

# Excursions

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## Opening Keynote

**Susan Currell**

*University of Sussex*

### Dirty History and America's White Trash: American Eugenics and the problem of Purity

This paper examines the idea of purity on several levels of discourse: firstly, as a historical trope by which ‘welfare’ and progress was enacted—with reference to the discourse of eugenics in America as it exerted pressure on metaphorical ideas of ‘social house cleaning’ and the efficient body during the 1930s. Secondly, it will explore how ‘factual’ documentary photographs of the rural poor were ‘infected’ with the ‘fictions’ of eugenic discourse: that, in order to explain their science of purity, eugenicists had to construct a narrative of the unseen, the unportrayable (that is the perception of purity or impurity beyond the eye); in other words a narrative that had to be a plausible fiction of the real, one stored in the after-image of the photographic negative with no ‘positive’ presence. Finally, I shall discuss how researching the history of eugenics raises further trouble by hanging out the ‘dirty laundry’ of the process of both history-making and scientific evidence, raising the problematic of historical knowledge and pure truths: producing instead an ‘impure’, tainted, or incomplete historical record for historians and researchers.

Susan Currell is Reader in American Literature at the University of Sussex. She was recently elected as Chair of the British Association for American Studies, 2013–2016. She sits on the editorial board of the *Journal of American Studies*.

## Panel One

**Máire MacNeill**

*Royal Holloway, University of London*

### Dying by the sword: Manliness, honour, and duelling on and off the stage, 1695-1745

How ought a gentleman in the early eighteenth century behave? This question confounded writers of the period, as they searched for an ideologically pure version of manliness, and I will use this as a starting point for my presentation. I will briefly discuss the stereotypical figure of manliness during the Restoration period—the rake, who drank, gambled, whored, and duelled—and how he exhibited traits that writers no longer wanted to encourage; however, the popular association with this figure and manliness remained. I will go on to argue that a hero who avoided the traditional manly activities that the rake enjoyed ran the risk of falling into the effeminate stereotypes of the fop. Ideal manly qualities had to be reconfigured in such a way that they did not become undesirable.

It is here that problems arose. For example, honour had been long-established as one of the key elements of 'ideal' manliness, and honour was often manifested in the honour-duel. It was one of the ironies of the age that in order to defend a sense of personal honour from being sullied by another, it was expected that a gentleman would be moved to perform a violent and potentially murderous act. In the second half of my paper I will discuss how some of the values and behaviours perceived to be indicative of pure manliness were interpreted on the stage. My work will use the representation of duels and sword-fights on the stage as its starting point, looking first at plays such as *The Relapse and Love Makes a Man* and then later sentimental comedies like *The Conscious Lovers*. My focus here will be on the way in which notions of pure manliness developed on the stage, and I hope to show that ideas about

manly honour in its purest form came to be encouraged as a passive, rather than an active, quality.

Máire MacNeill is a third-year Ph.D. candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London, researching representations of the duel on the stage between 1660 and 1745. She has previously spoken at conferences in the U.K. and the U.S.A..

**Annaliese Beth Piraino**

*University of Pennsylvania*

### The satisfaction and necessity of rape through possession in Renaissance drama and law

Patriarchal constructs ordain male dominance over female lifestyle and livelihood, additionally determining feminine value: more specifically determining what should happen with, and to, a woman's body. Outlined within Renaissance productions such as Thomas *Middleton's Women Beware Women*, *The Changeling*, and Shakespeare's 'Rape of Lucrece', possessive inequality lies behind each woman taken by her rapist. Early laws such as the 1275 Statute of Westminster liken rape to theft and help fashion the practice to be resultant of female Edenic flaw. Thus, both culture and law reveal the trivialization of rape through the necessity of possession. Rape and other sexual inequities become justifiable as a requisite right of the man, and part of the natural order to satisfy the woman.

