

## **Program of the KWG-Section Transcultural Life-Worlds**

for the Conference “Populäre Kulturen / Popular Cultures”  
8th annual conference of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft (KWG)  
Saarland University, 27–30 September 2023

Organizers:

Giulia Pelillo-Hestermeyer (University of Heidelberg) & Gilbert B. Rodman (University of Minnesota)

### **Introduction to the panels: “Diversifying the popular —Translating Cultural Studies”**

**Giulia Pelillo-Hestermeyer (Vienna School of International Studies, Austria)**  
**Gil Rodman (University of Minnesota, USA)**

The program of the section “Transcultural Life-Worlds” for the 8<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft consists of three panels. While each of the panels focuses on specific aspects of “the popular”, the general aim of all three panels is emphasizing and deepening the diversity of concepts, theories and manifestations of the popular, including their different traditions, trajectories and transculturalizations. We want to compare various forms of hierarchizations, which characterize cultural practices understood as “popular”: are there “good” vs. “bad” forms of popular and what is understood as such by whom? What happens when the popular wanders across borders into new territories, when it gets translated from one context to another, when it is stolen from one place and resituated somewhere else, when it slips inside the skins of strangers and makes them speak with new voices? We are especially interested in what happens when specific forms of “the popular” travel across/between cultures -- recognizing that cultures are never discrete, self-contained entities; that they are not coterminous with societies or nation-states; that not all traffic between cultures is voluntary or respectful; and that such traffic is often imbalanced, unequal, and unidirectional. All of which makes it challenging to talk about the politics of cross-cultural traffic in singular ways or using universal theories or models.

In order to open up and problematize static definitions of popular culture we want to compare a wide range of examples, which touch upon manifestations of the popular in fashion and lifestyles, digital technologies, urban cultures, populism, neoliberal forms of technocolonialism, questions of identity and diversity, coloniality and decolonial efforts. All in all, we want to question the popular in lifeworlds and in cultural studies, and discuss whether the concept is still good and for what.

## **Panel 1: “(Mis)Placing the Popular: Translation, Appropriation, and Globalization”**

### **Translating Haka into German Popular Culture**

**Angela Kölling (Universität Mainz-Germersheim, Germany)**

**Susan Ingram (York University, Canada)**

Haka performances are enjoying growing popularity in German culture. They have featured in a German insurance commercial in 2017, in protests against COVID-19 measures in 2020, and in the police procedural TV show *Tatort* in 2021 (Folge 1151 “Der feine Geist”), as well as in a growing number of shamanic life-coaching and YouTube-videos. Analysing these appearances, as well as the responses they have provoked, this paper seeks to articulate the complexity that marks the cultivation of otherness as an attribute of commercial branding, self-innovation and societal transformation. Our analysis will draw comparisons with Hartmut Lutz’s investigations of “indianthusiasm” (2002, 2020) to probe in how far the “Ka Mate”-Maori could be considered the new Winnetou-Indianer.

We will also engage with transcultural lifeworlds in considering the decolonising indigenisation of Germany, that is “Indigenialität” (Andreas Weber, 2018) in the wider context of “Indigenism” (Ronald Niezen, 2003). To that end, in the spirit of Bannerjee, Blätter and Escher’s *Re-Ethnisierung, Repräsentation von Indigenität und gelebte Bikulturalität* (2015), we ask what lived biculturality looks like for Indigenous diasporas in Germany in comparison with settler-colonial contexts such as Canada and New Zealand and how translation has and has not helped to bridge Anglophone and Germanophone discourses.

