

**Bodies – Systems – Structures:
Masculinities in the UK and the US, 1945
to the Present**

Veranstalter: Dresden University of Technology

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This international conference marked the end of the three-year TransCoop Project „Towards Comparative Masculinity Studies“ between Dresden University of Technology (Germany) and Kent State University (USA). As such, it was the last in a series of three conferences funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and Kent State University. The conference aimed at encouraging scholarly movement in a direction that both builds on recent work in the field of Masculinity Studies and moves past it, towards more comparative kinds of analysis, emphasising transdisciplinary and transnational systemic issues.

The opening of the conference by RON CORTHELL (Purdue-Calumet) and STEFAN HORLACHER (Dresden) not only sketched the theoretical framework of the ensuing discussions and provided first examples of cultural analyses of masculinities, but it also pointed out that Dresden has become an important centre of Masculinity Studies in Germany. This was underpinned by the fact that numerous leading scholars in the field gave insight into their current research at the conference.

In his keynote lecture, MICHAEL KIMMEL (Stony Brook) focused on the ways in which men on the extreme right emphasise the gendered body in their rhetoric. Based on empirical research amongst current and former White Supremacists in the US, Sweden and Germany, he argued that men on the extreme right saw their own bodies as having been emasculated and employed corporeal imagery to recruit new members. According to Kimmel, the right wing's rhetoric is not free from contradictions: pro-capitalist and pro-America on the one hand, anti-corporate and anti-government on the other.

The opening panel discussed „*How the West Was Won: Western Masculinities*“. WALTER ERHART (Bielefeld) compared the construction of masculinities in Charles Portis's „*True Grit*“ (1968) to those in the novel's two screen adaptations. Erhart argued that all versions of the Western epic put the abstract role model of the Western hero to the test. He stated that while the novel and its first adaptation (1969) depicted a variety of concrete masculinities that were all put in relation to the androgynous girl Mattie Ross, the Coen brothers' version (2010) turned masculinity into a rather homogenous 'dark continent' associated with violence and death, thereby (re-)introducing the 'abstract' notion of a threatening masculinity almost beyond comparison. BRIGITTE GEORGI-FINDLAY (Dresden) analysed how the HBO TV series „*Deadwood*“ (2004–06) represents gender relations and masculinity in an all-male 19th-century western gold camp on the edge of law and order. She argued that the series did not only depict a whole range of masculinities rather than a 'hegemonic' model of manhood, but that it ultimately referenced a troubled, injured masculinity in crisis, haunted by the fear of its own limitations. Both Erhart's and Georgi-Findlay's papers pointed out that the Western oscillated between rendering the past in terms of a nostalgic spectacle and challenging this kind of revisionism.

The second paper session dealt with „*Mercenary Masculinities*“. CHARITY FOX (Baltimore) read Frederick Forsyth's popular adventure novel „*The Dogs of War*“ (1974) and its film adaptation (1980) as transnational texts representing idealised masculinities aligning and colliding in decolonizing Africa. According to Fox, these narratives employ the rhetoric and style of imperialism associated with the golden age of the American Western in an attempt to reclaim a sense of certainty and moral purpose for the post-colonial mercenary. PAUL HIGATE (Bristol) addressed the recent phenomenon of the rapid growth of the Private and Military Security sector into a multi-billion dollar industry. Drawing on qualitative interviews and his own field research in Kabul, the US and the UK, Higate pointed to tensions between hypermasculine identity work and op-

erational effectiveness amongst military contractors, and argued that British companies propagated a notion of masculinity based on the ideal of restraint, while US American companies relied on hypermasculine tropes reminiscent of the frontier myth. LINDA ROLAND DANIL (Leeds) discussed the masculine identity of private military contractors (PMCs) as instances of what R.W. Connell has termed 'transnational business masculinity'. Thus, she examined how masculinities impact upon the international legal order and the global world order, reinforcing an inherently masculine domination on a global scale.

