Cultures of Inequality

Munich, July 9-11, 2015

15th international conference of the Bavarian American Academy

Abstracts & Bios
Thursday, 9 July 2015

18.00  Welcome and Opening Talk

Reymer Klüver: *Does the U.S. Need to Reinvent Itself?* .......... 2

Friday, 10 July 2015

09.00  Colin Gordon: *Growing Apart: A Political History of American Inequality* ................................................................. 2

Axel R. Schäfer: *Beyond ‘States’ and ‘Markets’: Isaac M. Rubinow, Social Inequality, and Transatlantic Reform, 1890-1935* .......... 3

11.00  David Wilson: *The Death of City Neoliberal Governance: Long Live City Neoliberal Governance* .............................................. 4

Yvonne Franz: *Housing (In)Equalities in Vienna and New York City?* ............................................................................................... 4

14.30  Bruce Robbins: *On Being a Beneficiary: Discomforts of Global Inequality* ............................................................................... 5

Sabine Broeck: *Unequality or (Social) Death? On the Devastation of Black Urban Life* ................................................................. 6

16.30  Sonali Perera: *Reading Tillie Olsen in a Global and Unequal World* ...................................................................................... 7

Julia Faisst: *Moving In and Out, Moving Up and Down: Re-Evaluating Real Estate in Twenty-First Century Drama* ............... 8

Rinaldo Walcott: *After Black Lives Matter: Black Death, Capitalism, and Unfreedom* ................................................................. 9

Saturday, 11 July 2015

10.00  Larry M. Bartels: *Political Inequality in Affluent Democracies* .......... 9

Susanne Pickel: *Unequal Democracies in Europe: Inequalities in Understandings of, Participation in, and Perception of Democracy* ........................................................................................................ 10

12.00  Gail Stephens: *Launching a Human Rights Museum* ............... 11

13.00  End of Conference
Thursday, 9 July 2015, 18.00  OPENING TALK

Reymer Klüver

*Does the U.S. Need to Reinvent Itself?*

Reymer Klüver is senior news editor at the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Germany’s leading daily political newspaper based in Munich. Prior to assuming this post he served as political correspondent for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Washington, DC from 2005 to 2012. Before that he covered national politics in Berlin. He has been writing for the paper for 25 years now, working as correspondent in Hamburg, as editor in the feature section, and as staff writer for Third-World-Affairs. He started his career at the Henri-Nannen-School for Journalism in Hamburg and worked for *Stern Magazine* and *Geo Magazine*. He received a MA from Tübingen University. He is author of four books on US affairs, population issues and global development policies. He received the Media Price for Development Reporting of the German government.

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Friday, 10 July 2015, 9.00  PANEL I

**Social Inequality and Reform in Atlantic History**

**Chair: Volker Depkat** is professor of American Studies at the University of Regensburg.

**Colin Gordon**

*Growing Apart: A Political History of American Inequality*

Colin Gordon is professor and director of Undergraduate Studies at the Department of History at the University of Iowa. He is also a senior research consultant at the Iowa Policy Project, for which he has written or co-written reports on health coverage, economic development, and wages and working conditions. His digital projects include “Mapping Decline,” an interactive mapping project based on his St. Louis research and “The Telltale Chart,” a data visualization project focusing on historical and recent economic data. He is the author of *Growing Apart: A Political History of American Inequality* (2013), *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (2008), *Dead on Arrival: The Politics of Health in Twentieth Century America* (2003), and *New Deals: Business, Labor and Politics, 1920-1935* (1994). He has written for the *Nation*, *In these Times*, *Z Magazine*, *Atlantic Cities*, and *Dissent* (where he is a regular contributor). Colin Gordon received his PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1990.

**Abstract**

Over the last generation, the United States has seen a dramatic increase in economic inequality. This marks a sharp contrast with both the shared prosperity
that prevailed in the United States from the 1930s through the end of the 1960s, and the experience of most other industrial democracies. The causal roots of this inequality are found not in the inexorable forces of globalization or technology, but in a clear and pointed set of political choices that undermined the bargaining power of workers, and enhanced the bargaining power of the well-off. These policies not only created and sustained inequality, they were designed to do so.

