

**Conference “Gentrification Imaginaries:
Stories of Urban Transformations and Displacement”**

12-14 June 2024

FRIAS Freiburg, Albertstraße 19

Abstracts and Bios

Thursday 13 June 2024

9:15-11:00 Panel I: Beginning Gentrification: Chronologies and Temporalities

Panel Chair: Eva von Contzen (University of Freiburg)

Hanna Henryson (Stockholm University/Linnaeus University): “When this neighborhood belonged to the workers”: Elements of Gentrification in Recent Stockholm Novels

Abstract: This contribution addresses the question of how narratives about gentrification are constructed through recurring plot elements and motifs. In my previous research on contemporary Berlin literature, I have analyzed how gentrification is narrated from the point of view of the characters in novels which reflect gentrification explicitly and often critically (see Henryson 2021, Henryson and Sulimma 2024). In response to the recent surge of such novels, Monika Wolting has coined the term “Berlin gentrification novel” (2021). In an equally conspicuous manner, gentrification permeates and shapes the plots of literary works in a variety of genres set in for example New York (see Heise 2022, Peacock 2016, Sulimma 2023) and London (see for example Dines 2023). However, elements of gentrification can also occur less prominently, conceptualized by Maria Sulimma as “microscripts” of gentrification (2023).

In this contribution, I will turn to representations of gentrification in recent Stockholm novels, a topic which has so far only been touched upon in relation to crime fiction and the so-called Nordic Noir (see for example Tapper 2015). While redeveloped according to egalitarian ideas by social democrat governments during the afterwar period, Stockholm has been no less touched by class-based urban change than other European cities. In Sweden, gentrification, social segregation, and displacement have resulted mainly from large-scale renovations of social housing and subsequent rent increases (“renovictions,” see Polanska and Richard 2021) and from the privatization and conversion of rental housing to condominiums. I will survey and examine plot elements and motifs in recent novels that can be directly or indirectly connected to these processes of urban transformation in Stockholm in order to contribute to the understanding of how narratives about gentrification can be identified and theorized.

HANNA HENRYSON (she/her) is a researcher and an assistant professor in German-language literature at Stockholm University and Linnaeus University, Sweden. She has previously published the monograph *Gentrifikationen: Zur Gentrifizierung in deutschsprachigen Berlin-Romanen nach 2000* (Peter Lang, 2021) on literary representations of gentrification in postmillennial Berlin. Other publications on gentrification and urban literature have appeared in *Narrative*, *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* and *Forum for Modern Language Studies*. Hanna Henryson's most recent research project concerns literary representations of homelessness and housing inequality in the 21st century.

Ece Ergin (University of Freiburg): Indigenous Mobility and Urban Identity in Michelle Good's *Five Little Indians*: Tracing Indigenous Displacement and Early Signs of Gentrification in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

Abstract: Most of Canada's Indigenous population resides in large urban centers (*Statistics Canada*). As of 2021, Vancouver accommodates the third largest Indigenous population in the country while Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) is home to a large portion of the Indigenous population in the city. The Indigenous peoples in the area are members of different communities from Turtle Island, highlighting the plurality of Indigenous groups, languages, and cultures represented within the city limits. This plurality is a result of Canada's long history of displacement policies. DTES has been plagued by high crime and unemployment rates, addiction, poverty, and homelessness. The city of Vancouver's attempts to gentrify the neighborhood to eliminate these problems have failed to facilitate positive change for the Indigenous peoples already residing in the area. Michelle Good's debut novel *Five Little Indians* (2020), positions DTES as her characters' new residence after they age out of the residential school system. Her narrative explores the mobility and displacement of her Indigenous characters while underscoring the cultural significance of the neighborhood for Indigenous communities. This talk examines Good's narrative against the backdrop of the current gentrification efforts ongoing in DTES within the theoretical framework of "native hub" outlined by Renya K. Ramirez. It underscores how in the novel, DTES facilitates cultural engagement between different Indigenous groups who were historically displaced, and it highlights how these current gentrification efforts are continuations of Canada's displacement policies.

ECE ERGIN (she/her) is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Freiburg in English and American Studies. She earned her master's degree in British and North American Cultural Studies (MiBNACS) in 2022 and now works as the MiBNACS program coordinator at the University of Freiburg. Her current research focuses on representations of Indigenous spiritual and religious identity in Canada's residential school narratives. Her areas of interest include Indigenous Literature, Trauma Studies, and Cultural Memory Studies.

Lieven Ameel (Tampere University): Before Gentrification: Changing Neighborhoods in New York and New Jersey in the works of Paule Marshall, Philip Roth, Jonathan Lethem, and Colson Whitehead

Abstract: What kinds of urban transformations and displacement are at work in the literature of New York and New Jersey before gentrification? How do narratives of decline lay the groundwork for narratives of gentrification, and for the neighborhood in literature as a site for community and displacement? These questions will be examined with reference to Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), Philip Roth's *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* (1999), and Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* (2003).