Throughout culture and law, rape, honour killings, and chastity expectations demonstrate the need for men to 'purify' male dominated societies of women that 'drive men' to sexual compulsion. Women are representative of societal atrocities – manifestations of patriarchal fears pertaining to the loss of power. Purging society of supposed forces proves a valuable service to patriarchal order, as a loss of these controls over the woman could prove disastrous. Thus, in order for the familial and societal

patriarchy to maintain stability, it is the right of the man to exercise his jurisdiction. Because women are possessions, their violation directly relates back to their possessors; therefore, the woman's natural propensity to be ravished, elicits a man's cultural predisposition to possess.

Ultimately, these texts expose possession as the factor used to justify man's desire to rape, and denote the woman's fault in her own rape. The act of rape is a political means of advancement in a culture filled with women in need of being ruled. Thus, patriarchal construct requires rule over sexuality, which must be regulated to protect women, the men that possess them, and the patriarchal society as a whole.

Annaliese Beth Piraino is a Communications Media and Instructional Technology (CMIT) PhD Candidate with Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). Analiese is currently teaching Communications Media classes with IUP.

**Jane Clare Jones**

*Stony Brook University*

## On the Possibility of Penetrable Being: National/Sexual Purity and the Ideal of Sovereign Integrity

As Rebecca Whisnant has noted in 'A Woman's Body is Like a Foreign Country,' violations of national and bodily integrity are 'routinely merged in rhetoric and metaphor'. Starting from this insight, this paper will explore the interweaving of discourses of national and sexual purity, and examine how both rely on notions of sovereign integrity resting on the imaginary figure of impenetrable territorial identity.

We will start with the horror of invasion, colonization and contamination expressed in two starkly different, yet resonant, sources. Firstly, A European Declaration of Independence, the 'manifesto' of the Norwegian mass murderer, Anders Breivik's, which links the 'rape' of Europe by 'Muslim hordes' with an increase in 'Sex and the City'-style female licentiousness, and a

concomitant feminization of the European male. Secondly, Andrea Dworkin's analysis of heterosexual penetration as an act of occupation in the infamous—but little read—*Intercourse*.

While Breivik and Dworkin might both be dismissed as extremists, Dworkin's analysis is a lucid exercise in making explicit the politico-sexual effects of a metaphysical assumption which equates subjectivity with sovereign identity, and runs deep in Western thought – an expression of what Derrida once called 'presence,' or, in his later, more political work, sovereignty, or 'ipseity in general' (Cf. Rogues). More reason perhaps that the conceptual contiguity between two such evident ideological opponents as Dworkin and Breivik should give us pause. The last stage of this paper will therefore question feminist thinkers like Whisnant and Dworkin's acceptance of a fundamentally patriarchal notion of subjectivity qua pure sovereign integrity. This acceptance, I argue, is antithetical to the possibility of heterosexual female subjectivity, and moreover, undermines the creation of a culture of 'enthusiastic consent,' identified by contemporary feminist thinkers and activists as crucial to challenging the normalization of sexual appropriation and violence.

Jane Clare Jones is a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Philosophy, Stony Brook University, State University of New York. She is completing her doctoral thesis on sexual violence and the discourse of sovereign integrity at Stony Brook University. She has published in *Hypatia*, and writes for *The Philosophers' Magazine* and *The Guardian*, where she first analyzed the work of Anders Breivik. She was also interviewed about Breivik, purity and misogyny for Kilden, the Information Center for Gender Research in Norway. She has recently won the Karen Burke Memorial Prize to give a paper on Irigaray, Derrida and hospitality, at the next meeting of the Luce Irigaray Circle in Bergen, Norway, in June 2013.

