

From March 22-26, 2021, the Spring Academy conference virtually hosted twenty international Ph.D. students to explore, discuss, and provide feedback on their respective American Studies research projects. This year's participants joined the HCA Spring Academy chairs and facilitators from five different time zones, ranging from the American West Coast to Hungary, representing universities in ten countries. Before the official conference start, participants joined Spring Academy organizers Ida Bahmann, Julian Kramer, and Emma Wolf for a tech Q&A on Sunday evening, guaranteeing a smooth technical run throughout the week. After clarifying all practical questions, participants and organizers enjoyed an informal get-together and a short video conference project speed dating on the "Glimpse" platform provided a welcome virtual icebreaker.

The following Monday afternoon, HCA director Welf Werner officially opened the conference. He warmly welcomed all participants emphasizing that the global pandemic had not discouraged students across the globe from applying. Earlier this year, the selection committee had chosen 20 out of 88 applications, once again bringing together, as Werner remarked, a diverse group of young researchers from 12 different countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Spain, the U.K., and the U.S.A. Spring Academy facilitators Dr. Wilfried Mausbach and Dr. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung expressed their regret that current circumstances did not permit an in-person conference. However, Spring Academy organizers had worked hard to preserve the conference's lively character by developing virtual features. The traditional thesis-outline "speed dating" now took place online on the "Glimpse" platform, allowing participants insight into their peers' projects in a fast-paced one-on-one conversation. As such, it served as an energetic start while simultaneously introducing the larger question of the future directions of the field of American Studies. Following this accelerated beginning, participants and facilitators decreased their pace as they went into the first panel's in-depth topical discussion.

Participants had posted a 15-minute slide or video presentation introducing their project in the run-up to the conference. At the beginning of each panel, speakers had 5 minutes to build on their presentation and set incentives for the following 35-minute discussion. Under the broader topic of "Locating Hip-Hop," two panelists from the University of Bern, Dianne Violeta Mausfeld and James Barber, shared their research. Mausfeld presented her thesis, "'American Made with a Mexican Flow!' Chicano Hip-Hop, Space, and Identity in Los Angeles, 1987-2001." Thereby, she opened a conversation on possible approaches to incorporate Digital Ethnography into historical research. Building on this

issue, the second presentation by James Barber on "'United Ghettos of America': The Aesthetics of Intercultural Exchange and Bricolage in New York City and the Case of the Jamaican Influence on Hip-Hop (1987-1995)" further sparked a discussion on the role of the onlooker and field research in the Hip-Hop and Reggae scenes. A stimulating debate on the difficulty of connecting historical research and contemporary developments ensued.

After a brief coffee break, everyone returned for the second panel, "Environmental Racism, Diversity, and Justice." First up, Coyote Shook from the University of Texas at Austin presented their research project on "Fetid Eden: Disability, Speculation, and the Twilight of Florida," a historiographic approach focusing on the intersection of capitalism and environmental policies. Participants were fascinated with Coyote Shook's approach and carefully constructed arguments. They eagerly explored his case study on Sea Life Orlando's manatee rehabilitation program and tourist outreach and its implication on the role of disability in a capitalist-environmentalist setting. Dorothee Schwieters from the University of Cologne provided further input with her presentation "(Un-)Officially Zoned for Industrial Pollution: Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice on the East Side of Houston, Texas, since the 1970s." This underexplored issue sparked a lively conversation on the difficulties of archival research for projects of this kind. Participants and facilitators concluded the conference day with open chats for both panels, during which they exchanged more ideas, comments, and tips in an informal environment.

A Panel on "Borderlands" moderated by guest chair Professor Ben Johnson from Loyola University Chicago commenced the second conference day. Zsófia Hutvágner from Texas Christian University presented her research project on "The Impact of Racially Restrictive Covenants on the Housing Crisis in Fort Worth, Texas, 1920-1949." She informed her peers that legislative changes in Fort Worth had recently banned racist language from official documents and explained how this may complicate her future archival research. Mario Macías Ayala from the University of Arizona at Tucson complemented this opening with a presentation on "Beyond Concrete and Violence: The reconfiguring of local dynamics in Nogales Arizona/Sonora borderlands since the early 2000s." The Corona pandemic had affected both participants' research throughout the past year, so they were especially appreciative to swap ideas with their peers about strategies and methods.