Drawing on the work of Carlo Rotella and Blanche Gelfant, and more recently, Thomas Heise, Hanna Henryson and Davy Knittle, I look at the narrative forms used to describe changing neighborhoods. I foreground 1. the aestheticization of absence; 2. the juxtaposition of loss with personal advancement, and 3. the emplotment of flight, as three key ways in which American literature describes urban transformation.

LIEVEN AMEEL (he/him) is Senior Lecturer in Comparative Literature at Tampere University, Finland. He has widely published on experiences of space, narrative planning, and

urban futures. His books include *Helsinki in Early Twentieth-Century Literature* (2014), *The Narrative Turn in Urban Planning* (2020), and several co-edited volumes, most recently *The Materiality of Literary Narratives in Urban History* (2019), and *Literatures of Urban Possibility* (2021). He is the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Literary Urban Studies* (2022), and one of the editors of the Palgrave Series in Literary Urban Studies.

11:30-13:15 Panel II: Destructive Agents of Gentrification: Embodying the Gentrifier

Panel Chair: Annika Mattissek (University of Freiburg)

James Peacock (Keele University): “You *gentrified* gentrification”: Affect, Authenticity and Authorship in Jonathan Lethem’s *Brooklyn Crime Novel* (2023)

Abstract: *Brooklyn Crime Novel* is a metafictional response to Lethem’s *The Fortress of Solitude* (2003). Where the earlier novel was lyrical and partly autobiographical, and explored Gowanus’s gentrification through the eyes of a teenage boy negotiating multiracial friendships, the latter presents itself as a dispassionate, distanced report on the history of Brooklyn gentrification and the borough’s complex racialized interactions. The mysterious homodiegetic narrator promises to eschew emotion, nostalgia and “painterly effects” (9), sticking to the facts to uncover gentrification’s “crimes.” (This attempt at objectivity is doomed to failure.) In one scene, the narrator and another character stage an intervention at a reading by “Dean Street’s novelist” (304), a fictionalized Lethem. The novelist stands accused of exploiting childhood friendships and of having “*gentrified gentrification*” (319). I argue that *Brooklyn Crime Novel* is, among other things, a meditation not only on Lethem’s role in portraying Brooklyn’s gentrification, but the role of literature more widely. Literary treatments by successful authors such as Lethem, it suggests, are big business, appeal to hipsters and middle-class gentrifiers, and thus contribute to gentrification. To employ Sarah Schulman’s vivid metaphor: they are a mirror that gentrifier consumers think is “a window, believing that corporate support for and inflation of their story is in fact a neutral and accurate picture of the world” (28). The establishment of an affective readerly relationship with gentrifier protagonists, no matter how critical of gentrification they are, exacerbates the problem. New forms of literary engagement, therefore, less allied to lyrical realist conventions, are required.

JAMES PEACOCK (he/him) is Reader in English and American Literatures at Keele University in the UK. He specializes in contemporary literature and has just completed a monograph on gentrification fictions, which includes discussions of twenty-first-century novels published in the US, Canada, UK, India and Australia. He is the author of *Brooklyn Fictions: The Contemporary Urban Community in a Global Age* (Bloomsbury 2015) and *Jonathan Lethem* (Manchester University Press, 2012).

Heike Steinhoff (Ruhr-University Bochum): Flipping Houses on American Reality TV: Gentrification, Self-Entrepreneurship, and the (Un)Making of Homes

Abstract: *Flip or Flop*, *Good Bones*, *Fixxer Upper* – contemporary American reality TV provides us with a plethora of so called house flipping shows. On these shows, flipping houses, i.e. buying, renovating and quickly selling a house to make a profit, is represented as lucrative business. Though focused on the remodelling of single family homes, these shows contribute to processes and aesthetics of gentrification, while framing flippers-as-gentrifiers as neoliberal aspirational self-entrepreneurs worthy of imitation. In this paper, I will argue that house flipping reality television constitutes a specifically gendered discourse, in which gentrification is shaped by the creative labor of (predominantly white) women, and promotes interior designs and aesthetics of domestic distinction rooted in discourses of spaciousness and cleanliness linked to American middle-class values. As homes are (un)made on the TV screen, mediated house flipping produces (in)visibilities that function to stabilize dominant patterns of displacement. At the same time house flipping shows participate in reality TV’s economy of visibility, linking gentrification aesthetics and normative ideals of home and subjecthood to notions of diversity

and an apparent democratization of taste. In my presentation, I will analyze selected shows to explore these dynamics of gender, class, race, and space, pointing out the format's formulaic sameness as well as its heterogeneity.