## Panel Two

**Francesco di Bernardo**

*University of Sussex*

### ‘We want what you have’: Faustian finance in *The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim* and *Capital*

‘We want what you have’ is the most emblematic sentence in Lanchester’s *Capital*: it is printed on a postcard left in the houses of Pepys Road and revokes the spectre of house repossessions followed by the 2008 financial crisis. Conversely, in literature the definitive repossession is that of Faust’s soul by Mephistopheles. Ian Watts (2006) tracing the origins of the Faustian myth recounts the historical and fictional roots of the myth and affirms that that Faust represents the ‘unrepentant individualist’. Faust’s unstoppable desire to achieve his own interests by any means is eventually the cause of his own ruin and perpetual damnation.

The financial crisis that started in 2008 in the UK, revealed the fallacy of the ‘alchemic’ dream of deregulated finance as constantly generating wealth through dubious gambling practices. The results of that individualistic and greedy pursuit of wealth are the current economic and social crises. In this paper, I will investigate how the parable of greed, success, crisis and final ruin is represented through Faustian echoes in Jonathan Coe’s *The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim* and John Lanchester’s *Capital*. I will focus specifically on those characters and those sections of the novels that invoke the Faustian parable in the context of the representation of the deregulated finance.

Francesco Di Bernardo is a PhD candidate in English at the University of Sussex. He is particularly interested in the relation between literature and history/society/politics. His research is focused on the literary representation

of recent political history in Britain in the works of Coe in comparison with other authors.

**Rebecca Downes**

*National University of Ireland, Galway*

### Putrefaction and Purity: Death and Denial in Andrew Miller's *Pure*

The great carapace of human culture is erected to deny our essential corporeality, our persistent vulnerability, and our inevitable extinction; death is quite simply an elephant in the room of Western culture. Inspired by Phillipe Ariès's *The Hour of Our Death*, Andrew Miller's 2011 novel, *Pure*, is a fictionalised account of the clearing of Les Innocents cemetery in Paris in 1785. True to Foucault's conception of history as a means of interrogating the present, Miller's novel investigates the origins of contemporary attitudes to death in Enlightenment values of reason, sanitation and medicalization. This rationalisation coupled with, and complicated by, the Romantic revolution in sentiment that dates back to the late eighteenth century and still reverberates throughout Western society today has led to a collective denial of death and a denunciation of the decaying and diseased body.

The book's title, *Pure*, refers to this purification of culture through the purgation of death, but it also brings to mind Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, which is contemporaneous with the novel's setting. This paper will argue that Miller's novel is itself a critique of the kind of abstract thinking or pure reason that serves to deny the body and banish death. Miller's sensuous, voluptuous prose brings death to life, so to speak, literally and metaphorically depicting the resurgence of the dead body and resituating death within daily life. A contemporary *ars moriendi*, *Pure* exemplifies the praxis of storytelling as a form of embodied knowledge that transcends abstract theory and situates discourse in the arena of shared sentience and shared mortality.



Rebecca Downes is a PhD candidate and Irish Research Council Scholar with the Department of English at NUI Galway.

**Zac Rowlinson**

*University of Sussex*

‘A carrying of whiteness to ultrawhite’: The Dental  
Metaphysics of Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*

Zac is a doctoral student at the University of Sussex, working towards a thesis that explores the various representations of the face in the novels of Thomas Pynchon. He was also the Chief Editor of *Excursions* for the ‘Science/Fiction’ Issue #4.

## Creative Interpretations

**Iris Zaki**

### *My Kosher Shifts* (film, 2011)

In North London there's a small Jewish hotel. You don't have to get circumcised to get a room, but why would anyone from his own will have a Kosher breakfast? I am the receptionist, and my name is Iris. I represent the opposite of the typical clientele, that if they knew more about my wild lifestyle, the bible would probably slip from their hands. Being a complete outsider, I was surprised by the intimacy and openness that have developed between me and the guests, and started documenting our conversations.

Iris Zaki is an independent documentary film-maker, and holds an MA in Documentary Practice from Brunel University.

