Introduction: Crime and America

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The 2008 release of the film *Frost/Nixon* brought the infamous interviews of former US President Richard Nixon, conducted by British journalist Sir David Frost in 1977, back into public awareness. One of the most notorious sentences in the interview, and arguably in Nixon's career, was his answer to Frost's question whether the President, acting in the nation's interest, may do something illegal.[1] Nixon's reply: "When the President does it that means that it is not illegal" ("Nixon's Views").

His answer is stunning in that it suggests that the office of the President includes the power to decide what is legal and what is not, a bold assertion violating both the separation of powers and the rule of law. Apart from these constitutional ramifications, however, the role this one sentence has played for the interviews as well as for their cinematic reenactment is remarkable. It signifies a cultural fascination with Nixon's deeds that has inextricably tied this sentence to the public memory of his presidency. More importantly, the recent interest[2] in the thirty-seventh President and his downfall suggests that his actions might have come to symbolize the possibility of an overreaching of the executive branch more generally.

This fascination with crime, its symbolic value, and its discursive functions are indicative of the cultural dimension real-life crime can have. They are also indicative of questions on Crime and America central to this issue of *aspeers*. On the upcoming pages, we will thus outline one possible framework to investigate 'crime' from a sociocultural perspective and demonstrate its productivity for scholarship and American studies in particular, followed by an introduction to this year's academic and artistic contributions that all engage the cultural roles of 'crime' from a multitude of angles.

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1   The question referred to the Huston Plan, which gathered intelligence about political enemies through wiretapping, burglaries, surveillance, etc., later culminating in the Watergate scandal.
2   Before it became a movie, *Frost/Nixon* was a play written by Peter Morgan (Reston).

CRIME AND AMERICA

Scholars have often found it difficult to work with a definition of crime that goes beyond a nation's legislation of what is legally considered a criminal act: "The state, not the scientist, determines the nature or definition of crime" (Gottfredson and Hirschi 3). In cultural studies, working with a definition of crime restricted to real-life acts is even more difficult in discussions involving more abstract matters of American culture.[3] Considering these difficulties, the purpose of this introduction is not to try to do the seemingly impossible. Rather than developing a universal definition, we will introduce a triangular perspective to discuss the interrelations between crime and (American) culture. This triangular perspective underscores the extent to which crime is always both a real-life act and a larger discursive construct. Furthermore, it will allow us to demonstrate why 'crime' is an immensely productive concept for certain fields and to identify 'contact areas' between the study of crime and American studies.

For the purpose of this introduction, we will approach the notion of 'crime' from three different perspectives. First, there are certain acts or deeds, parts of social reality, that are commonly referred to as crimes, such as genocide, murder, rape, theft, blackmail, tax fraud, drug abuse, piracy, graffiti, and countless other examples. This first perspective thus deals with the actual 'thing,' something that happened somewhere, somehow. Of course, these acts are not crimes per se but have been called or labeled such—an arbitrary process that has led to and is reflected in the changing nature of legal definitions. Second, focusing on the more abstract level of symbolic meanings, 'crime' goes beyond the legal classification of individual acts. Instead, it forms a pervasive discourse that structures all contemporary societies. As such, 'crime' does cultural work, and this second perspective is concerned with the cultural functions the discourse of 'crime' fulfills. Accordingly, it is interested in the way a culture fantasizes about 'crime,' how it uses 'crime' symbolically to negotiate the distribution of power, fears of social change, desires for personal opportunity, and other questions, all of which need not be related to an actual deed at all. Finally, a third perspective, the strategic use of 'crime,' brings the two together in the intentional act of labeling something a crime to challenge the status quo. Such a renaming of something previously not referred to as a crime effects a change of perspective and a reevaluation. Often, then, 'crime' serves as a means to make something visible and speakable that would otherwise be invisible and silenced: a discursive operation that aims for social or political effect. Ultimately, this triangular structure might be

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3   For instance, in discussing the significance of 'crime' in crime fiction, Jerry Palmer points out the importance of "considering the nature of crime as a discursive construct" (133).

responsible both for the value 'crime' has as an analytic category and for the appeal it exerts.

To demonstrate how this triangular structure can be applied, the real-life crime of domestic violence may serve as an example. Traditionally, the act of a husband beating his wife had long been tolerated by society as part of "male-dominated family structures" and had not been critically discussed (Buzawa and Buzawa 57). In the 1960s and '70s, due to the women's rights movement (89), parts of American society began to see this act as a crime, finding the term 'domestic violence' for it and thus opening it up for debate. Moreover, this cultural perception of domestic violence as a crime evidences changes in an American culture that no longer accepted domestic violence as "a form of oppression" (McCue 5)—a symbol for the crumbling foundations of patriarchy at the time. Finally, the strategic use of the term 'domestic violence' by scholars can also serve to make other facets of society visible. For instance, Suzanne K. Steinmetz coined the term 'battered husbands' for domestic violence committed by women against their husbands. The existence of this side of domestic violence has, still, mostly been silenced in society, partly "because of the shame battered men experience," keeping them from "com[ing] forward with their problem." Therefore, strategically labeling this deed a crime (under the name of 'domestic violence') has made "hidden victims" (McCue 34) visible.[4] In this sense, 'crime' refers to all three, the real-life act of the beating, the cultural discourses around it, and the strategic use of the term.