After a break and brief, casual conversations, the second panel on "Narration Beyond Words: Erik Drooker and Herman Melville" shifted our focus to the field of literary studies. First, Zohra Hassan-Pieper of the University Duisburg-Essen shared her research on "N.Y. City—The City of Destruction: Disaster-Building in Drooker's *Flood! A Novel In Pictures* (1992)." When literary scholars point to a lack of letters and art scholars to the seriality of a wordless graphic novel, where was one to start? Soon participants discussed the contextualization of images and possible ways of approaching the wordless.

Arturo Corujo from the University of Barcelona shared similar issues in his presentation on "Interweaving the Melvillean Self: Queering the Porous Boundaries of the In/Human." Participants contextualized the symbolism of *White Jacket* with other works of Herman Melville. Moreover, they explored the white jacket's role as a non-human other in the narrative. These and more ideas were again hotly debated during the end-of-day open chats.

On the third conference day, the Spring Academy shifted its analytical focus to the Caribbean and Nicaragua. The first panel, "Caribbean Histories and Poetries," hosted Debby Esmeé de Vlugt from Leiden University and Barbara Gföllner from the University of Vienna. De Vlugt presented her research on "Black Power in the Dutch Caribbean and the Netherlands, 1968-1973," a project that explores a history that has been relatively neglected to date. Her presentation sparked a lively discussion on locating and accessing the necessary but geographically widespread archival sources. Barbara Gföllner complemented the discussion with her presentation on "'Thinking with the Archipelago': Diasporic Im/Mobilities in Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean Poetry." It shifted the perspective to literary studies and introduced questions of selecting and grouping texts. Participants highlighted aspects of including and analytically connecting francophone and anglophone Caribbean poetry. Some participants continued this exchange during a brief coffee break.

The second panel then focused on "The U.S. and Nicaragua in the Twentieth Century." Eimeel Castillo from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor began by sharing her research on "Imperial Encounters: Gender Politics in U.S. Occupied Nicaragua (1912-1933)." Her peers were curious to know more and soon discussed this project's position within a larger American Studies framework. Further, they shared constructive and creative ideas for the future of this research, considering its archival research challenges and various analytical angles. Verena Baier from the University of Regensburg contributed a new viewpoint with her presentation on "Remembering Nicaragua? Life Writings by U.S. American Volunteers in the Nicaragua Peace and Solidarity Movement and the Contra War, 1979-1990." Moving away from relations on the ground, participants were interested in debating how this project approaches Nicaragua as an imagined space in writing. Debates continued in the open chats, which rounded off the conference day.

On Thursday, the Spring Academy started with a panel on "Culture Wars in Recent American Intellectual History." Guest chair Professor Michelle Nickerson from Loyola University Chicago welcomed speakers Olli Saukko from Helsinki University and Emily Hull from University College London. Saukko provided insights into his research on "American Jewish Intellectuals and the Culture Wars 2011-2016," sparking a lively discussion on recent cultural and political changes in the U.S.A. and how best to frame these in research projects. Emily Hull focused the debate more closely on the Liberal-Conservative divide with her presentation of "Irving Kristol: Cold War Liberal and

Conservative." Combining broader definitions of these two terms with the changing self-understanding of an individual was an issue the group debated together. Before moving into the second panel of the day, participants took the opportunity to recharge during a virtual coffee break.