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### **Practices of Vestimentary Culture Between Appropriation and Dispossession: The Economic Exploitation of the *Sape* in the Globalised Entertainment Industry and the Symbolic Exploitation of the Old Clothes Industry in the Globalised Art Business**

**Urs Urban (Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Germany)**

If cultural appropriation is no longer seen as enrichment, but increasingly as a problem, it is because even those appropriating can no longer deny that their doing – the ‘transfer of symbolic capital’ – does not take place in a power-free space in which everyone simply takes from everyone else what he or she needs for *Self-Fashioning*, but in many cases presupposes the expropriation of often underprivileged sub- or minority cultures and thus takes place at the expense of others. It is therefore all the more remarkable when members of communities with a long history of dispossession invert this dynamic and begin to appropriate the symbolic capital of hegemonic cultures for themselves: for example, by wearing the clothes of the former colonisers (and the global elite of today) in a way that has an irritating effect on them and destabilises existing power relations, at least aesthetically and thus in relation to (the way) how they are perceived.

In my contribution, I would like to address the question how symbolic capital can be appropriated and translated into real capital through clothing and the practices of presenting

clothing, and in this way demonstrate and theoretically problematise different modes of cultural appropriation and dispossession. In a first step, the focus will be on social (*La Sape*) or artistic (Samuel Fosso) appropriation practices that subvert the hegemonic dress code in a productive way, but are in turn appropriated today by a global mainstream fed by the entertainment industry, as can be seen, for example, in the music videos of Solange Knowles *Losing you* (2012) and Kendrick Lamar's *All the stars* (2018). In a second step, this perspective is to be reversed, so to speak, with regard to the artificial revaluation of the globally active old clothes industry: What is at stake here, is a lucrative business practice that consists in not disposing of clothing that has lost all exchange and use value in its original context as rubbish, but rather feeding it back into a value-creation process in the global South, at the expense of local economies and cultures. The artists of the Kenyan *Nest Collective* are appropriating this economic practice for their part by sending the old clothes back to the sender in the global North ("Return to Sender"): where the clothes, being rubbish again, become a problem, which is exhibited in an art context ('Documenta') and can thus be translated back into symbolic and ultimately also real (economic) capital for the artists.

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**What Makes a South African Video Game Popular?:  
Mapping the Transcultural and Transnational Legibilities of the "Popular"**

**Rachel Lara van der Merwe (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)**

What happens when a media creator working in a country with less "soft power" wants to create a successful, and likely popular, media text? My contribution examines the interplay of industry, politics, infrastructure, and legibility of what is considered "popular" that inform the conditions from which said creator must work. I focus on Global South contexts wherein the creator's nation exerts relatively less soft power, i.e. cultural and/or economic influence, outside of its borders than key Global North players like the US, EU, and China.

In such nations, a media creator may work within less developed industry infrastructures and receive less support from governmental policies, but they must also contend with diverging expectations of what can be read as "popular". A local audience's grammar around "the popular" may not resemble national formations, let alone overlap with what global markets privilege as "popular". Ironically, in order for the media creator to obtain more infrastructural and institutional support at the *national* and *local* levels, it may be strategic to aim for popularity at the *global* level.

I map out these forces at play using the example of the video game industry in South Africa, a country not without soft power, but with significantly less influence than key national players of the Global North. In previous research I have observed the colonial rhetoric and values (e.g. mastery, "pwning") that are embedded in what global markets generally deem to be successful video games, especially in triple-A games with RPG mechanics. While there have been a number of innovative RPGs developed on the African continent, the first to gain critical/mainstream recognition, to some extent, was *Beautiful Desolation*, one that while set in South Africa, deployed traditional colonial logics that I argue have been hegemonically accepted as key to a good and "popular" game.

## **Panel 2: “The Age of Pluralization in Popular Culture?”**

### **‘Peak TV’ and the Increasing Diversity of Women Representations (2010-2020)**

**Céline Morin (Paris Nanterre University, France)**

Television series have long favored female heroines who, in their journey towards emancipation, had to overcome sexist obstacles by mobilizing individual resources. This was first motivated in the 1970s, by demographic changes where female viewers were seen as having increased purchasing power, then in the 1980s, it was forced by cable competition which pushed networks towards risks and innovations. For a few years now, television studies are concerned with ascertaining whether the emergence and consolidation of platform TV has led to ‘Peak TV,’ a new ‘Golden age of television,’ wherein niche audiences and content diversification are reinvigorated.