HEIKE STEINHOFF (she/her) is Junior Professor of American Studies at Ruhr-University Bochum. In her research she explores American culture from the 19th to the 21st century with a particular focus on media, body studies, gender studies, and urban cultures. She is the author of two monographs, *Transforming Bodies: Makeovers and Monstrosities in American Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and *Queer Buccaneers: (De)Constructing Boundaries in the Pirates of the Caribbean Film Series* (Lit, 2011). Moreover, she is the editor of *Hipster Culture: Transnational and Intersectional Perspectives* (Bloomsbury, 2021) and *Epidemics and Othering: The Biopolitics of COVID-19 in Historical and Cultural Perspectives* (transcript, 2023). She has also published on 19th century city mystery novels, children's movies, filmic representations of urban masculinities, and the interrelations of self-help literature, body positivity and popular feminisms.

Kübra Aksay (University of Freiburg): Swallowing the City – *Donut County* and Stories of Gentrification in Video Games

Abstract: From the pixelated landscapes of early arcade games to the detailed metropolises of modern city builders, video games have long been intertwined with urban settings. Players' engagements with these settings encompass diverse interactions, including the development and transformation of virtual cities, immersive exploration of their intricacies, or deliberate acts of their destruction. In this talk, I examine *Donut County* (Esposito, 2018), a video game in which players control an ever-growing hole in the ground, intending to swallow everything and everyone within a fictional rendition of Los Angeles. The game's narrative, however, is not about destruction but displacement, as the player-controlled hole does not simply remove residents and their homes but traps them all underground, while the surface of the city is taken over by outsiders. Like the player who needs to expand the hole in the ground to complete each level, the protagonist of *Donut County* manipulates the holes for instant benefits, provided through a gamified reward system on a mobile app simulated in the game. Thus, the game presents a narrative that parallels the power dynamics between the player and the gamespace, and those between the protagonist and their employer, who influences their actions through the mobile app and its rewards. I aim to support this argument by analysing the gameplay as well as the racial implications and the role of technology in the game's story.

KÜBRA AKSAY (she/her) is a lecturer and Ph.D. candidate in American Studies at the University of Freiburg, Germany. Her doctoral thesis focuses on the remediation and representation of archival objects in video games. She is an associated member of DiGRA and DAS|LAB (Regensburg) and has been convening the monthly meetings of the colloquium *Reading Games* in Freiburg since 2019.

14:15-16:00 Panel III: The Local and the Global: Gentrification and Scale

Panel Chair: Manuela Boatcă (University of Freiburg)

Andrej Holm (Humboldt University of Berlin): Berlin's Gentrification Mainstream and the Trap of Localization

Abstract: Tracing the urban development processes in Berlin's city center since the 1990s, this talk describes the expansion of gentrification dynamics to large parts of the city. In the 1990s, gentrification was diagnosed to effect clearly delineated neighborhoods in Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg. However, from the 2000s onward, gentrification dynamics were perceived through the image of a wave expanding to city parts like Friedrichshain, Neukölln, and Kreuzberg. This dominant image regularly parked speculations in pub conversations just as much as media reports about which neighborhood would be the next candidate to be hit by the wave of gentrification. By the 2010s, wide parts of Berlin's city center were affected by processes of upgrading and displacement, so that previously inconspicuous neighborhoods such as Weißensee, Pankow, Moabit, Tiergarten, and parts of Wedding were seen as places of gentrification.

In many ways, Berlin epitomizes the emergence of a gentrification mainstream. This mainstream challenges shared foundations of gentrification research, public discourses, and literary representations of gentrification by requiring approaches that exceed location-specific and neighborhood-specific models of explanation. If gentrification can no longer be conceived as "islands of renewal in seas of decay" (Berry, 1985), then the process of gentrification cedes to be perceived as extraordinary or exceptional. Rising rents and increased visibility of local cultures can no longer be attributed to the urban and historically specific conditions of different neighborhoods. Using the example of Berlin's gentrification over the past 30 years, this talk presents explanations that highlight political-economic conditions rather than the local characteristics of individual neighborhoods.

ANDREJ HOLM (he/him) is a faculty member of the Department for Urban and Regional Sociology at the Humboldt University of Berlin. His research focuses on gentrification, urban development, and housing policy. Raised in East Berlin, Holm has been researching and publicly commenting on Berlin's urban development processes since the late 1990s. His research on housing market developments, privatizations of municipal housing companies, and displacement in Berlin have significantly shaped the public and academic understanding of the housing crisis in Berlin. Since the early 1990s, he has been a part of tenant rights organizations and movements and actively seeks to influence Berlin's housing policy.

