

# Bridging the Ivory Tower and the Streets: Academia and Activism in Times of Crisis Ordinarity



Photo on Canva.

a documentation of the conference  
at Ca' Foscari University and  
Venice International University

June 8–10, 2023

by Christopher Steil

# The Organizers



Steph Berens

Steph Berens is a PhD student at the Graduate School Language & Literature Munich, Class of Literature, and works as a research associate at LMU's Institute for North American Studies. Steph completed their M.A. at LMU in 2020 with a thesis on transgender road narratives and is currently working on their dissertation, which examines literary reworkings of harmful cultural tropes about trans people in contemporary North American trans fiction. Since the relationship between academia and activism is so relevant to their research, they look forward to fostering a productive space for discussion and reflection about this important topic.



Carole Martin

Carole Martin is currently a doctoral candidate in American Literary History at LMU Munich, where she is a member of the Graduate School Language & Literature, Class of Literature. Through the lens of Vietnamese American literary productions, her dissertation project considers refugees' entangled im/mobilities and liminal subjectivities while scrutinizing the material conditions and political contexts of displacement. Previously, she completed her B.A. and M.A. in English and Anthropology at the University of Basel. Her main research interests lie in the interdisciplinary fields of critical refugee studies, transnational migration studies, and mobility studies.

## Creative Team

Christopher Steil is a student of North American studies (B.A. program) at LMU Munich. In 2023, he wrote his Bachelor's thesis on the censorship of homosexuality in the adaptation of 1950s literature to the screen. His research interests are film and literary studies, and queer and gender studies. The opportunity to write creatively and revisit Venice convinced him to participate in the workshop. He currently works as an editor at the Rachel Carson Center in Munich.



Christopher Steil

## Day 1

Klaus Benesch	"The Crisis of Intellectuals"
Guest Speaker: Burcu Toğral Koca	"Borders/Bordering and Refugees across and beyond Europe: Reflections on Practices and Agency"
Dan Rees	"Changing the Narrative: Viewing Crisis as an Opportunity"
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

Ca' Foscari Student Roundtable	Anna Margeti Lucia De Zio Benjamin Lewin Alejandro Mendez Elena Scaggiante Margherita Lanza
LMU Student Reflections	Finn Lee Wiens Joe Bamford Anna de Riggi Theresa Hilz Inti Crisanto Guder Steve Dio
Loredana Filip	"Academia, Capitalism, and the Intimate Outsider"
Guest Speaker: Michael Wutz	"The Activist Classroom/The Political Classroom? Reflections on Teaching in a Conservative State (of Mind)"

## Day 3

Mark Olival-Bartley	"Poets of Maxvorstadt, Muses of Venice"
Maren Lutz	"African American Anti-Vietnam War Protest Music as an Example of Class and Race-Based Bias in Historiography?"
Alexandra Schenke	"'Let's Make America Great Again': Delineating Conservative Responses to Post-Vietnam Crises of National Identity."
Guest Speaker: Maryna Shevtsova	"The Rights for Emotions: Being an Academic and Activist in the War Times"



## My Last Trip to Venice



Photograph by Christopher Steil.

I grew up in Upper Bavaria. The beaches of the Mediterranean Sea were therefore much closer than the German shores. So usually, in my childhood, family vacations would lead south to Croatia or Italy. Somewhere warm in May or June, around Pentecost, was one of the criteria. It makes sense then that we would usually end up in Tuscany. It still amazes me that not once had we gone to Venice on one of our family vacations, being much closer than Tuscany—meaning less time in the car with three children for my parents. But finally, in fall of 2022, I boarded a bus headed to Venice.

And then, something very curious happened on my last evening. Having just completed dinner, I was rushing back to the hostel. On the Ponte della Costituzione, within reach of the bus that would take me back to the hostel where I stored my luggage until the departure of the bus returning to Munich, out of the crowd walking at me stepped my co-worker from Munich. Neither of us knew the other would be in Venice that weekend and yet there we were—over five hundred kilometers away from our home, in a different country, she there with school and I by myself. Sometimes the world seems incredibly small.

I was incredibly grateful to be able to visit this beautiful city once more—this time with a reason other than travel. Experiencing student life and hearing great contributions from academics of various backgrounds and nations, the following pages document the 2023 conference at the universities in Venice.