This presentation first offers an historicization of television’s progressist thrusts before diving into the last decade of TV series’ heroines (2010-2020). Recent innovations are understood, not as any platform’s exclusiveness, but as one more thrusts to add to a long and complex history of conservative/progressist tension in media representation. For the last ten years, a wave of ‘female choirs,’ has burst on our screens. This upsurge diversifies the heroines’ subjectivities, particularly bodily experiences, and finally gives a positive perspective on women’s solidarity – may it be generationally or intergenerationally-based. Six TV shows are analyzed: *Girls*, *Mom*, *Jane the Virgin*, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, *Grace & Frankie* and *Sex Education*, and two main axis are explored: the diversification of female bodies and corporealities; and the various opening of sexual representations to both ends of the age spectrum (from adolescents to elderly women).

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### **The Popular in Cultural Public Spheres**

**Udo Göttlich (Zeppelin Universität Friedrichshafen, Germany)**

The “Popular” in television programming and online streaming platforms is still seen as evasion from the routines of daily life as well as from politics. The question, which consequences the “popular” has on our understanding of everyday life and public communication is still open. This is true for the relation between the “Popular” and “Cultural Public Spheres”. What can be shown and analysed up to now are the different phases, the relation of the Popular in Cultural Public Spheres has evolved e.g. by producing media events. In my paper I will ask from a sociological point of view for the role and function of the Popular in entertainment programs on our media culture and understanding of Cultural Public Spheres. Going back to Anthony Giddens notion of "life politics" and Raymond Williams question on drama in a dramatised society I will show, that the “Popular” in entertainment formats is not only the product of marketing related strategies but also the expression of changed cultural relations. From this point of view, I will discuss if the actual understanding of the popular is appropriate to understand the changes in media culture, transcultural communication and cultural public spheres.

## **Comics and their Audiences: Pluralization or Tolerance?**

**Éric Maigret (Sorbonne Nouvelle University, France)**

In reference to the 2015 statistical survey on French comics practices and tastes, this paper challenges conventional understandings of the taste patterns informing comics consumption in contemporary France. It infers the incommensurability of comics genres and taste judgments no longer based on “rejections/dislikes” but rather on “openness/tolerance” or “indifference/ignorance”. Our analysis confirms a major transformation in judgments of taste in the cultural field. Omnivorous/univorous models – from Richard Peterson to Tony Bennett – and cultural models – i.e. John Frow – have helped blur the pyramidal vision of culture supposedly inscribed in practices but they didn’t catch a paradigmatic change. We now live in a world where “cultural legitimacy” (as defined by Bourdieu) is deeply contested by multiple forms of multiculturalism.

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## **Saving the Story: Where Oral Tradition and Popular Culture Meet**

**Otman Bychou (Sultan Moulay Slimane University, Morocco)**

The history of the Moroccan colonial soldiers who fought in Germany in WWII is largely dominated by a collection of cultural production. History books, articles, military studies, novels, documentary films and movies on this topic illustrate a historical context on the war totally controlled by a monolithic homogenous perspective. This cultural repertoire does not appropriately include the history and the experiences of the Moroccan colonial soldiers who fought under the French flag. In this paper, attention is drawn to the way these Moroccan veterans saved their experiences in the Second World War through orality. These Moroccan ex-fighters told stories about the atrocities they underwent and the heroic deeds they did in order to save their history from disappearance in a society that considers them as enemy collaborators. The veterans, as orators, vehemently faced this pertinent negligence and transformed their silenced history into magnificent oral stories. Their oppressed history is rehabilitated through their own voices which make the history of this war approached from the perspective of the subaltern who was also an eyewitness and an effective participant in this war. The power of their talks in public derives its essence from the fact that they were in Germany, they participated in the war, and, according to them, nobody could dare to question the reliability of their oral narratives. These storytellers constitute an oral tradition that reveals a unique practice of an ownership of stories. The members of the society in which they live enjoy listening to these stories and consider them as part of popular oral history.