The session on „*Masculinities in Sports*“ consisted of two papers: DANIEL ZIESCHE (Chemnitz, Aberdeen) analysed the changes that conceptualisations of masculinities have undergone in England's football culture, most notably its development towards emphasizing heterogeneity and pluralism while simultaneously relying on heteronormativity and male camaraderie; EDWARD MADDEN (Columbia) examined the self-representation of the Emerald Warriors, Dublin's gay rugby club, specifically focusing on the ways in which the athletic body functions as a metonymic marker of gender and social power. He showed that as the Warriors achieved acceptance and coverage outside gay venues, their self-representations increasingly presented a commodified as well as eroticised vision of the athletic body and obviated the queer potential of the gay team athlete. Nevertheless, Madden concluded that the Emerald Warriors retained the potential for destabilising the very norms they sometimes reinforced.

The next panel addressed „*Concepts of the Male Body in Contemporary Media*“. Based on Giorgio Agamben's and Philippe Dubois's theoretical perspectives on photography, SIGRUN MEINIG (Dresden) examined the nexus encapsulated in photographic images of the corporeal and its cultural and aesthetic frames. Meinig illustrated how the works of Amy Elkins and Wolfgang Tillmans interrogated established aesthetic strategies such as the *profil perdu*, and thus negotiated the familiar binary of masculine versus feminine both in art and culture. WIELAND SCHWANEBECK (Dresden)

analysed the portrayal of phallic masculinities (and language) in the political arena as epitomised in the highly successful BBC programme „*The Thick of It*“ (2005–) and its spin-off film „*In the Loop*“ (2009). Having outlined the history of the renowned metaphor of the body of state, he argued that the show's narrative suggested that the body politic might not so much depend upon a head which formed rational decisions as it did on a fully erect penis, i.e. thoroughly phallic imagery. MARGARET HASS (Tübingen) discussed the depiction of male bodies in popular television weight loss formats such as the „*The Biggest Loser*“. She pointed out that the contemporary debate about obesity was indicative of a general unease about the transgression of gender norms. Hence, for men weight loss was seen to offer a path to becoming 'real' men again, to gain independence from women (particularly mothers) and to develop 'normal' heterosexual relationships.

The three papers gathered in „*Crisis, Spectacle and Narrative*“ examined contemporary crisis narratives in different media. ELAHE HASCHEMI YEKANI (Berlin) analysed Ian McEwan's „*Saturday*“ (2005) and Oliver Stone's „*World Trade Center*“ (2006) in order to explore how cultural shifts such as '9/11' are framed through the lens of male crisis narratives. Haschemi Yekani challenged ontologising conceptions of masculine identity which see crisis as a concept inherent to masculinity, for they appeared to privilege and recentre hegemonic masculinities and thereby marginalised non-hegemonic masculinities (and femininities). ALEXANDRA SCHEIN (Dresden) discussed the TV series „*Rescue Me*“ (2004–2011) and the Martin Scorsese film „*The Departed*“ (2006). According to her, both suggest that Irish-American manhood is challenged by revisions of masculinity and by an erosion of essentialist notions of identity. Moreover, Schein argued that the ethnic men's crises reflected the demise of a more traditional and conservative version of male identity in US-American culture. Based on Homi Bhabha's theoretical framework and Lacanian psychoanalysis, TAMÁS NAGYPÁL (Toronto) analysed Danny Boyle's „*Slumdog Millionaire*“ (2008), a film whose protagonist triumphs in a TV

quiz not by using civilisatory, colonial education, but by coming to terms with his repressed traumas. Significantly, Nagypál claimed that the evolving masculine identity was one that 'anybody' could get anywhere in the world; the resulting masculinity was a spectacle that, unlike the traditional phallic one, consisted in narrating publicly one's lack of the phallus.