Axel R. Schäfer

Beyond ‘States’ and ‘Markets’: Isaac M. Rubinow, Social Inequality, and Transatlantic Reform, 1890-1935

Axel R. Schäfer is professor of American Studies at Johannes-Gutenberg-University Mainz. His research focuses on 19th and 20th century US intellectual and cultural history, with a particular emphasis on religion and politics, transatlantic social thought, and public policy. He is the author of Piety and Public Funding: Evangelicals and the State in Modern America (2012), Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right (2011), and American Progressives and German Social Reform, 1875-1920: Social Ethics, Moral Control, and the Regulatory State in a Transatlantic Context (2000). He has published numerous journal articles and essays in edited volumes, including a prize-winning essay on W.E.B. Du Bois in the Journal of American History. In his current research project he examines the role immigration policies and discourses have played in the formation of modern welfare states. He is also working on various studies that explore the international engagement of American evangelicals in the 19th and 20th century.

Abstract

Few reformers of the Progressive Era partook in the complex transnational, intellectual, and socioeconomic cross-currents of the period to the extent Isaac M. Rubinow did. As a Jew, a Socialist, an actuary, a physician, and an urban Progressive he straddled the words of immigrant cultures, city politics, late nineteenth-century professionalization, and transatlantic social reform. He has been called the “father of Social Security," on a par with Edwin Witte and Abraham Epstein. This paper explores Rubinow’s efforts to establish a modern health insurance system on the basis of transatlantic borrowings and immigrant self-help institutions. Rubinow’s “cultural social politics," the paper suggests, combined European reforms with models of immigrant mutualism in ways that developed further prewar Progressivism’s potential to address deeply patterns of social inequality in American society. Equally critical of an overbearing state and limited regulatory interventions in market mechanisms, he spelled out a model of the welfare state that sought to reconcile distributive justice, ethnic diversity, participatory politics, and cultural modernity.
David Wilson

*The Death of City Neoliberal Governance: Long Live City Neoliberal Governance*

David Wilson is professor of Geography, Urban Planning, and the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research areas are urban political processes in cities of the global west, contemporary urban restructuring in North American cities, and the dynamics of change in America’s Rust Belt urban centers. His most recent books are *Cities and Inequalities in Cities Across the Globe in an Era of Neoliberalism and Transnationalism* with Faranak Miraftab and Ken Salo, (2016), *The Politics of the Concept Urban Sustainability* (in press), and *Cities and Race: America’s New Black Ghetto* (2007).

**Abstract**

Current neoliberal governances in America’s large urban centers have conceptually stagnated for years, offering the same tired recipe of austerity, retrenched government, and privatism to advance their redevelopment initiatives. As they continue to widen gaps between the haves and have nots, predictions of their demise have been common. Yet, they bravely solder on, and continue to author neoliberal-inspired redevelopment using this same rhetoric. This paper seeks to shed light on how these governances are able to remain firmly entrenched as viable political formations in this setting. The results suggest two dominant processes that are relevant. First, a mix of new fears – what I term the global trope and the race-class phobia trope – are invoked in current narratives of redevelopment that strengthen the neoliberal vision. Second, current neoliberal statecraft has come to depend upon (and is inescapably marked by) crisis. These entities have thus become a creature of crisis, drawing from this a pool go strength and resiliency. I conclude that these governances continue to be remarkably flexible and malleable political formations.

Yvonne Franz

*Housing (In)Equalities in Vienna and New York City?*

Yvonne Franz is a post-doc researcher at the Institute for Urban and Regional Research at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. She studied business economics and geography at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich, University of Cologne and University of Vienna and received her PhD in 2013. Her
dissertation focused on gentrification processes in New York City, Berlin, and Vienna as an inherent component in neighbourhood development and included a fellowship visit at the Graduate Center, City University New York (CUNY). She is now involved in two JPI Urban Europe projects dealing with gentrification processes (“Practices and Policies for Neighbourhood Improvement: Towards Gentrification 2.0”) and interethnic coexistence (“ICEC-Interethnic Coexistence in European Cities: A comparative and applied oriented analysis of neighborhood-related policies”). Her research interests include urban and neighbourhood development policies, as well as qualitative methods and living lab approaches in urban studies. She is a lecturer at the University of Vienna and co-organizer of the Vienna Summer School in Urban Studies.

Abstract

Housing is a basic need in everyone’s lives. When it comes to housing choices and affordability in growing cities, housing market mechanisms become complex and highly fragmented: What kinds of housing options are available, for whom, and based on what kinds of economic expenses and other aspects of eligibility? How does this framework change if the momentum of population growth is used to facilitate urban renewal practices? Is it possible to identify a tipping point that signifies the transition from gentle urban renewal practices to gentrification processes? This talk responds to these questions by presenting two different housing frameworks. The examples of Vienna and New York City will provide insights into political framework conditions and practices by various actors involved in urban renewal processes and impacting on inner-city housing markets.