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### **Panel 3: “New and Improved(?): (Re)Making the Popular in/for the 2020s”**

#### **In Search of the People: The Popular in a Time-Space of Populist Nationalisms**

**John Clarke (The Open University, UK)**

If our concern with popular culture is motivated by its potential as a site through which progressive political-cultural mobilisations might be enacted, what is the character of the “people” in this period? The proliferation of “angry politics” (Maskovsky and Bjork-James, 2020) have often taken the form of authoritarian, reactionary forms of populist movements. As Valluvan (2019) has argued, this is not just a period of populism, but of specifically *nationalist* populism. This view demands attention to the conjunctural salience of the nation as a focal concern. So, where are we to look for the people as a potential political-cultural subject? In this contribution, I argue that the possibilities of imagining the people simultaneously within and beyond the nation are of critical importance – and that varieties of popular cultural forms exist that might sustain such possibilities, even if they are far from counter-hegemonic.

Maskvosky, J. and Bjork-James, S. (eds) (2020) *Beyond Populism: Angry Politics and the Twilight of Neoliberalism*. Morgantown, VA: West Virginia University Press.

Valluvan, S. (2019) *The Clamour of Nationalism: Race and Nation in Twenty-First-Century Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

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#### **Tech Demos as Popular Culture Events**

**Markus Reisenleitner (York University, Canada)**

Apple's September 2021 keynote, titled “California Streaming”, adapted the format of the annual presentation of a new iPhone to Covid lock-downs by suspending the pretence of a stage event and turning the genre into a snazzy 85-minute, elaborately cinematographed and edited infomercial inspired by music video aesthetics and drawing attention to the company's efforts in the streaming space. Analysts and fans quickly speculated that this shift from live performance to a cinematically mediated streaming event might have constituted the death knell to a long tradition of product demos on stage that Apple had perfected under the leadership of Steve Jobs, whose showmanship, timing, perfectionism, and sleight-of-hand in introducing new products had become legendary. However, what happened in 2022 seems to have shown that live demos are here to stay.

My paper probes the importance of stagecraft and live performance for the effects the keynote genre generates in terms of techno-utopian spectacles that establish and reinforce imaginaries of technology as tools that always work, rather than as consistent sources of frustrations and disempowerment – most people's everyday experiences. The performance aspect of the genre can thus be seen as a continuation of the lineages of magic and illusionism

that have accompanied imaginaries of technological progress since the European Enlightenment. Looking at these articulations of technological and magical lifeworlds as Popular Culture events in which complex negotiations of historical lineages and transcultural imaginaries are being sutured reveals their popular appeal as well as their socio-political impact.

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**The Uses and Abuses of Popular Culture in the Age of Apocalypse:  
What Stuart Hall Might Say**

**Megan Wood (Ohio Northern University, USA)**

Between prolonged stints of “binge-watching” and “doomscrolling” to pass time during Covid lockdown, a question festers: what do we want, in these times, from popular culture? A critique of determinant conditions? A plotline that celebrates world-making under conditions of adversity? Distraction? Nostalgia? Good-feeling? Taking seriously Stuart Hall’s insistence on ongoing necessity of popular culture’s radical historicization, my contribution to the panel revisits Hall’s reflections on the “two paradigms” of Cultural Studies, finding in them a line of thought we must translate for overcoming the debate of our time: “critique” or “post-critique”? Today, as in the time of Hall’s writing, neither culturalism’s confidence in the history-making subject nor structuralism’s attachment to “[t]heory with a capital ‘T’” seem adequate for apprehending either our conditions or the modes by which we negotiate them. With attention to some new popular cultural artifacts (*Don’t Look Up*, *Euphoria*) as well as old ones that enjoyed renewed popularity (*Alien*, *Jaws*) in the time of lockdown, I sketch out a framework for a kind of contextual critical reading practice Hall might invite.