Boris Vormann (Bard College Berlin): Does the Global City Still Exist? Making Sense of Urbanization after Neoliberalism

Abstract: It's been more than thirty years since Saskia Sassen coined the influential concept of the global city. Written in the tradition of the literature on empires and world cities, the book has influenced a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. More recently, Simon Curtis's work has shown how the global city was one element in a broader arrangement of power relations, especially at the height of American hegemony. From this perspective, the global city was defined above all by its emergence in neoliberal globalization processes. Gentrification was an urban strategy in a larger context of extensive marketization, increased intercity competition, and urban entrepreneurship. This paper asks what remains of the global city as Sassen once conceptualized it, now that neoliberalism seems to have taken its last breath. And it asks to what extent we need to rethink both this concept and our understanding of

urbanization at a moment when globalization seems to be unraveling, or at least profoundly changing.

BORIS VORMANN (he/him) is Professor of Politics and Director of the Politics Section at Bard College Berlin. Vormann's research and teaching lie at the intersection of comparative political economy and economic geography and focus on the role of the state in globalization and urbanization processes; nations and nationalism; and the crisis of democracy. Vormann is a regular commentator on public policy debates for different media outlets (including *The Economist*, *Deutsche Welle*, *Tagesschau*, and *Deutschlandfunk*). His current research project examines the role of the state in building the urban logistical infrastructures of expanding global trade networks.

Julia Roth (Bielefeld University): “Plymouth Rock Landed on Us”: Hip Hop as Critique of Gentrification and Local and Global Racialized Inequalities

Abstract: The fact that Hip Hop culture emerged in the aftermath of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the context of brutal social cuts and neoliberal segregationist urban planning is seldom considered of central importance for the genre. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, DJ club parties and block parties united MCs, DJs, break dancers and graffiti artists as a means to give voice to the experience of youths of color from urban poor communities such as ghettoization, gang culture of drugs and violence resulting from gentrification, as well as the low self-esteem and lack of perspective related to the “hood”. Recently, numerous Hip Hop artists have critiqued and protested against the new phase of neoliberal gentrification that makes living in the neighborhoods that created the genre unaffordable. Artists also use Hip Hop's potential as a “diasporic *lingua franca*” (El-Tayeb 2011) pointing to the transnational parallels and interrelations when it comes to segregationist urban “renewal”, but also immigration and citizenship regimes, ranging from references to the slavery past and Africa (Afrika Bambaataa/Zulu Nation), the identification with refugees (The Fugees), or the imaginary of a “Hip Hop Nation” and Hip Hop Nation Language or the “right to migrate” (Las Krudas). Examining a number of Hip Hop lyrics, videos and performances, this talk focuses on Hip Hop as a mode of activism and critique of but also education about gentrification and how to combat it. It argues that the recent reflections and literature on gentrification can gain a lot by considering the long and vivid tradition and archive of experiences Hip Hop culture has to offer.

JULIA ROTH (she/her) teaches American Studies and Inter-American Studies and is currently director of the Center for Interamerican Studies (CIAS) at Bielefeld University. She was a postdoctoral fellow in the research project “The Americas as Space of Entanglements” in Bielefeld and in the interdisciplinary network “desiguALdades.net – Interdependent Inequalities in Latin America” at Freie Universität Berlin, lecturer at Humboldt-Universität Berlin, Universität Potsdam, and Universidad de Guadalajara, Mexico. In addition to her academic work, she organizes cultural and political events (e.g. the festival symposium “Hip Hop Havana-Berlin: Urban counter-cultures and social movements in the Black Atlantic” with Matti Steinitz and Robert Zurbano at Savvy Contemporary Berlin in July 2020).

16:30-18:15 Panel IV: Archives of Gentrification: Memory and History

Panel Chair: Valerie Caillet (University of Freiburg)

Thomas Heise (Pennsylvania State U/Abington): “Down River”: Pennsylvania’s “Steel Country,” LaToya Ruby Frazier, and the Making of American Memory

Abstract: This paper analyzes the stories told about two industrial sites in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania’s Monongahela River Valley: the decommissioned Carrie Blast Furnaces, one of the few surviving remnants of U.S. Steel Homestead Steel Works and Edgar Thomson Steel Works, which sits two miles downriver from Carrie and is owned by U.S. Steel and is still in operation. For much of the twentieth century, the Monongahela River Valley produced more steel than any other region of the world and as such, the area has played an outsized role in the U.S. imaginary. Its mills produced the steel that built much of what is iconically American. The precipitous collapse of the steel industry in the 1980s and the decades of industrial decline that followed have had similarly outsized effects on how the U.S. imagines itself, though one in decidedly less-triumphalist terms.

Saved from demolition, the Carrie Blast Furnaces are today a National Historic Landmark managed by Rivers of Steel, a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to safeguard western Pennsylvania’s industrial heritage while spurring cultural tourism to revitalize the region. In Carrie’s postindustrial incarnation, one can take a tour of the rusted furnaces, enroll in a class on graffiti writing or metalworking, or watch an open-air production of a Shakespeare play. In this talk, I situate the stories of industrial heritage, artmaking, and economic rebirth that are emerging at the 168-acre Carrie site alongside those stories told about Edgar Thomson Steel Works and the surrounding community by the MacArthur “Genius” photographer LaToya Ruby Frazier in *The Notion of Family* (2014). Frazier’s mixed-media work, I argue, reveals the slow violence of industrial racism and the erasure of African-American voices both in mid-century collective memories of American industrial progress and today’s postindustrial stories of rebirth and revitalization.