Panel eight then addressed "Audiovisual Strategies: 1970s Exploitation Cinema and Netflix," hosting Eponine Moreau from the University of Mons and Matthew Tchepikova-Treon from the University of Minnesota. Moreau opened the panel with her presentation on "The Subtitling of Swear Words in the French Subtitled Version of Netflix Original Series: A Corpus-Based Analysis." In the French subtitles, the Netflix series' language is usually 'cleaned up,' swear words are reduced, and, she maintained, overall more vulgar language is used to establish a similar atmosphere. Moreau works towards defining a more 'faithful translation' of media, an endeavor her peers found fascinating. Matthew Tchepikova-Treon complemented this discussion by sharing his research on "X-Rated Sound: Exploitation Cinema & One Hundred Years of 1972." In 1972, the word 'fuck' was first added to the Oxford Dictionary; in the same period, the U.S. right was very concerned about 'cleaning up' movies. Participants were curious to find out more about the connection of sound and visuality in exploitation films and how they reflect socio-political conditions. Everyone enjoyed continuing these debates after the end of the second panel but made sure to finish on time for a virtual visit to the John Deere production facility in Mannheim, Germany. John Deere has supported the Spring Academy since 2004 and has welcomed its participants to tour its location in Mannheim every year. For the first time this year, Spring Academy participants and facilitators had the opportunity to explore the Mannheim site virtually. After a factory tour and a Q&A with John Deere Forum Manager Heiner Ehmer, Anke Schaeufele took over for a brief overview of John Deere's precision farming program. The virtual format enabled Spring Academy participants to access areas of the Mannheim site that are usually closed to visitors.

The final day of the Spring Academy 2021 began with a panel on "Technology and American Culture" with speakers Sarah Collier from University College London and Stephanie Redekop from the University of Toronto. In the first presentation on "Between Man and Machine: Masculinity, Technology and Spatiality in Contemporary U.S. War Narratives," Sarah Collier outlined her argument, which combines aspects of gendered domestic spaces and the intersection of masculinity and technology. Participants eagerly discussed how contemporary trends in video games intersect with this study. They further explored how the depiction of trauma influences images of soldiers and warfare. Stephanie Redekop followed this discussion with a presentation on "'Is that a Fact?': The Literary Essay and American Crisis Discourse in the 1960s." This Essay Studies project explores connections among Norman Mailer's perception of the novel in the twentieth century as expressed in his essays and the simultaneous crisis surrounding the definition of factuality. Soon the participants

discussed how factual accuracy and moral righteousness increasingly seem to go hand in hand in public discourse. They continued these conversations during the ensuing coffee break before all participants returned for the final panel.

The Spring Academy's last panel focused on "Racial Justice and Liberation Movements." Sebastian Mayer from Washington University in Seattle began and shared his research on "No More' Sticking to Sports': Black Athlete Activism and Its Political Consequences." Highlighting the historical and contemporary relationship between sports and politics in U.S. society, this project opened a conversation on sociological and digital ethnographic research methods. Gloria Fears-Heinzel from Goethe University Frankfurt tied into this debate with her presentation on "Black/Gay/Power/Liberation: Inter-Movement Co-operations on Issues of Black Gay Liberation Struggles." Her peers were excited to talk about this project and shared many constructive ideas on approaching and structuring the research attached to it. With renewed interest in the Black Panther Party and its coalitions with other social liberation movements, everyone found this topic to be particularly pertinent in the times of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Both presentations lead to further exchange in the open chats after the end of the panel.

Eventually, Spring Academy participants and facilitators came together one last time for the conference's Cool Down session. As a group, they reflected on current and future trends for American Studies. Moreover, they explored how their peers' projects had impacted their idea of this changing academic discipline during the past week. Everyone bade a special virtual farewell to facilitator Dr. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung for whom it had been the last Spring Academy conference. Dr. Wilfried Mausbach emphasized her priceless contributions to and support of the Spring Academy since 2004 and invited her to return to the HCA for a proper, in-person farewell at Spring Academy 2022. Although they had only met virtually, participants expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to connect with peers from many different countries—connections that hopefully will last and build a foundation for networking of a rising generation of exceptional scholars.

Ida Bahmann and Emma Wolf