**Janice Pariat**

### 19/87

In 1987, Shillong, the small hill-station town that I come from in the far northeast of India, played backdrop to swift and violent 'ethnic' conflicts between the local Khasis and 'dkhars' (the Khasi word for 'outsider'). The designation 'dkhar' implies the drawing of borders of purity in terms of bloodline and lineage. In this fiction piece, the conversations between two

unlikely friends—a Muslim tailor who is fond of flying kites and a Khasi youth with a penchant for gambling—give voice to alternative conceptions of belonging and being indigenous to a place. To the peripheral expressions of the awkwardness of purity.

Janice Pariat is a writer based between London and New Delhi/Shillong. She studied English Literature at St Stephen's College, Delhi, and History of Art at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. Her work has featured in a wide number of Indian publications including *OPEN*, *Art India*, *Tehelka*, *India Today*, *The Caravan*, *Outlook* and *Timeout Delhi*.

**Caitlin Hayward-Tapp**

*University of Sussex*

## Poetry Performance

Caitlin Hayward-Tapp is an arts facilitator, fundraiser, poet and activist based in Brighton. She is currently studying for an MA in Gender Studies at the University of Sussex and was a co-organiser of the 2012 *Shutwalk London*. She has performed her poetry at many events, including *Reclaim the Night*, and has been published in several journals, including *Peace News* and *The F Word*.

**Matthew Atkinson**

*Goldsmiths, University of London*

### (Im)pure Noise

A short sound piece using analogue (cassette tapes), digital (synthesiser, f/x pedals) and 'raw' (scrap metal) sound sources. I will both enact and illustrate the ideas explored in the paper, in turn investigating the purity/impurity of the forms, the technology at hand and, ultimately, noise itself. Note also Matthew's critical discussion on Friday as part of Panel Four.

Matthew Atkinson is an undergraduate student in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths. He performs and records experimental music under a variety of guises, and has appeared at Newcastle-upon-Tyne's Tusk festival and the Arnolfini gallery in Bristol. He also operates a small-run cassette label from his bedroom.

**Charlie Duncan Saffrey**

*University of Sussex*

### Stand-Up Comedy Performance

Charlie Duncan Saffrey is a stand-up comedian, A-Level philosophy lecturer and doctoral candidate at the University of Sussex. In addition to his research on Aesthetics and Ethics, he has performed in and directed numerous stand-up and sketch shows, including successful runs at the Edinburgh festival and around the UK. In 2013 he started London's first regular night of 'Stand-up Philosophy', in which various philosophers and stand-up comedians tackle philosophical problems.

## Panel Three

**Hang Lin**

*University of Würzburg*

### On Being Confucian: Confucian Traditions and Modern Chinese Cultural Identity

After a century of its retreat from political and social stages in East Asia, Confucianism eventually found its revival together with the economic industrialization in the region. The awakening consciousness of the traditional Confucian values leads to a reconsideration of their implications in a modern society. Certainly China has experienced massive social and cultural transformation during the last century, an era marked with rapid adoption of Western norms and ideas. In the meantime, Chinese cultural heritages have never been totally cut, and the Chinese people and Chinese society today are still considerably shaped by China's unique past and its traditional cultural identity, especially by the Confucian traditions.

Despite the disruptive scholarly debates on the actual relevance of Confucianism and modernization, there are precious elements within Confucian values which provide the relevance of Confucianism to the future, such as an ethic of responsibility and the understanding of the humanistic meaning of life. This paper endeavours to explore and discuss various aspects of the relationship between the old Confucian traditions and the modern Chinese cultural identity, including Confucianism as a way of life, Chinese understanding of morality and value relationships, and recent Confucian influence on Chinese politics. On the base of this examination, considerations will be given to demonstrate that Confucian teachings did not perish but are still relevant in modern China. A proper appreciation of these values can help to better comprehend Chinese contemporary society and Chinese cultural identity.