Friday, 10 July 2015, 14.30 | PANEL III

Cultural Scripts of (In)Equality

Chair: Heike Paul is professor and chair of American Studies at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg.

Bruce Robbins

On Being a Beneficiary: Discomforts of Global Inequality

the World (2011). He is also the director of a documentary entitled “Some of My Best Friends Are Zionists” (bestfriendsfilm.com).

Abstract

“Under the capitalist system,” George Orwell wrote in 1936, “in order that England may live in comparative comfort, a hundred million Indians must live on the verge of starvation – an evil state of affairs, but you acquiesce in it every time you step into a taxi or eat a plate of strawberries and cream.” Orwell was investigating the effects of the Great Depression on the miners of the North. Yet he suddenly lifted his eyes from the grim spectacle before him and spoke instead about an invisible inequality – inequality at the scale of the world. Perhaps for that reason, he spoke in a contorted way: to beneficiaries of an unjust system, and as himself a taxi-taking, strawberry-eating beneficiary. What can we learn from his speech about the political and discursive discomforts of a world in which, for Americans as well as Europeans, global inequality seems to follow a different track and demand a different vocabulary from inequality at home?

Sabine Broeck

Unequality or (Social) Death? On the Devastation of Black Urban Life

Sabine Broeck is professor of American Studies at the University of Bremen. Her research critiques the coloniality and anti-blackness of transatlantic modernity as a social formation and culture of (post)-enslavement. She is president of the international scholarly organization Collegium for African American Research (CAAR), as well as director of the University of Bremen Institute for Postcolonial and Transcultural Studies (INPUTS). Her two previous monographs are Der entkolonisierte Körper (1988, “The decolonized body”) and White Amnesia-Black Memory? American Women’s Writing and History (1999). She is also the editor with Stella Bolaki of Audre Lorde’s Transnational Legacies (2015), as well as with Jason Ambroise of Black Knowledges/Black Struggles: Essays in Critical Epistemology (2015). She is currently at work on a manuscript entitled: Gender and Anti-Blackness, contracted with SUNY Press.

Abstract

The paper will look at a body of recent white academic and social media debates about cases of the accelerating devastation of black urban life, as witnessed in such instances as the deterioration of public services in Detroit, the public killings of black mostly young men and also women, and the anti-black politics of policing and incarceration from an afro-pessimist perspective. This theoretical perspective, as represented in the recent work by Frank Wilderson, Jared Sexton, Christina Sharpe, and others calls for a re-examination of the paradigm of inequality. Based on the theoretical concept of enslavism, rather than following liberal and leftist white commentary operating with a term like inequality (which implies at least the possibility of comparative evaluation on a range of human entitlements, no matter how unequally distributed in our given
moment), Broeck suggests to acknowledge the practice of a white classist reiterative production of black (social) death.

Friday, 10 July 2015, 16.30  |  PANEL IV

Writing Inequality: Literary Negotiations of Class, Globalization, and Social Justice

Chair: Kerstin Schmidt is professor and chair of American Studies at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt.

Sonali Perera

Reading Tillie Olsen in a Global and Unequal World

Sonali Perera is associate professor of English at Hunter College of the City University of New York, where she teaches courses in working-class literature, Marxist theory, feminist theory, globalization studies, and post-colonial literature and theory. She is the author of No Country: Working-Class Writing in the Age of Globalization (2014), “Rethinking Working-Class Literature: Feminism, Globalization, and Socialist Ethics” (2008), “Working-Class Writing and the Use Value of the Literary” (2012) and of “Moments, Not Monuments: Feminism and Labor Activism in Postnational Sri Lanka” (2012). From 2006-2008, she served on the executive board of directors of SAALT (South Asian Americans Leading Together), a national non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring civil rights and social justice for marginalized members of the South Asian immigrant community in America. At Hunter, Perera is a faculty associate of the Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute Human Rights Program. She is also affiliated faculty with the Departments of Women and Gender Studies and Comparative Literature. She is currently at work on her second book, Between Imperialism and Internationalism: World Literature and Human Rights.