THOMAS HEISE (he/him) is the author of *The Gentrification Plot: New York and the Postindustrial Crime Novel* (Columbia 2022) and *Urban Underworlds: A Geography of Twentieth-Century American Literature and Culture* (Rutgers 2011). His essays have appeared in *African American Review*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies*, and *American Literary History*. A former faculty member at McGill University, he is now an Associate Professor in the Department of English at Pennsylvania State University (Abington).

Hollis Griffin (University of Michigan): Television & the Subway: NYC, Summer/Fall 1990

Abstract: What role does television play in the gentrification of urban space? How can scholars construct an archive for studying the relationship between various kinds of programs and the medium’s placemaking functions, more broadly? In this talk, Griffin isolates a stretch of time when U.S. television was inordinately concerned with the New York City transit system. Looking at government-produced public service announcements, news segments, police procedurals, and sitcoms, he argues that understanding the relationship between television and gentrification requires a varied archive that remains attuned to differences in generic forms, the audiences imagined by writers and producers, and various modes of financing content. In doing so, he argues that the gentrification of New York is closely connected to another kind of

gentrification, the one that occurred on U.S. television in the 1990s. With the decline of the manufacturing sector and the rise of white flight in the 1970s, New York City teetered on the brink of bankruptcy. For decades, it had a reputation as a space characterized by urban blight, homelessness, and high rates of drug-related crime. But by 1990, broad structural changes in the form of a robust financial sector, strategic zoning practices by city government, and legislative support for property investment were resulting in visible changes to many New York City neighborhoods. The result was a displacement of low income residents in favor of white-collar professionals. Similarly, broadcast television moved away from programming designed to appeal to a mass audience and toward content that more self-consciously courted narrower demographics thought to have more disposable income. These viewers were attractive to advertisers who were rapidly leaving the network television market in order to advertise elsewhere. Griffin considers these two modalities of gentrification in tandem to think about what television reveals about the city, and what the city reveals about television.

HOLLIS GRIFFIN (he/him) is Associate Professor in the Departments of Communication and Media and Film, Television, and Media at the University of Michigan, where he teaches and researches television, new media, and cultural politics, particularly as they intersect with questions of sexuality, affect and emotion, and space/place. His book, *Feeling Normal: Sexuality and Media Criticism in the Digital Age* (Indiana, 2017), was named an Outstanding Academic Title for 2017 by *Choice*, the publication of the American Library Association. He is also the editor of the anthology *Television Studies in Queer Times* (Routledge, 2023). Hollis currently sits on the editorial boards for *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*; *Communication, Culture, and Critique*; *Television & New Media*; *Film Criticism*, and *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture*. He is currently the book review editor for *Television & New Media*. Hollis was also elected to the Board of Directors for the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, where he served as Secretary.

Lena Mattheis (University of Surrey): Transplacement: Gentrification, Gender and Vampires in *Dead Collections* (2022)

Abstract: Displacement of trans lives and queer spaces through rising rents, normative restructuring of built environments, exclusionary infrastructures, and transphobia as well as queerphobia is an urgent threat to the material realities of trans people globally. *Dead Collections* by Isaac Fellman tackles these important issues by turning Sol, the novel's protagonist, into an elusive yet powerful creature: a trans vampire archivist.

Sol secretly moves into his natural habitat, the dark basement of the archive that is also his workplace, to seek respite from the constant threats vampirism creates in his daily life: the mortal danger of exposure to the sun, the need to access regular transfusions at the hospital where most doctors understand very little about his illness, the rising rents in the urban environment he calls his home. In creating this clumsy, self-deprecating, and deeply relatable character, Fellman is able to describe the particular challenges trans people face in gentrified areas. Borrowing from transecological thinking, I want to think about the constant threats of involuntary mobility that Sol is exposed to as forms of transplacement.

LENA MATTHEIS (they/she) is a lecturer in contemporary literature at the University of Surrey. Lena specialises in queer literature, narrative studies and literary geography. In 2019, Lena completed a PhD in literary urban studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. Lena's work has been published in a monograph, *Translocality in Contemporary City Novels* (Palgrave, 2021), and in journals such as *Narrative*, *Transnational Literature*, *Literary Geographies*, or *WSQ*. Since April 2021, Lena has been hosting the *Queer Lit* podcast and

recorded conversations with Sara Ahmed, Sue Lanser, Jack Halberstam, Susan Stryker, Lee Edelman, Meg-John Barker and many other inspiring scholars.

