a winner of the 2022's Emma Goldman award for her engagement in feminist research and human rights activism. She currently works on an edited volume *Feminist Perspectives on Russia's War in Ukraine* to be published later this year with Lexington Books.

TOĞRAL KOCA, BURCU:

“Borders/bordering and Refugees across and beyond Europe: Reflections on Practices and Agency”

Drawing on critical migration and border studies and my fieldwork experiences, my speech will engage with the complex interplay between borders/bordering and the acts of state and non-state actors at multiple scales (local/national/transnational). Through a critical engagement with the state-centric understanding of borders and taking borders/bordering as spaces, processes and institutions, I will address questions such as: How can we think of borders differently? What kind of bordering practices have been developed by states? How do these bordering processes operate at various scales and in relation to different groups of refugees and immigrants? How can we interpret the positioning and agency of different nonstate actors—including refugees—in contemporary “border struggles”? In answering these questions, I will look at the violent, racialized and neo-liberal bordering practices across and beyond Europe and discuss to what extent non-state actors are intervening against, challenging and transforming these practices. Against the portrayal of refugees as passive victims with no capacity to challenge political structures and policies, I will particularly reflect on refugees' agency and their subjectivity, autonomy, capabilities and political influence within bordering processes. Concomitantly, my speech will also try to raise broader normative and political questions on the emerging new forms of inequality and exclusion but at the same time new forms of political activism and solidarity in the face of current turbulent times and structural changes.

Burcu Toğral Koca (PhD in Political Science, University of Hamburg) is a political scientist with a focus on borders/bordering, migration and refugee rights movements. While working as an assistant professor at the Eskişehir Osmangazi University/Turkey, she signed the Peace Petition of the Academics for Peace in 2016 and, later, got banned from public service in Turkey in 2017. She is currently working as a visiting researcher at the Viadrina Center B/ORDERS IN MOTION of the European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder). Before Viadrina Center, she worked as a research fellow at the University of Trieste, Technical University of Berlin and Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space and conducted various fieldwork on the interplay between borders/bordering, refugees and civil society actors in Berlin, London, Trieste, and Ljubljana.

**WIENS, FINN LEE:
“Em(Power)ment in the Academic Complex”**

“Never change a running system”—but what if it necessary? It is evident that not every person is equally represented in academic research and publications. In an effort to create a more equal and just world for everyone regardless of their identity, these systems need to be challenged. However, when people from marginalized groups question or criticize these structures, they are repeatedly reduced to their identities, or they are accused of not being able to “separate the personal from the professionals.” If our perspectives are not yet represented and seemingly not actively invited into the dialogue either, where does this leave us? Consequently, what does it feel like to approach the rather non-transparent and complicated academic system as a young person from a marginalized group? Many scholars have argued that dominant forms of knowledge production and research are often tied to oppressive structures, resulting in the academic complex upholding these structures as well. Building on Chomsky’s theoretical basis of the responsibility of the intellectual and drawing from Stryker’s theory of subjugated knowledges, the importance of academic activism and their inherent interconnection is highlighted.

Finn Lee Wiens is currently enrolled in the North American studies bachelor’s program at LMU with a minor in German as a foreign language. Some of his research interests include queer and feminist history and theory, as well as interculturality and its impacts. He works at the Munich office of Junior Year in Munich, a program that offers exchange programs to American college students. Further, Finn volunteers for an organization that offers intercultural exchange programs, where he is able to focus on activist and educational work regarding anti-discriminatory practices. He is interested in non-academic activist strategies and how the academic complex can profit from these approaches.

**WUTZ, MICHAEL:
“The Activist Classroom/The Political Classroom? Reflections on Teaching in a Conservative State (of Mind)”**

The title of the workshop, “Bridging the Ivory Tower and the Streets,” invites reflection on two intimately connected issues: (1) what has, arguably, led to the noticeable disconnect between academics and practices of lay reading, and the public sphere more generally? and (2), how can a critical pedagogy in the classroom foster political, if not activist, awareness among students and, perhaps, help relegitimate the profession of English, esp. in the increasingly conservative culture of the United States. Hence the title of my talk, “The Activist Classroom/The Political Classroom?”

Michael Wutz (Ph.D., Emory U) is Brady Presidential Distinguished Professor in the Department of English at Weber State University and the editor of *Weber*. Recent publications include a volume of original essays, *E. L. Doctorow: A Reconsideration* (co-edited with Julian Murphet, Edinburgh 2019), an edition of original essays by the late media theorist Friedrich Kittler, *Operation Valhalla* (co-edited with Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Ilinca Iurascu, Duke 2021), and an essay on Jhumpa Lahiri, empire, and ecology in *MELUS*. Please see, <https://www.weber.edu/michael.wutz>.

Organizers: Steph Berens and Carole Martin

Co-Organizers: Simone Francescato and Mena Mitrano