In the panel opening the final conference day, „*Male Bodies and Race*“, DANIEL HOLDER (Gießen) addressed the interconnections of race, gender and Un-Americanism, using autobiographical works of W. E. B. DuBois and C. L. R. James. He stated that both authors drew upon the image of the weak and fragile black body in order to highlight their Americanism and to fight against their stigmatisation as 'Un-American' in the sociopolitical climate of the early Cold War. VELINA MANOLOVA (New York) approached James Baldwin's queer black writings and their motif of American masculinity gone bankrupt, using the displaced protagonist in „*Giovanni's Room*“ (1956) as an illustration of themes frequently revisited by Baldwin, such as the clash between progress and nostalgia for a pre-feminist society. The corporeal dimension of masculinity was taken up again in ERIK PIETSCHMANN's (Tübingen) paper on the rhetoric of white, heterosexual, middle class male bodies which try to disguise their own performative disposition. In his reading of two contemporary novels by Chad Kultgen and Blake Morrison, Pietschmann elaborated on the narrative strategies employed within a heteronormative rhetoric that attempted to defend its own privileged position.

The penultimate session, dedicated to the topic of confession and religion, opened with JÜRGEN MEYER's (Erfurt) analysis of masculinities in adaptations of Samuel Beckett's plays. Meyer analysed the Beckettian use of the Augustan tradition of confession and also pointed at the author's critical interrogation of logocentrism and colonialism, all of which could be read in terms of their underlying gendered disposition. BJÖRN KRONDORFER (Maryland) showed how the confessiographic impulse was present and presented in Gay Religious Studies scholarship in

the United States, arguing that Gay Religious Studies scholars had employed the mechanism of self-revelation with an interest in gender politics. Krondorfer stated that the introspective and retrospective accounting of one's self (which is a key feature of the traditional format of male confessional writings) was combined with Foucault's emphasis that the self is always in the process of becoming.

The last panel looked into contemporary US discourses, particularly the legal and financial sector. Through her reading of William Gaddis's „*A Frolic of His Own*“ (1994) as a narrative of post-patriarchal malaise, KATJA KANZLER (Dresden) proposed the idea of employing the law as a 'systemic metaphor', operating as a mutable code for the protagonist's frustrations and his 'white male pathos'. She also linked this thoroughly postmodern theme to Gaddis's poetic strategy, as the narrative integrated various text-types and thus allowed the law to 'colonise' the language of its own storytelling. SARAH L. STEELE (Cambridge) discussed a recent anti-trafficking video campaign that gained international attention via social networks. Steele illustrated that the advertisements did not only pattern masculinity by defining concrete, 'approved' expressions of manliness, but that they also dangerously attempted to objectify the objectifier, thus removing the very possibility of desistence. Finally, the ongoing financial crisis was addressed by ULFRIED REICHARDT (Mannheim), who stressed the connections between the current economic climate and the history of American individualism and its gendered framework. In his analysis of contemporary depictions of the 'homo oeconomicus' in Don DeLillo's „*Cosmopolis*“ (2003) or J.C. Chandor's „*Margin Call*“ (2011), amongst others, Reichardt demonstrated how the cultural representations of Wall Street emphasised hypermasculine behaviour and exaggerated exhibitions of male virility.

The question whether there is such a thing as an actual 'crisis' of masculinity recurred time and again throughout the conference. KEVIN FLOYD (Kent), one of the co-organisers, suggested that it might be more accurate to assume a social and political crisis that had merely been misread as a cri-

sis of masculinity. Generally, speakers and audience expressed the desire to address the underlying social and economic problems of which the perceived crisis was often merely a symptom.

In having leading scholars, international experts and PhD students present the findings of their most recent research projects, this conference provided the audience with an overview of the state of the art in contemporary Masculinity Studies. By interrogating systemic mechanisms that affect the construction and representation of masculinities, the speakers broke new ground and arrived at conclusions with transnational, transdisciplinary and, indeed, comparative implications, paving the way towards Comparative Masculinity Studies. The latter may very well represent the future of Masculinity Studies in a globalised environment. A volume with selected papers from this conference will be published in early 2014.