18:30 -19:45 Poetry Reading and Discussion with Poet Donna Stonecipher: *The Ruins of Nostalgia* (2023), moderated by Davy Knittle

Donna Stonecipher will read from her recently published book *The Ruins of Nostalgia*, a poetic reconsideration of nostalgia as both feeling-state and historical idea. Some of the poems address gentrification and the nostalgia it can engender. Nostalgia originally meant, essentially, a kind of homesickness, and these poems explore longing for a past that included a sense of a “home” that no longer exists, at least in part because the speakers can no longer afford to live there.

DONNA STONECIPHER (she/her) is the author of six books of poetry, most recently *The Ruins of Nostalgia*, which was named a best book of 2023 by NPR, and *Transaction Histories*, which was listed by *The New York Times* as one of the 10 best poetry books of 2018. She has also published one book of criticism, *Prose Poetry and the City* (2018). Her poems have been translated into seven languages, and her translation of Friederike Mayröcker’s trilogy *études*, *cahier*, and *fleurs*, for which she received a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, is being published by Seagull. She lives in Berlin.

Friday 14 June 2024

9:00-10:45 Panel V: Gentrification on the Page and Screen – Tracking Stories of Urban Change

Panel Chair: Jennifer Howard (University of Freiburg)

Adam Hollstein (University of Freiburg): Upholding Conflict Spaces, Creating Contact Zones: Shop Owners in Fictional Gentrifying Communities

Abstract: Gentrification is often defined through the dichotomy of the gentrifiers and those displaced through gentrification. Following such definitions, interactions between the groups could only be conflictual in nature, mirroring global power structures in localized conflict spaces. Applying Mary Louise Pratt's concept of "contact zones" to (fictional) gentrifying communities however offers a more nuanced perspective that allows productive interactions to take place in those communities. I will discuss the special role of shops upholding conflict spaces and creating contact zones inside their respective fictional gentrifying communities. Such establishments are insofar special as they are a privately owned, yet part of the public sphere, reflecting the global power structure that drives gentrification in a localized space. Comparing the shopkeepers Sal from Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and Fadi from Ivy Pochoda's *Visitation Street* (2013), I will analyze how their interactions shape their respective shops as spaces in between conflict spaces and contact zones. I will show how the shop owners are introduced as outsiders but contribute to the communities at the same time, while still upholding their economic interests. Finally, the need for representation in these privately owned, yet public spaces in the fictional gentrifying communities will be discussed.

ADAM HOLLSTEIN (he/him) is enrolled in the Master of Education program at the University of Freiburg with the aim of becoming a teacher. He completed his undergraduate studies at the universities of Konstanz and Freiburg, graduating with a double-major in English and Political Science in 2023. His areas of interest include narratives of gentrification and climate change with a focus on their (visual) representation in popular culture.

Kieu Jenny Vi (University of Freiburg): Cooking Up Change – Food and Gentrification in *The Bear*

Abstract: Emerging as a terrain where gentrification's impacts and conflicts are vividly illustrated, the interconnectedness between food and gentrification serves as a lens through which we can study the shifting landscapes of neighborhoods. Food is not just symbolic of gentrification – seen as "a harbinger of things to come" (Alkon et al. 5); rather it manifests as a tangible force in the forms of 'fancy' coffee shops, restaurants, or grocery stores that can actively contribute to changes in a city's neighborhood. A notable example for studying the relationship between food and gentrification is FX's *The Bear* (2022-), a critically acclaimed kitchen 'dramedy' that deals with a young chef struggling to upkeep the family restaurant, an Italian beef sandwich shop, in the changing Chicagoan neighborhood of River North. Through an analysis of the changing Italian beef sandwich shop and its effect on the neighborhood, I demonstrate that the evolution of the restaurant mirrors the processes of retail gentrification, a form of gentrification that changes neighborhoods through the upscaling of businesses (Hubbard 296). In order to examine this "distinctive form of gentrification that can precede (and precipitate) other social, cultural and economic processes of gentrification" (Hubbard 307) in *The Bear*, the presentation focuses on three key aspects: the restaurant, the neighborhood, and the character portrayals.

KIEU JENNY VI (she/her) is a master's student in British and North American Cultural Studies at the University of Freiburg. She graduated with a double-major in English and Philosophy from the same university in 2023, writing on "The Complexities of Contemporary Motherhood in *Big Little Lies*." In addition to her studies, she is the co-host of the *English Language Film Club* and volunteers at the Carl-Schurz Haus, a German-American institute. Moreover, she works as a student assistant for Prof. Dr. Monika Fludernik, a professor of English Literature at the University of Freiburg. As of now, her research interests encompass Motherhood Studies, literature and philosophy, dystopian fiction, and Film/TV Studies.