On June 8-10, 2023, roughly two dozen scholars working in the humanities and the social sciences from different stages in their academic journeys and from different countries came together in Venice to convene and discuss “Bridging the Ivory Tower and the Streets: Academia and Activism in Times of Crisis Ordinarity.” This collection of recollections is the sum of documenting a variety of talks and presentations over the course of these three days. Presentations were given by senior scholars and experts in their field and by students who brought personal experiences and fresh takes. The articles in this booklet are meant as a means of preserving the individual contributions by the guest speakers, presenters, and students.

## Day 1: Klaus Benesch

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*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.*

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LMU student Steve Dio introduced Klaus Benesch and his presentation which he titled “The Crisis of Intellectuals.”

Klaus Benesch was visibly happy to be back in Venice after an intermission of two to three years when the two universities—Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich and Ca’ Foscari Venice—were unable to come together for this returning conference. “It’s always been great [at this palazzo] and we’re truly grateful, all of us!” he expressed.

Benesch then explained the meaning behind his titling of the workshop: “The Crisis of the Intellectuals” was clearly inspired by the recently published *New Yorker* article [“The End of the English Major”](#) by Nathan Heller, which can be regarded as an examination of the state of the humanities at universities that arrived at the conclusion: “a disarray beyond repair,” explained Benesch. However, the decline of the institutions has been noted since the early 2000s—many campuses in the US registering a decline in enrollment in the humanities of more than 50% which in turn led to dramatically reduced funding. Benesch noted that some scholars question whether a loss of the humanities as a whole would even be noticed as an article in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* posed the question: “Wer würde den die Geisteswissenschaften vermissen?” [“Who would miss the humanities?”]



Klaus Benesch welcoming the conveners.

When it comes to the prospect of career opportunities, the “humanities clearly lost the science wars,” said Benesch. This makes it obvious that in order for the humanities to survive, the various fields would have to reinvent themselves and make changes.

## Day 1: Burcu Toğral Koca

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*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.*

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Carole Martin introduced the first guest speaker of the conference, Burcu Toğral Koca and her presentation on “Borders/Bordering and Refugees across and beyond Europe: Reflections on Practices and Agency.”

Toğral Koca started by presenting her definition of *bordering*, changing the word *border* into a gerund, thereby making a subject out of an object. She understands borders not as lines but rather as spaces, processes, and institutional structures (including transnational borders). These spaces are always dynamic—they shift and enlarge which makes a case for using the gerund when talking about border politics. Being a native of Turkey, she explains her frustration with European discriminatory visa policies. Many of her colleagues, said Toğral Koca, “cannot attend conferences like these.” Borders, however, are not merely national or political separations from spaces deemed “other” but can additionally be of an ideological or societal nature. Refugees have expressed this sentiment: “We are here because you are there,” explained Toğral Koca.

Agency is a very heterogeneous aspect when it comes to one’s movement within borders, along them, or across them—agency is based on class, nationality, gender, and social capital. (Responding to a question after her presentation, she explained that everybody experiences *bordering* differently but that everybody does encounter it in some form or another; gender identity, for instance, also creates borders and a lecture hall or any form of teaching space is also a space of borders, allowing some in but not others).

She introduced the [No Nation Truck](#) collective as an innovative tactic against bordering with a very simple idea: the truck provides shelter to refugees who can charge their phones (up to 100 simultaneously) and it goes wherever it is needed.



Burcu Toğral Koca talking about the No Nation Truck collective.

In conclusion, one could ask whether Burcu herself has managed—in some regard—to work alongside with *bordering* having accomplished to surmount some borders in her lifetime. She calls herself a “polygamous academic” because she has received scholarships from various places and countries—including Germany where she completed her PhD and currently at the Viadrina Center B/ORDERS IN MOTION in Frankfurt (Oder)—and felt, at times, that she simply went wherever she was allowed to conduct her research. At the same time, however, she is not allowed to do research in her native Turkey.



## Day 1: Dan Rees

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*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.

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LMU student Christopher Steil introduced the next presenter, Dan Rees, and his presentation on "Changing the Narrative: Viewing Crisis as an Opportunity."

Seemingly connecting Klaus Benesch's train of thought from two hours before, Dan Rees also began his presentation with Nathan Heller's influential New Yorker [article](#), listing also one further reference: [Narrative Change Management in American Studies: A Pragmatic Reading](#) by Silke Schmidt. These two resources, said Rees, differ drastically in their perspective on the issue of the "decline of the humanities."