Hang Lin is a PhD candidate (ABD) in Chinese history at Graduate School of the Humanities, University of Würzburg. He is concurrently a research fellow and lecturer for intercultural competence at Institute for Cultural Studies of East—and South Asia—Sinology, University of Würzburg. His recent publications include 'Traditional Confucianism and Its Contemporary Relevance', *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2011): 437-445; 'Teachings of the Master: Confucius and the Chinese Cultural Identity with Confucian Characteristics' (in German), *Interculture Journal*, vol. 19 (2012): 21-31; 'A Mixed Bag of Results: Village Elections in Contemporary China', *Asian History and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2011): 14-22.

**Daniel Weiss**

*University of Cambridge*

Impurity without repression: Julia Kristeva and the biblical possibilities of a non-eliminationist construction of religious purity

In her seminal analysis of impurity and abjection in *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva argues that the abject represents a threat to identity, and accordingly gives rise to repression, horror, and a perceived need to purify social space from such defiling elements. In her analysis, she draws heavily on the biblical tradition as setting the stage for subsequent Western constructions of purity and impurity. I argue, however, that while the type of purity-construction described by Kristeva does represent one conceptual stream that has flowed from the biblical tradition, her account nevertheless oversimplifies and eliminates key unique features of biblical constructions of impurity.

Drawing upon Jonathan Klawans's work on purity and sin, I argue that, in fact, biblical presentations of purity also give rise to a quite different historical conceptual trajectory, with important potential implications for understandings of religious and social identities in contemporary culture.

While in Kristeva's account, impurity represents a functionally contagious threat that must be quarantined and eliminated from the social sphere, a key stream of biblical thought, taken up in the later tradition of classical rabbinic Judaism, treats impurity as much less threatening to identity. Maintaining the principles of purity and impurity, this approach also puts forth a construction wherein one can live alongside impurity, without having to repress or eliminate it from one's geographical context. While purity and impurity remain significant for one's own actions and practices, there is less need to impose a regime of purity on others in one's surrounding spatial environs.

Thus, while certain constructions of purity generate attempts to guarantee uniformity via force and coercion, the biblical text simultaneously contains resources for an understanding of purity and impurity that rejects violent coercion and instead allows for proximity to and ethical engagement with those who one considers 'other' or impure.

Daniel Weiss is the Polonsky-Coexist Lecturer in Jewish Studies, and Fellow and Director of Studies in Theology and Religious Studies at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge.

**Brent Ranalli**  
*The Cadmus Group*

## The Pull of Environmental Purity

This paper will explore the strong moral pull that the category of purity has in contemporary environmental discourse, activism, and law-making: the idealization of 'pure' air and water as a policy goal. From a scientific point of view, the removal of synthetic and naturally occurring chemical impurities from air and water produces significant health and ecological benefits—but only up to a point, and then it becomes inefficiently costly, and sometimes even detrimental to health. Insights from anthropology (e.g., Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*) can help explain the deep-seated pull of purity in our

psyche, and its obverse, our deep-seated aversion to pollution (which was indeed a religious concept before an environmental concept).

The antidote to irrational attachment to the concept of purity in environmental (and other) matters, ironically, is also found in the environmental movement: an ecological understanding that recognizes profound interconnectedness of phenomena in the world, acknowledges the limitations of our ability to comprehend those connections, and abhors monoculture—artificial simplicity, imposed by force in the name of radically dualistic value systems—both in the landscape and in the mind.

Brent Ranalli is an environmental policy consultant with over ten years of professional experience supporting the U.S. EPA's drinking water protection programme. He is also active as a humanities scholar, with peer-reviewed articles in history, philosophical anthropology, and science studies. He received his education in history and environmental science at Harvard and the Central European University. He is the recipient of a research fellowship from the Thoreau Society, and co-edits *Environment: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* for Yale University Press.