Julius Paul (University of Freiburg/Lübeck Academy of Music): From General Store to Rose Apothecary: Rural Gentrification in *Schitt's Creek*

Abstract: Because it is mostly associated with urban spaces, the question arises whether and how gentrification can occur in rural spaces. This talk examines a portrayal of what rural gentrification could look like in the television series *Schitt's Creek* (CBC, 2015-2020). I focus on the upper-class Rose family and their transformative impact on the small town they involuntarily inhabit. As the Roses endeavor to revitalize the dilapidated village, the narrative unfolds with a tone of optimism and the overall message, that the town's upscaling is beneficial for the community as a whole. However, my analysis will highlight the characters' lack of critical awareness regarding the negative side effects of gentrification, such as displacement and loss of community cohesion. Key focal points of my analysis include the characterization of the Rose family as gentrifiers, the gradual upscaling of the town, and the symbolic significance of a concept store called Rose Apothecary, which replaces the town's general store. Overall, the paper explores rural gentrification in *Schitt's Creek*, emphasizing the complexities and implications of the portrayed revitalization efforts.

JULIUS PAUL (he/him) studied English and American Studies with a focus on cultural studies at the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg as well as music at the University of Music Freiburg. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in classical piano at the Lübeck Academy of Music

11:15-13:00 Panel VI: Communities against Gentrification

Panel Chair: Klara Machata (University of Freiburg)

Davy Knittle (University of Delaware): “Service to the Avian Public”: Multispecies Resistance to Gentrification in *The Thirty Names of Night*

Abstract: Throughout Zeyn Joukhadar’s 2020 novel, *The Thirty Names of Night*, the survival of queer, trans, Black, and brown people is tied to the study and support of birds and resistance to neoliberal gentrification across New York City. The novel focuses on a Syrian American transmasculine protagonist, Nadir, whose community manifests opposition to predatory development and anti-Muslim violence through organizing projects and through small institutions including one run by a family friend, Aisha, who operates a tiny bird sanctuary in a house in Queens.

Early in the novel, the sanctuary’s funding is cut by the city in a wave of austerity measures and Nadir and his friends help Aisha close it, while reflecting on the harm gentrification causes to many forms of life in New York. Throughout the novel, birds draw attention to the ruptures caused by gentrification, making evident that predatory urban policy affects not only marginalized people but also multispecies survival.

In this presentation, I build on work in literary urban studies and urban history as well as multispecies justice and queer and trans studies scholarship by Harlan Weaver, Stacy Alaimo, and others to make two contributions to a conversation about stories of gentrification and displacement. First, I suggest that the distribution of life chances and reliable access to space the city is always already a multispecies question. Second, I draw attention to small, precarious institutions that blur the line between municipal governance and mutual aid and their complex role in processes of gentrification.

DAVY KNITTLE (he/they) is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Delaware, where he teaches queer and trans theory, U.S. literature, and the urban and environmental humanities. Davy’s current book project is entitled “Urbanist Desire and the Ecology of Queer and Trans Survival.” His critical work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in *PMLA*, *Feminist Formations*, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* and *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. He lives in Philadelphia.

Alexa Weik von Mossner (University of Klagenfurt/University of Freiburg): Unintentional Communities: Narratives of Climate (De)gentrification

Abstract: What happens to the geographies and social stratification of coastal cities and other urban spaces in a swiftly changing climate? How will sea level rise and extreme weather events drive urban transformations and population shifts in unexpected ways? Focusing on the climate “riskscapes” (Mehnert 2014) of the United States, my presentation will consider documentary nonfiction and speculative fiction to explore some pressing questions around climate (de)gentrification.

We are already witnessing climate-driven gentrification as it is depicted, for example, in Katja Esson’s documentary *Razing Liberty Square* (2023), which chronicles a Black community’s displacement as the public housing units it calls home gets “razed” by the City of Miami to build expensive condominiums on higher ground. Meanwhile, formerly attractive beachfront properties are no longer insurable, inviting population shifts like the ones we are seeing in Louisiana, where Hurricane Katrina and other disasters have set in motion migrations to lower-risk places (McDonnell 2020). Low-income families are forced to stay or seek out higher-risk

places where the rents are more affordable in a climate-driven process of *degentrification*: “the reversal of urban progress and the decline of once-thriving neighborhoods” (Hendrix 2021). The second part of my talk will investigate how speculative fiction has extrapolated such processes of climate (de)gentrification, using examples such as Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Water Knife* (2015), Kim Stanley Robinson’s *New York 2140* (2017), and my own novel *Fragile* (2023), which all showcase American metropolises reshaped by climate change. I am interested in how the cities’ physicality and future geographies are transformed by the changed climatic conditions and how these are shown to affect population displacement and the resulting involuntary communities.