6

Rees began by identifying the three typical "crisis indicators": funding, enrollment, and employment (as per Nathan Heller). He explained that the 1950s are considered a "golden age of the humanities" that created a big spike in enrollment in the humanities and job opportunities were plentiful. In 1980, public funds accounted for 79% of public revenue; in 2019, on the other hand, this number has decreased to only 55%. Heller further explained that student debt puts a lot of pressure on the students to pay them back quickly and they are thus in need of a steady (and good) income. A study had found that out of 15 PhDs graduating from Princeton only two managed to land tenured positions, leaving Ivy League education with daunting prospects. However, Heller's

article is surprisingly optimistic in regard to job opportunities for alumni in the humanities asserting that they increasingly be in demand.



Dan Rees presenting on the prospects of the humanities sector.

In contrast, the prospects in Germany are different: the number of students enrolling in the humanities has been stable in an analyzed period from 2007-2019 (it has in fact increased); enrollment in engineering programs have increased, too, as many regard such degrees as highly desirable and in-demand; and unemployment numbers in Germany during that twelve-year period have fallen. These comparisons between Germany and the United States paint drastically different pictures.

In his concluding remarks, Rees asks the following question: "Has crisis become so perpetual, such a way of life that it has become an identity, something we have learned to live with?" Crisis, so Rees, is "a critical moment or turning point." However, what exactly is to be revealed (post-crisis) remains to be seen.

## Day 1: Bryan Banker

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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.

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LMU student Veronika Wittmann introduced the next speaker, Bryan Banker, and the final presentation for the day titled “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.”



Bryan Banker during his presentation.

During his presentation, Banker was advocating for a subversion of the classroom by taking away the power from the teacher and instead making the students the “pedagogical instruments.” This way, both teachers and students learn from the exchange. During the round of questions, Banker remembered a student in Turkey asking him, “What was the point of our degree?” to which he now replied: “We can envision worlds,

we relate that material to ourselves, we have pure imagination (unlike the sciences) and critical reflection.” The difficulty, however, is that we cannot share our value to the people outside academia, so Banker.

Another question delved into the question of authorship and creativity during the advent of artificial intelligence. Banker responded to this saying that sooner or later, “we will realize that the human creative is valuable much more than AI usage.” With the example of the writers’ strike in Hollywood, however, it is clear that this belief has not transferred to the workplace—the strike that is still ongoing in July 2023 demonstrates that it is commonly believed that screenwriters are exchangeable and invaluable. Will the outcome of the strike, then, have something to say about the vitality of the humanities?

## Day 2: Ca’ Foscari Student Roundtable

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*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.*

9

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*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.*

*Benjamin Lewin is a master’s 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.*

*Before coming to Venice to pursue his master’s degree in American and Postcolonial literature, Alejandro Mendez received his 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, he has taken different courses on Comparative Literature in both La Universidad Católica de Piura, Peru, and La Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín, where he 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, he is working on The Colombian Peace Process and the problems of representation, discourse, and political institutions during the Colombian armed conflict.*



*Elena Scaggiante* is an 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).

*Margherita Lanza*, a student of English and American Studies, is enrolled in a Double Joint Degree master's degree between Ca' Foscari University of Venice and Bamberg University. During my bachelor's 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.

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The second day of the conference began with the Ca' Foscari Student Roundtable, which was born out of a workshop given by co-organizer Mena Mitrano, who posed the following question: "Does the public intellectual exist?" In the following, she introduced the six panelists, all students at Ca' Foscari and their presentations, which are the fruits of seminar papers that were handed in for the workshop.



The Ca' Foscari Student Roundtable from left to right: Lucia de Zio, Benjamin Lewin, Anna Margeti, Elena Scaggiante, Margherita Lanza, and Alejandro Mendez.

The students presented on a variety of topics. However, many of them were inspired by works of Susan Sontag (Mena Mitrano is a Sontag scholar and most likely guided her students through Sontag's works).

The first presentation was given by Anna Margeti and was titled "(Photo)journalism and Climate Action: Bridging Climate Science and Politics." A native of the Greek island of Evia, Margeti chose to highlight

photographs taken during the 2021 wildfires that burned more than 50,000 hectares of forests. She explained that victims from that area were further traumatized by the dissemination of these photographs in international newspapers such as *The Guardian* which misconstrued the facts using the photographs to stage an “impending apocalypse.” Referencing Susan Sontag from her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Margeti voiced what these victims might have felt: “It is intolerable to have one’s own suffering twinned with anybody else’s.” Margeti ended her presentation with posing the question, “Who is to blame?” for which there should be no answer since it is the wrong approach: “The goal should not be blame but action,” said Margeti. Mirroring Noam Chomsky’s words, she concluded with the declaration that journalists are in the privileged position to expose the lies of governments.