Conference Overview:

Conference Opening

Christian Prunitsch (Dresden): „Welcome“

Ron Corthell (Purdue-Calumet): „‘We Are Not Men’: The TransCoop-Project Kent – Dresden“

Stefan Horlacher (Dresden): „Bodies – Systems – Structures: Towards Comparative Masculinity Studies“

Keynote Lecture

Chair: Stefan Horlacher (Dresden)

Michael Kimmel (Stony Brook): „Their Bodies, Our Selves: The Embodiment of the Emasculated Other in the Rhetoric of the Extreme Right Wing“

Panel I: How the West Was Won: Western Masculinities

Chair: Stefan Horlacher (Dresden)

Walter Erhart (Bielefeld): „True Grit (1968 / 1969 / 2010): On Comparing Masculinities“

Brigitte Georgi-Findlay (Dresden): „‘Stand It Like a Man’: The Performance of Masculinities in *Deadwood* (2004–2006)“

Panel II: Mercenary Masculinities

Chair: Stefan Horlacher (Dresden)

Charity Fox (Baltimore): „Mercenary Bodies and Systemic Coups: Imagining Post-Colonial Masculinities in *The Dogs of War* (1974)“

Paul Higate (Bristol): „From Subjectivity to Material Practice: Men, Masculinities and the Private Military Contractor“

Linda Roland Danil (Leeds): „‘Mercenary’ Masculinities: Private Military Contractors, Gender Identity and the Laws of War in the Contemporary Period“

Panel III: Masculinities in Sports

Chair: Kevin Floyd (Kent)

Daniel Ziesche (Chemnitz, Aberdeen): „Changing Masculinities in England’s Football Culture“

Edward Madden (Columbia): „Rugger Buggers: Queering the Athletic Body in Irish Gay Rugby“

Panel IV: Concepts of the Male Body in Contemporary Media

Chair: Ron Corthell (Purdue-Calumet)

Sigrun Meinig (Dresden): „Between *profil perdu* and *Rückenfigur*: The Aesthetic and Cultural Portraiture of the Male Body in Contemporary British and American Photography“

Wieland Schwanebeck (Dresden): „Does the Body Politic Have No Genitals? Phallic Power Structures in *The Thick of It*“

Margaret Hass (Tübingen): „Viewing the Fat Man: Redemptive Masculinity in Popular Television Weight Loss Series“

Panel V: Crisis, Spectacle and Narrative

Chair: Brigitte Georgi-Findlay (Dresden)

Elahe Haschemi Yekani (Berlin): „The Privilege of Crisis? Epistemologies of Male Crisis in Narratives after ‘9/11’“

Alexandra Schein (Dresden): „The Crisis of Male Identity in *Rescue Me* (2004–2011) and *The Departed* (2006)“

Tamás Nagypál (Toronto): „The Narrative Spectacle of Masculinity in Danny Boyle’s *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008)“

Panel VI: Male Bodies and Race

Chair: Katja Kanzler (Dresden)

Daniel Holder (Gießen): „Un-American Black Bodies in Battle: W. E. B. DuBois and C. L. R. James“

Velina Manolova (New York): „Imagining Another Country: The Contradictions of Masculinity, Race and Nation in James Baldwin’s Fiction“

Erik Pietschmann (Tübingen): „Normative Fiction: The Rhetoric of White, Heterosexual, Middle-Class Male ‘Bodies’“

Panel VII: Masculinities, Religion and Confession

Chair: Kevin Floyd (Kent)

Jürgen Meyer (Erfurt): „Confess and Expose: Violent Representations of Masculinity in *Beckett on Film* (2001–2002)“

Björn Krondorfer (Maryland): „The Confessiographic Impulse: The Divine and the Erotic Male Body in U.S. Gay Religious Scholarship“

Panel VIII: ‘Real Men’, Capitalism and American Individualism

Chair: Stefan Horlacher (Dresden)

Katja Kanzler (Dresden): „Law, Language, and Post-Patriarchal Malaise in William Gaddis’s *A Frolic of His Own* (1994)“

Sarah L. Steele (Cambridge): „‘Real Men Don’t Buy Girls’: Patterning Masculinities by Objectifying the Objectifier in Anti-Trafficking Law and Media“

Ulfried Reichardt (Mannheim): „Wall Street and Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Film and Fiction“

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