ALEXA WEIK VON MOSSNER (she/her) is Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Klagenfurt and a visiting professor of Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Freiburg. She is the author of *Cosmopolitan Minds: Literature, Emotion, and the Transnational Imagination* (U of Texas P 2014) and *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative* (Ohio State UP 2017), and has (co)edited several books, among them *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film* (Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2014) and *Empirical Ecocriticism: Environmental Narratives for Social Change* (U of Minnesota P, 2023). Her first novel, *Fragile* (Elzwhere), was published in 2023.

Japonica Brown-Saracino (Boston University): A Mass for the Triple Decker

Abstract: How do a variety of cultural producers (Griswold 1986) rely on gentrification to convey stories of community dissolution and change? Drawing on a chapter from my forthcoming book (Princeton; anticipated early 2025), I will turn to a documentary, sculpture, a television series, and a film to demonstrate how some feature gentrification to offer accounts of how a diverse set of communities change. I will explore what gentrification and community mean in these accounts, which feature very distinct population groups in disparate locales and rely on different media to convey their stories. Ultimately, I explore what these cultural objects (Griswold 1986) reveal about how some think about both gentrification and community today.

JAPONICA BROWN-SARACINO (she/her) is professor of Sociology and Women’s, Gender & Sexuality Studies at Boston University, where she is also chair of Sociology. She is an ethnographer who studies gentrification, sexualities, place, and culture. Her books include, *A Neighborhood That Never Changes: Gentrification, Social Preservation and the Quest for Authentic Community* (Chicago, 2009); an edited volume, *The Gentrification Debates* (Routledge 2010); and *How Places Make Us: Novel LBQ Identities in Four Small Cities* (Chicago 2018). She is currently finalizing a book for Princeton University Press on representations of gentrification, and, with a collaborator, she is launching a project on gender and housing.

14:00-15:15 Panel VII: Gentrification and/through Leisure

Panel Chair: Kristina Seefeldt (University of Freiburg)

Stefan Höhne (KWI Essen): Gold Rush in Needle Park – Histories of Drug-led Gentrification

Abstract: In much of the popular imagination, illicit drugs are traditionally associated with urban decay, ghettos, and junkies, while gentrification is thought of as a way to transform such “drug-ridden” neighborhoods into safe and clean areas for middle class families. Moreover, the displacement of such drug cultures from public spaces, such as parks and squares, is usually legitimized as a way to eradicate deviant behavior and to “sober up” neighborhoods. However, this talk will offer an alternative to such truisms, arguing that more often than not, dynamics of urban renewal are actually tied to process of “drug-led gentrification”. Instead of feeding the narrative of gentrification and illicit drug use as negatively correlated, I will argue that gentrifying neighborhoods often trigger a proliferation and pluralization of local drug cultures.

STEFAN HÖHNE (he/him) is a cultural studies scholar working at The Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI) Essen, Germany. His research focusses on histories of infrastructures and urban everyday life in Europe and North America. He is a member of the editorial collective of the open access journal *sub\urban – Zeitschrift für kritische Stadtforschung* and lead archivist of the “Narcotic City Archive.”

Maria Sulimma (University of Freiburg): Puppies, Babies, and Gentrifiers: Canine-Human Consumerism, Care, and Cohabitation in Urban Storytelling

Abstract: The dog park and the over-burdened dog walker are a staple setting and character respectively in stories about the city. However, in the gentrifying city, activities and spaces associated with dog ownership have been upscaled, commodified, and specialized. In storytelling, too, the human-dog relationship has become a means to depict gentrification in US-American cities, ranging from pets being seen as a risk for maintaining one’s lease, to connect with neighbors, or as occasion for exaggerated consumer practices. Hence, the walking of a dog, caring for a dog, or living with a dog can be approached as a kind of microscript of gentrification, a marginalized depiction of leisure or consumer practices that serve as a shortcut to depict the complex phenomenon. I turn to novels like Sigrid Nunez’s *The Friend* (2018) and Jen Beagin’s *Big Swiss* (2023) alongside Eileen Myles’s dog memoir *Afterglow* (2017) and the A.L. Steiner’s Zine *Puppies and Babies* (2013) to explore the ambiguous role of dogs in the transforming urban environment in cohabitation with humans and at the same time as symbols of privileged lifestyles and entitlement of their owners/dog parents.

In this talk, I am thinking through the ways that the gentrified city is connected to and mediated through cohabitation with dogs drawing on theoretical frameworks of Donna Haraway, Bénédicte Boisseron, or Harlan Weaver to understand the complex ways that race, gender, and class are involved in multi-species cohabitations between humans and dogs.

MARIA SULIMMA (she/her) is Juniorprofessor of North American Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Freiburg. She is the author of *Gender and Seriality: Practices and Politics of Contemporary US Television* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021) and co-editor of *City Scripts: Narratives of Postindustrial Urban Futures* (Ohio State University Press, 2023). Her recent work is on storytelling and gentrification.