Lucia de Zio presented next, on “The Politics of Beauty: A Feminist Critique of the Evolution of the Concept of Beauty in Western Culture,” tracing the evolving and changing beauty standards over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Benjamin Lewin presented on “Public Queerness and the Freedom to Position Yourself” by the example of Susan Sontag and utilizing her “Notes on Camp.” Alejandro Mendez presented third, on “The Colombian Peace Process: National Imaginary, Representation and Truth.” Elena Scaggiante followed and posed the question, “Can the First Lady Be an Intellectual?” with a case study of Jackie Kennedy naming her years as former first lady the time of her greatest influence. During these years, so Scaggiante, Kennedy was adamant that her late husband’s vision shall continue. Margherita Lanza concluded the roundtable with her presentation on “Gender Roles in War,” illustrating that women in war have traditional roles, e.g. as nurses, as 97% of soldiers are men. However, so Lanza, “women suffer like their men,” rendering their experiences of war the same as those of their male counterparts.

During the question round, the students were collectively asked which approaches of combining academics and activism they would wish their professors to take. Benjamin Lewin responded saying that “an academic should produce knowledge - but also produce long-term knowledge” (not just knowledge for the current situation and/or crisis). Anna Margeti regarded knowledge as power and wondered whether academics in fact deserve that amount of power and the influence that

comes with it. She concluded that academics should therefore listen and promote the thoughts of those not moving within the bounds of academia.

## Day 2: LMU Student Reflections on Academia and Activism

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**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.

**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.

**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

**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.

**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.

**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.

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The conference continued with the student contributions from the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich. Finn Lee Wiens presented on "Em(Power)ment in the Academic Complex." Joe Bamford presented second with a presentation titled "Towards the Postcapitalist Intellectual: Forming a Climate Vanguard through Violent and Radical Protest." Third, Anna de Riggi performed a reading of her creative piece titled "An Intellectual Traitor," in which she posits herself as a traitor being born into a working-class migrant family and being the first in that family to enter the field of academia. Theresa Hilz concluded the first round of LMU student contributions with her presentation on "Environmental and Social Justice Education on the Ground: Growing Communities through Urban Gardening (from the South Bronx to Munich)."



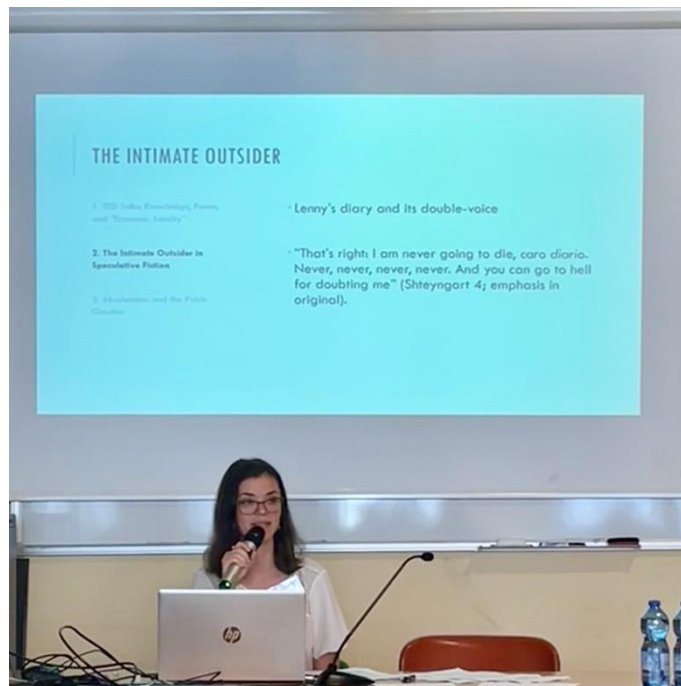
LMU Student Reflections from left to right: Finn Lee Wiens, Joe Bamford, Theresa Hilz, and Anna de Riggi.

The second round of LMU student contributions commenced with Inti Crisanto Guder's presentation on "Cancel Culture and Scholar Activism at U.S. Universities: The Importance of Competing Narratives in the Academic Field." The LMU roundtable concluded with Steve Dio's reading of "I'm Sitting Right Here, in the Middle of a Pyramid, Telling You That: The University's Limits on Activism."





has been mostly torn down and the access to knowledge is more widespread.