### **Bioblurbs of the organizers**

[Giulia Pelillo-Hestermeyer](#) is a senior lecturer for Cultural Studies in the Department of Romance Studies of the University of Heidelberg. From September 2023 she will be head of the research area Cultural Studies at the Vienna School of International Studies. Her research and teaching focus on linguistic diversity and intersectionality in the context of the transculturalization and mediatization of communication. Giulia is a founding member of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft, where she serves on the Governing Board, as Co-chair of the 'Transcultural Life-Worlds' Section, and Co-editor of the book series 'Studien der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft'. She is a former fellow of the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context') and has engaged in several projects on multilingualism and media pedagogy relating to her activism at a free radio station. A full list of publications can be found [here](#). Her current project analyzes transcultural processes of un- and remaking heritages in the context of globalization and decolonialization.

[Gilbert B. Rodman](#) is Associate Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Minnesota, former Chair of the Association for Cultural Studies, and the founder/manager of the CULTSTUD-L listserv. His major research interests include popular culture, communication technologies, intellectual property, and the politics of race and ethnicity. He is the author of *Why Cultural Studies?* (Wiley Blackwell, 2015) and *Elvis After Elvis* (Routledge, 1996), the editor of *The Race and Media Reader* (Routledge, 2014), and co-editor of *Race in Cyberspace* (Routledge, 2000). With Giulia Pelillo-Hestermeyer, he is engaged in an ongoing project to (re)imagine cultural studies through transnational and translational lenses, as well as a podcast entitled *Culture Media Language*. He is also currently working on a book entitled *Creating While Black: A Racial History of Copyright in the US*.

### **Bioblurbs of the speakers**

Otman Bychou is an assistant professor of English in the department of English Studies, Sultan Moulay Slimane University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Morocco. He obtained his PhD in cultural studies in the same university. In addition to delivering many oral presentations at several Moroccan universities, he participated in some conferences in England with the Second World War Research Group, based at King's College, University of London. He also delivered oral presentations on the Moroccan participation in the Great War and the Second World War at St. Peter's College in Oxford, University Queen Mary, University of London, and at the University of Lancaster. Otman Bychou has published several articles on Morocco's involvement in WWII. His research interests focus principally on the cultural history of the Moroccan veterans' participation in WWII and in the French-Indochina War.

[John Clarke](#) is an Emeritus Professor at the UK's Open University. He has been a recurrent Visiting Professor at Central European University and a Leverhulme Emeritus Professor (2019-2022). His latest book, *The Battle for Britain: Crises, Conflicts and the Conjuncture*, about political-cultural struggles and realignments in the UK, will be published in May 2023 by Bristol University Press.



[Udo Göttlich](#) is a Professor for Media and Communication Studies at Zeppelin University, Friedrichshafen. Main research interests: Sociology of Culture, Sociology of Media and Communication, Cultural Studies. Recent Publications include: “The Kultursoziologie of Cultural Studies”, in: Dorer, Johanna et al. (eds.) (2021): *Cultural Studies revisited*, Wiesbaden: Springer, S.85-97 and „Zur Vermessung des „Digitalen“: Soziologie und die Herausforderungen der digitalen Transformation“, in: *Soziologische Revue*, 2022, Jg. 45, H.4, S.421-445. E-Mail: [udo.goettlich@zu.de](mailto:udo.goettlich@zu.de) (Zeppelin University Friedrichshafen, Germany)

[Susan Ingram](#) is Professor in the Department of Humanities at York University, Toronto, where she coordinates the Graduate Diploma in Comparative Literature. She is the general editor of Intellect Book’s Urban Chic series and co-author of the volumes on Berlin, Vienna, and Los Angeles. A past president of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association and its current web systems administrator, her research interests revolve around the institutions of European cultural modernity and their legacies.