Abstract

Fatal fires in Bangladeshi garment factories supplying cheap goods to US retailers focus the global Northern consumer’s attention on the disposable labor of the periphery, but only for the briefest moment. Meanwhile, the construction of the US worker as a casualty of off-shore manufacturing also pushes further into shadow the illegal immigrant worker whose cheap labor displaces the “American” laborer from within the bounds of the nation-state. Against such a fraught contemporary historical backdrop, how can we possibly make meaning of working-class writing as an ethical intervention in an age of comparative advantage and outsourcing? What conceptual and imaginative resources might we lay claim to to help us negotiate the global North-South question in an age of economic globalization? This paper proposes that there are worthwhile lessons still to be learned from prescient texts of the 1930s US proletarian tradition. Bringing together Tillie Olsen’s (1912 or 1913-2007) “I Want You Women Up
North to Know” (as well as her other works) with the poetry and prose of Sri Lankan garment factory workers published in Free Trade Zone periodicals, this paper considers how women’s and feminist texts of labor from across the global North-South divide offer us ethical models and interpretative frameworks for thinking a comparative, not competitive, model for working-class internationalism. And what does it mean to read Tillie Olsen nowadays, in a global and unequal world?

Julia Faisst

Moving In and Out, Moving Up and Down: Re-Evaluating Real Estate in Twenty-First Century Drama

Julia Faisst is assistant professor of American Studies at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. After receiving her PhD from Harvard, she was visiting assistant professor at Wake Forest University and postdoctoral research fellow at the International Graduate Center for the Study of Culture at the University of Giessen. Her fields of interest include US American and ethnic literatures and visual cultures, space and architecture, and class and poverty studies. She is the author of Cultures of Emancipation: Photography, Race, and Modern American Literature (2012) and co-editor of David P. Boder’s Die Toten habe ich nicht befragt (2011, “I did not interview the dead”). She has published essays on urban renewal in Tremé, the liberatory potential of photography in African American Literature, neo-slave narratives and plantation architecture, Philip Roth’s fictions of race, and the spatial turn in literary and cultural studies. She currently works on her habilitation, Precarious Belongings: Architectures of Class in U.S. Literature and Visual Culture, on housing inequalities and the segregated home in literature, film, and photography since the 1980s.

Abstract

Both Lisa D’Amour’s play Detroit (2011) and Bruce Norris’s drama Clybourne Park (2010, based on Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun) stand as contemporary real estate dramas which explore housing inequality and urban neighborhoods in transition after the 2007-2008 real estate crisis. Between inclusion and exclusion, and amidst growing diversification, its resident-protagonists move both in and out, and up and down. Focusing on housing aspirations in gentrifying neighborhoods of Chicago and Detroit, as they are negotiated in twenty-first century drama, this paper thus engages critically with the ways in which African American and white communities, poor and middle-class alike, find their dwellings threatened and hopes for upward mobility and senses of belonging challenged. Its inquiries into processes of disinvestment, dilapidation, and subsequent re-evaluation and gentrification of housing aim to investigate literary depictions of spatial inequality and housing discrimination from the double perspectives of class and race.
Rinaldo Walcott

*After Black Lives Matter: Black Death, Capitalism, and Unfreedom*

Rinaldo Walcott is associate professor and director of Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. His research is centered in Black diaspora politics, gender and sexuality, and decolonial politics. He is also a Research Fellow of the Broadbent Institute and a fellow of Subproject 4 (Prof. Susan Arndt/Dr. Mariam Popal) of the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies. Walcott is the author of *Black Like Who: Writing Black Canada* (1997, 2nd rev. ed. in 2003) and editor of *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism* (2000). As well Walcott is the co-editor with Roy Moodley of *Counselling Across and Beyond Cultures: Exploring the Work of Clemment Vontress in Clinical Practice* (2010). His latest book *Black Diaspora Faggotry: Frames Readings Limits* is forthcoming.

**Abstract**

The paper will address the ways in which contemporary protest concerning the deaths of black people in North America have cast new light on thinking about the ways in which capitalism and its multiple forms of unfreedom is the foundation of these deaths. This paper will work with the long and sustained debates about blackness and capitalism from W.E.B Du Bois to Cedric Robinson. This paper therefore argues that black life is and will always be shaped by significant forms of inequality given that capitalist foundations are premised on the exploitation of black labour and simultaneously the excision of black life. The paper argues for new forms of collective life beyond capitalist organization.