Loredana Filip explaining the concept of the "intimate outsider."

## Day 2: Michael Wutz

**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/michaelwutz>.

The guest speaker for the second day of the workshop and the last presentation of the day was Michael Wutz, who presented on "The Activist Classroom/The Political Classroom? Reflections on Teaching in a Conservative State (of Mind)."

Wutz highlighted that reader-response theory is often overlooked (or not given enough space) in teachings of critical theory at university. He referenced Adam Kirsch's essay "The Way We Read Now," which was published in *The Wall Street Journal* in 2018 featuring a list of 100 favorite works of fiction. The list demonstrated that there was a vast disconnect ("The Great Divide") between American literature on syllabi and what

academics tend to think. He advocated for critical pedagogy, which he described as “indirect/embedded activism.” This kind of activism is to be made possible through a set of classroom characteristics such as subverting the role of the teacher into an impartial facilitator whose choice of required reading allows for embedded activism on the syllabus; student-driven talks and a diffusion of the political space of classroom; inductive and/or dialogical conclusions and insights; and sidestepping polarization in the classroom.



Michael Wutz on “The Great Divide.”

### Day 3: Mark Olival-Bartley

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*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*.

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The third day of the workshop kicked off with an introduction of the first presenter, Mark Olival-Bartley, by LMU student Theresa Hilz and his presentation by the title of “Poets of Maxvorstadt, Muses of Venice.”

Poetry and the city of Venice seem to be intricately linked to Olival-Bartley having written several poems in this city; others were inspired in the streets of Venice.



Mark Olival-Bartley performing his poetry.

English novelist Charles Percy Snow, Baron Snow, was not only a creative literary person but also an active physical chemist and gave a lecture on the “two knowledges” in 1959, so Olival-Bartley. He described the chasm between the humanities and the sciences, the wide divide between the two disciplines (he, however, was proof the two could come together and co-exist). Olival-Bartley argues that poets “are and have always been influenced by the sciences.” By example of his brother, who works in pandemic prevention, he demonstrated that the two disciplines can work in tandem to mutual benefit: the institution that employs his brother works together with and hires artists to better (and more adequately) spread newly discovered knowledge and dangers of a disease.

17

### Day 3: Maren Lutz

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**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.

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LMU student Joe Bamford introduced the next presenter, Maren Lutz, and her presentation on her doctoral project titled "African American Anti-Vietnam War Protest Music as an Example of Class and Race-Based Bias in Historiography?"



Maren Lutz showing a live performance of Nina Simone's *Backlash Blues* (1968).

Lutz highlighted in her presentation how African Americans were often excluded from footage on anti-war protest although they had been very much present and an active part in these demonstrations. She concluded her presentation with a clip of a live performance of the song *Backlash Blues*, performed in 1968 by Nina Simone. The song is an adaptation of a poem written by Langston Hughes in 1966 which he adapted to song lyrics for Simone.

### Day 3: Alexandra Schenke

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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.

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LMU student Anna de Riggi introduced the next presenter, Alexandra Schenke, and her PhD project which is titled “Let’s Make America Great Again’: Delineating Conservative Responses to Post-Vietnam Crises of National Identity.”



Alexandra Schenke on depictions of masculinity in American film.

19

During her presentation, Schenke presented several typical tropes of masculinity found in American films during the post-Vietnam war era.

### Day 3: Maryna Shevtsova

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**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.

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The final guest speaker of the conference, Maryna Shevtsova, and her presentation on “The Rights for Emotions: Being an Academic and Activist in the War Times” were introduced by Steph Berens.



Maryna Shevtsova is introduced by Steph Berens.

A native of Ukraine, Shevtsova began by giving some background on the education system in the country, stating that 86% of the Ukrainian population have received a higher-education diploma. Her background in international economic relations gave her unique insights into the business world in Ukraine, which Shevtsova described as “very homo-transphobic and very sexist,” and in general a very “male-dominated world.” Amongst others, these insights led to her dissertation on the import of LGBTQ+-friendly rights from the European Union into Ukraine and Turkey. In 2021, she published these findings in the book *LGBTI Politics and Value Change in Ukraine and Turkey: Exporting Europe?*

Shevtsova then presented on the Euromaidan Revolution, which was mainly caused by “Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych’s [refusal] to sign a free-trade agreement with the European Union,”<sup>1</sup> while the real reason was believed to be “European leaders demanding Ukraine’s legalization of same-sex marriages and the adoption of an equality law for sexual minorities,” which would “contradict the religious beliefs of the nation.”<sup>2</sup> Shevtsova further explained that most LGBTQ+ organizations in Ukraine are fully dependent on foreign funding. Important in that it increases visibility of the LGBTQ+ community and an event of celebration,

<sup>1</sup> Shevtsova, Maryna, “Fighting ‘Gayropa’: Europeanization and Instrumentalization of LGBTI Rights in Ukrainian Public Debate,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 67, no. 6 (2020): 504.