## Panel Four

**Joanna Kellond**

*University of Sussex*

### ‘A Pure Act of Perception’: Interpretation, Affect and the Psychoanalytic Spectator

This paper sets out to consider the role which psychoanalysis has, and might, contribute to a theory of spectatorship. Using the 2009 Royal Shakespeare production of the play, *Hamlet*, as well as Freud's reading of the play itself, the paper considers how psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship dating from the 1970s repeated Freud's gesture of using psychoanalysis as an interpretative tool. The paper argues that, like Freud, such theories attempted to mitigate the effects of the encounter with the visual text by inscribing and understanding it in writing. At the same time, the paper sets out to demonstrate that Freud's own description of the act of watching the play represents a theory of communication which might be used to bring psychoanalytic theory into dialogue with more recent theories of spectatorship which have focused on affective, and mimetic communication.

Joanna Kellond is a Doctoral Student in the School of English at the University of Sussex. She is completing a PhD on psychoanalysis as a cultural cure, with particular attention to the work of Donald Winnicott. She has been part of the editorial board for *Excursions* since beginning her PhD.

**Tara Ward**

*University of Michigan*

## Pure Painting and Mottled Colour

On the eve of World War I, Guillaume Apollinaire announced the birth of 'pure painting'. Scholars have typically understood this as an early version of mid-century views of abstract art; however, that interpretation ignores the poet's deep connection to Robert and Sonia Delaunay. These artists made little to no distinction between works with recognizable objects and those without, and they moved freely between the realms of high art and those of fashion and décor. Yet, the Delaunays did have an obsession with purity.

The terms 'simultaneous contrast' were omnipresent in the couple's pre-War art, writing, and conversation. This was a direct, and acknowledged, reference to M. E. Chevreul, a nineteenth-century colour theorist and chemist who had shown that hues diametrically opposed on the colour wheel appear more pure when seen simultaneously. Most often discussed in relation to the phenomenological changes that occur when red and green are viewed side-by-side, simultaneous contrast suggests an alternative view of purity. It could be produced not by segregation but proximity, not by distillation but careful mixing. For the Delaunays, this type of purity became a way of life.

After outlining how the Delaunays used Chevreul's theories to evoke three-dimensional space, this paper will argue that their techniques of simultaneous contrast were a way of recognizing the ideological struggles, power structures, and practical congestion of modern, Paris. Robert Delaunay's juxtapositions of colour spatialize time in order to distinguish his work from the ideas of the Cubists, the Futurists, and the Unanimists. Sonia Delaunay's motley designs arrange the competing claims for her identity (wife, artist, mother, nightclub fixture). In short, for the Delaunays, pure painting was not a retreat from the world, but a way of making its dichotomies and conflicts more visible.

Tara Ward teaches the history of art as a visitor at Michigan University. She recently completed her PhD at Boston University with a dissertation entitled 'Personal Space: Simultaneities in the 1913 work of Robert Delaunay, Fernand Léger, and Sonia Delaunay'. Tara has also taught at Boston

University, Brandeis University, and Harvard University, and she has published catalogue essays for the McMullan and Guggenheim museums.

**Matthew Atkinson**

*Goldsmiths, University of London*

### (Im)pure noise

In recent years, noise—both as a presence in music and as a music in its own right—has received increasing critical and theoretical attention, as evidenced by Paul Hegarty's *Noise/Music* (Continuum, 2007), as well as Andrew McGettigan and Ray Brassier's noisetheorynoise conferences.

Despite the binary oppositions engaged with in such discourse (simple/refined; solid/textured; improvised/composed; analogue/digital; primitive/conceptual; loud/very loud, et cetera), noise music's perceived purity/impurity is less commonly articulated. This paper will consider what might constitute a purity of noise: is noise a degradation of the pure, an attempt to corrupt the totality of sound(s)? Or is it is the reverse, a brutal alchemy that seeks to turn the unwelcome and the upsetting into an immediate, genuine (if not always enjoyable) aural/physical experience?