**Saturday, 11 July 2015, 10.00 | PANEL V**

*Unequal Democracy in Transatlantic Perspective*

**Chair: Jürgen Gebhardt** is professor eremitus of Political Science at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg.

**Larry M. Bartels**

*Political Inequality in Affluent Democracies*

Fellowship (2015), and many other awards and honors. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Academy of Political and Social Science, and the National Academy of Sciences.

Abstract
According to Robert Dahl, democracy should ensure “the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals.” But how well do democratic political systems approximate this ideal? This paper examines the relationship between public preferences and social welfare policies since the mid-1980s in 23 affluent (OECD) democracies. The analysis reveals substantial, persistent shortfalls in social welfare spending (relative to public demand) in most countries. Moreover, insofar as policymakers are responsive to public opinion, they seem to be largely – perhaps entirely – responsive to the preferences of affluent citizens. These findings suggest that the massive disparities in political influence documented in recent studies of the United States are probably common in contemporary democracies, despite their different political institutions, political economies, and political cultures.

Susanne Pickel
Unequal Democracies in Europe: Inequalities in Understandings of, Participation in, and Perception of Democracy

Susanne Pickel is professor of Political Science (Comparative Studies) at the University of Duisburg-Essen. Her research examines European political behavior, political culture, political participation, responsibility, transitional justice, and survey methodology. Recent publications on the topic are Political Culture(s) in Eastern Europe: An Eastern European Map of Political Support (2010) and together with Toralf Stark and Wiebke Breustedt Assessing the Quality of Quality Measures of Democracy (2015 forthcoming). She is co-editor of Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft (ZfVP)/Comparative Governance and Politics.

Abstract
While many researchers advocate a definition of democracy in terms of “freedom, political equality, and control,” few European citizens share this viewpoint in its entirety. Overall, the citizens in some societies in Eastern and Western Europe prefer a more “social democratic” concept of democracy that includes an understanding of equality in terms of social equality instead of mere political equality. On average, people in Eastern Europe participate less in politics than in Western Europe, and they are frequently less satisfied with their democracy. However, the legitimacy of democracy does not vary to the same extent. Democracy is largely accepted and supported throughout Europe. Within the European states, especially the less affluent support the idea of democracy as a social democracy. These European citizens are not only deprived in an economic sense, they are also deprived with regard to their capability and oppor-
tunity to participate in political actions. Their perception of democracy is often characterized by alienation or frustration. Democracies in Europe are unequal or dissimilar – both between states and within societies.

Saturday, 11 July 2015, 12.00 | Lecture

Gail Stephens

Launching a Human Rights Museum

Gail Stephens is the interim President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Previously, she held the position of Chief Operating Officer at Canada’s newest national museum dedicated to the subject of human rights. Prior to joining the Museum, she was City Manager for the City of Victoria, British Columbia and Chief Executive Officer of the BC Pension Corporation. From 1998 until 2003, she was the City of Winnipeg’s first Chief Administrative Officer, replacing a Board of Commissioners and becoming the first woman to run a major Canadian city. In that role, she helped lead a diverse team of departments including Police, Fire/Paramedics, Transit, Community Services, Water and Waste, and Public Works to help Winnipeg become one of the most cost-effective city governments in Canada with a citizen satisfaction rating of over 92 per cent. Stephens was named by the Women’s Executive Network in 2003, 2010, and 2011 as one of “The 100 Most Powerful Women in Canada,” the country’s most recognizable award for high-achieving female leaders.

Abstract

This lecture will focus on the challenges of launching a new national human rights museum. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights is an ideas museum, beginning with a concept, not a collection. Opened in September 2014, the museum is devoted to human rights awareness and education. From the very first gallery, “What are Human Rights?”, visitors discover that people from different backgrounds and different parts of the world have different ideas about human rights. Which events, moments, and people have shaped your definition of human rights? The Museum captures these multiple perspectives and diversity of experiences through 11 galleries, sharing the deeply personal stories of human rights violations and the stories of struggle, adversity, courage and resilience. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights is a place where everyone is welcome to participate in human rights conversations and ultimately, to be inspired.
**Bavarian American Academy**

The BAA promotes interdisciplinary research in the social and cultural sciences. Funded by the Bavarian State Ministry of Education, Science and the Arts, the Academy provides a platform for Bavarian Scholars investigating North American culture, society, politics, and economics in their hemispheric and global contexts.

The organizers wish to thank the following institutions for their support:

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![US Flag](image)

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