<sup>2</sup> Shevtsova, “Fighting ‘Gayropa,’” 504.

the Kyiv pride is the most-funded organization and yet, there are other organizations in need of financial aids to a far greater extent than Kyiv pride, so Shevtsova.

Amidst the horrors of the ongoing war in Ukraine, a surge of coming-outs was observed among the Ukrainian military. Shevtsova explained that these soldiers declared their sexual or gender identity openly because otherwise, their partners would have no rights were they killed or injured—no rights in regard to their children, hospital care, and visiting rights, among others.

#### Further Reading:

Shevtsova, Maryna. "Fighting 'Gayropa': Europeanization and Instrumentalization of LGBTI Rights in Ukrainian Public Debate." *Problems of Post-Communism* 67, no. 6 (2020): 500-510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2020.1716807>.

#### **Looking Back on the Conference**

Looking back on the conference with over a month that has passed since our return to Munich, I still hold these days in fond memory. Such interesting presentations, of which I have attempted to capture the essence in the way of this booklet; exciting persons from various backgrounds and origins with different experiences in their own private and academic lives; and a beautiful sense of community among the students, especially the group of seven students from Munich that I got to share an accommodation with.

One thing I clearly took away from this conference is something that was presented by Klaus Benesch at the very beginning: While being an intellectual—or academic—working or being active in the humanities does not call for activist behavior, activism should nonetheless have a place in it. The conference might not have provided definitive answers to questions such as, "How can intellectuals communicate their findings to persons outside of academia and thereby bridge the ivory tower?", or "What is the responsibility of the intellectual (when it comes to activism)?", to reference the title of Noam Chomsky's essay. But: It might have been successful in communicating these concerns and providing some points of departure for my generation of students who will go forth and develop the

ideas and concepts that were presented at the conference and infuse their own future works with activist nuances.

### **Bridging the Gap: Censorship of Queerness**

Very recently, I conducted research on the censorship of homosexuality in 1950s entertainment media. For this purpose, I selected two literary works, *Strangers on a Train* (1950) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), which represent two different genres, the novel and drama, and have thus many differences. Due to their great public and critical successes, their respective adaptations to the silver screen arrived within that same decade. The findings, which made up the majority of my bachelor's thesis, were quite extensive—censorship came up in various aspects of the artistic process and was more substantial than a first glance of these respective works of art might suggest. While the reasons for censorship in the 1950s were and still are quite well known—the waning but still quite present remnants of the Comstock Act of 1873, which prohibited the mailing of lewd materials, and the Hays Code, which forbid the (favorable) depiction of homosexuality in film—the reasons for such artistic control nowadays are not as understandable.

22

A recent [New Yorker article](#), published in April 2023, displays its author E. Tammy Kim's four-year documentation of a Montana public library chain that underwent severe administrative changes after one librarian chose to read *Prince & Knight*, a fairy-tale picture book about a (male) prince who falls in love with a (male) knight, to a group of children. The repercussions that set in motion these administrative changes resulted in new members on the board of trustees, commissioners, and managers that were far more conservative. Together, they brought about considerable change in the process of selecting books for the collection of these libraries, in particular ones with LGBTQ+ themes and characters. Book challenges by these members became somewhat of a regularity and suggestions such as displacing books with controversial topics to a restricted section were made. Over the course of four years, this Montana public library chain thus experienced a renewed rise in censorship.

Kim's first occupation as a lawyer, she now primarily works as a writer and podcast co-host. Although not active in academia, she can be regarded as an example of an intellectual bridging the gap—she observed events, which inflicted harm on minority groups and censored their

presence in public places, documented these events, and, by publishing them in a magazine such as *The New Yorker*, she shed light on these occurrences to be accessed by a large public readership.

Further Reading:

Kim, E. Tammy. "When the Culture Wars Come for the Public Library." *New Yorker*, April 20, 2023. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/when-the-culture-wars-come-for-the-public-library>.