[Angela Kölling](#) is a Professor for Anglophone Studies at the Faculty of Translation Studies, Linguistics and Cultural Studies of the Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz, as well as Book Reviews co-Editor of the *Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies*. Her research and teaching focuses on translation as catalysts for societal transformation, such as decolonisation and environmental crisis adaptation. Recent publications include “Visibility and Translation” (Special Issue of *Imaginations* vol. 11, no. 3, Dec. 2020) and “From ‘talking head’ to world maker: a discussion of Frank Schätzing’s *Was, wenn wir einfach die Welt retten?* and Andreas Weber’s *Indigenialität* in terms of public intellectualism (*Drain* vol. 19, no. 2, Fall 2023).

[Eric Maignet](#) Eric Maignet is Professor of Cultural Studies at Sorbonne Nouvelle University and Director of the Institute for Research on Media, Communication, Culture and Numérique/Digital (IRMECCEN). His research focusses on the socio-political levels of media cultures, especially audiences and comic books. Recent publications include *Sociologie de la communication et des médias* (Armand Colin, 2022, 4th version), *Les Cultural Studies : au-delà des politiques des identités*, Le Bord de l’eau, 2020, with Laurent Martin.

[Céline Morin](#) is Associate Professor of Cultural and Media Studies at Paris Nanterre University. Her work centers around politics of representation in popular culture. Focusing on the relationships between modern love, waves of women’s emancipation-movements and female TV characters, she examines the variations of meaning offered in television series regarding domestic structures, the ways of loving and emotional imaginaries. She has published in French a book focusing on the ‘Heroines of Television Series. From Bewitched to The Good Wife’ (2017).

[Markus Reisenleitner](#) is Professor of Humanities at York University and Director of the Graduate Program in Communication and Culture, as well as editor-in-chief of *Imaginations: Revue d’études interculturelles de l’image / Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies*. Reisenleitner’s research focusses on the intersections and socio-political implications of popular culture, digital culture, the urban, and fashion. Recent publications include *L.A. Chic: A Locational History of Los Angeles Fashion* (with Susan Ingram , Intellect, 2018)

and “Fiddling with Southern California at a Time of Upheaval: A.E. Maxwell’s Mystery Series.” in *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 52, no. 2, July 2022.

[Urs Urban](#) is associate professor at Bauhaus University in Weimar. He studied romance philology at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf and at the University of Vienna and did his Ph.D. thesis on Jean Genet at the University of Treves. He then worked for years as a DAAD-lecturer abroad, first in Strasburg, then in Buenos Aires, where he was head of the DAAD-office. In 2023, he obtained his postdoctoral lecture qualification (Habilitation) at Humboldt University in Berlin. Urs works and publishes on the economics of literature – for example: *Texte zur Theorie der Arbeit* (Reclam 2015), *Die Ökonomie der Literatur* (Aisthesis 2018), *Konflikt und Vermittlung. Die Ökonomie des Romans in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Brill: Fink, forthcoming) and on Black Paris and the function of clothes for cultural re/appropriation.

[Rachel Lara van der Merwe](#) is an assistant professor in the Centre for Media and Journalism Studies at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Her research explores the intersection of digital media, national identity, ecopolitics, and coloniality—particularly within South Africa and the Global South. Originally from Cape Town, South Africa, she received a Ph.D. in Media Research and Practice from the University of Colorado Boulder and holds an MA in Cultural Studies, with a concentration in media studies, from Claremont Graduate University.

[Megan Wood](#) is an assistant professor of Communication and Culture at Ohio Northern University in the Communication and Media Studies program. She researches, teaches, and writes broadly about matters of identity, inequality, and economy with special attention to transformations of U.S. political culture. Her current book-in-progress probes the implications of corporate empowerment for political identity and the domain of civic practice in the United States through the lenses of popular and vernacular culture. In addition to teaching and research, Megan serves as the Commentaries and Reviews editor for the *Journal of Cultural Economy* and on the executive board of the Cultural Studies Association.