Rather than argue for or against any particular noisemaking strategies, I will instead reflect on the aesthetic, performatory and methodological tactics employed by a range of noise artists (from early British power electronics and industrial acts, through the Japanese and American scenes of the 1990s, up to the recent 'hybridisation' of noise), as well as the considerations, concerns and biases that inform my own practice.

Matthew Atkinson is an undergraduate student in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths. He performs and records experimental music under a variety of guises, and has appeared at Newcastle-upon-Tyne's *Tusk* festival and the Arnolfini gallery in Bristol. He also operates a small-run cassette label from his bedroom.

## Panel Five

**Susana Sánchez Renieblas**

*Universidad Complutense de Madrid*

### Collapsing the 1960s Female Purity Myth through Janis Joplin's Music

Janis Joplin was a fashionable and loved singer of the 1950s and 1960s and, at the same time, a social outsider from the perspective of the mainstream. Through her songs and her harsh voice, she showed the 1950s and 1960s society there was an alternative to the have-to-do and have-to-be feminine stereotypes.

Her music was her personal and professional tool which allowed her to distance herself from the female mainstream. Her songs became feminine (and subsequently feminist) hymns in which Joplin sang to those 'other impure women' who did not follow the feminine social standards. In her lyrics she encouraged women to be as they wanted, to feel free in terms of gender and sexuality, and also to fight for finding real love.

The aim of this paper is to analyze several of Janis Joplin's songs, including 'A Woman Left Lonely' and 'Me and Bobbie McGee' in order to examine how Joplin collapsed and went far beyond the 'purity myth' (Valenti, 2010: 10) and the 'feminine mystique' (Betty Friedan, 1963: 5) of the 1960s. This paper will also connect Janis Joplin with the countercultural movement in the United States, determining to what extent she (and other offbeat women like her) were actually able to be countercultural at all.

Susana Sánchez Renieblas is a PhD Candidate at Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Her thesis in progress is entitled 'Ideological and Social Alienation of North American Women in the 1950s in Literature and Cinema'. She is a member of AEDEAN (Spanish Association for English and American Studies),

EAAS (European Association for American Studies) and SAAS (Spanish Association for American Studies).

**Björn Sonnenberg-Schrank**

*University of Cologne*

### My Most Prized Possession, an American Obsession. Virginité and the Sexual Politics of the American Teen Film

In my paper, I will argue that so-called teen films, much more than merely reflecting or depicting American teenage life, actually construct and invent it. In this sense, teen films are descriptive as well as prescriptive. There are many conclusions a viewer can extract from their mediality, plots, characters, settings, aesthetics and techniques about the American culture that produces and consumes them—as well as about their function in the construction, shaping and perpetuation of gender roles, normalcy, and American-ness.

The focus of my analysis lies on the sexual politics and politicization of sexuality which often is a central part of these narratives. Especially of interest is the obsession with (female) virginité, which remains a staple in teen films and TV shows. Current examples of this are the *Twilight* movies or the long-running series *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, but also ‘real life’ persons of teenage interest such as Justin Bieber, Britney Spears or the Jonas Brothers, who at some point in their careers have made the choice to endorse virginité, sometimes symbolized by wearing so-called ‘purity rings’.

I will point out how these sexual politics of teen entertainment and their mediation of chastity, purity, and virginité are linked to societal and ideological shifts in the USA, especially the re-emergence of the Religious Right and their ‘family values’ during the Bush presidency (2001-2009).

Björn Sonnenberg-Schrank is a PhD candidate, lecturer, and research assistant to Prof. Dr. Hanjo Berressem in the University of Cologne’s English department.

## Closing Keynote

**Robbie Duschinsky**

*University of Northumbria*

### Morality, Colour, Bodies: Epistemological and Interpretive Questions of Purity

Robbie Duschinsky is Senior Lecturer in Social Science for Social Work at Northumbria University. His research has focused on children and families, the use of psychology in social policy and professional practice, and social and political theory.