With 'crime' located at the intersection between real-life deeds and cultural discourses, the media's role has moved to the center of scholarly interest. When Vincent F. Sacco, for example, notes that the media has the ability to transform a 'private' crime (an act suffered by individuals) into a public issue (142)—thus "exemplifying a larger social problem" (145)—he connects it to the realm of larger cultural discourse. This line of thought suggests that the news media makes a selection as to which crimes to transform into public issues and how to present them. Accordingly, the portrayal of crimes is distorted to fit preexisting discourses both of crime and other, broader concerns.[5] As, ultimately, "the known world is known via the

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4   Domestic violence in LGBT relationships would be another aspect of this particular crime that has yet to be publicly recognized (McCue 35-36). For more research on this, cf. e.g. Island and Letellier; Renzetti and Miley; Leventhal and Lundy.

5   For instance, crime statistics suggest that most crime is nonviolent, but since stories about nonviolent crime are often not deemed exciting or newsworthy, the majority of crimes the media reports on are violent (Sacco 143). More prominent misconceptions about crime are described in Marcus Felson's chapter on "Ten Fallacies About Crime," most of which have entered the public mind because "[m]any people rely on nonprofessional sources of information about crime, including the news media" (1). Another important example would be the misrepresentation of minorities in reports on crime, as elaborated on page xii of this introduction.

media" (Seltzer 26), news coverage more so than personally experienced crime shapes how Americans "[construct] the reality of crime" (Ferell 396-97). Hence, the study of the relationship of crime and media becomes an arena to discuss the implications of mediated realities.[6]

Studies on other media formats, such as popular crime TV series, not only emphasize the "enormous appeal of crime as entertainment" (838). They, too, observe how these formats obscure the distinction between reality and fiction by blurring "the boundary between crime information and crime entertainment" (837). A case in point is the '*CSI* effect,' which describes how the depiction of police investigation in TV series has led to higher real-world expectations of forensic science by the public and, especially, by jury members: "Prosecutors lament the fact that they have to supply more forensic evidence because jurors expect this type of evidence, having seen it on television" (Dowler, Fleming, and Muzzatti 838).[7] The interest scholars of crime and the media take in the intersection between reality and representation thus underscores the special position of 'crime' as always being about both 'actual' deeds and cultural discourses.

Trends to present fictional crime as based in reality (Eschholz, Mallard, and Flynn 162) are not limited to TV series, of course, but can also be found in other media, such as literature. In fact, the genre of true crime is principally concerned with achieving such an effect by "retell[ing] real-life cases of crime [...] following the conventions of popular crime fiction" (Seltzer 26).[8] However, while criminal deeds may be a theme or topic in many works of fiction,[9] 'crime' also defines a whole genre that would otherwise be "unclassifiable" (Scaggs 1), namely crime fiction.[10] There, 'crime' assumes a far more central role (Palmer 131): A crime committed at the beginning of a story is seen as a symbol for the disruption of the social order, which is only restored by the subsequent solution of the crime via the identification of the criminal.[11] As Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle point out in their reading of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," detective fiction may be read as using 'crime' to pursue a reactionary and conservative agenda since it is so centrally concerned with the "restoration of the

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6   For examples of research on the representation of crime in the media, cf. Jewkes; Mason; or McCormick. Cf. also Cohen's or Thompson's research on the role of the media in creating and fueling moral panics about 'deviant' and delinquent behavior.

7   The '*CSI* effect' has, e.g., been investigated by Schweitzer and Saks. For a study of a TV show's depiction of torture and the blurring between reality and fiction, cf. Nissel in this issue.

8   One of the first and arguably best-known examples of a crime novel based on a real-life case is Truman Capote's nonfiction work *In Cold Blood*.

9   For instance, in *Crime in Literature*, sociologist Vincenzo Ruggiero discusses different forms of crime in classic literary fiction, such as "[c]rimes of the [e]conomy" in *Moby Dick* (135).

10 Another genre defined by 'crime,' albeit in an entirely different way, is that of the mob movie. Cf. Schwanebeck in this issue for an exploration of the genre and its lineage.

11 For this formula of the classical detective story, cf. Cawelti.

status quo" and the "re-establishment of power relations" (173). Similarly, as the criminal disrupts the social order, criticism of society in classic detective fiction is rare "because of the danger that 'society', rather than a particular individual, will itself come to be seen as the culprit" (173).[12] In other types of crime fiction, specifically the American hard-boiled variant, this notion has changed and 'crime'—"in its currency as social barometer"—is seen as a "bastard offspring of an urban-fuelled modernity" and, as such, becomes "an inevitable part of the institutional superstructure of American life" (Pepper 10). Likewise, feminist crime authors react to the conservative usage of 'crime' in classic works by using crime fiction "as an allegory of feminist resistance to patriarchy's attempts to enclose and silence women" (Reddy 199) and "subvert a genre that is both masculine and reactionary" (Tasker 232). Thus, many contemporary authors of crime fiction specifically use 'crime' to react to, or even undo, its earlier use as a tool for preserving a "reactionary political agenda" (Bennett and Royle 173).

Since the 1960s, scholarship, too, has been increasingly interested in countering reactionary agendas by studying the voice and perspective of minorities—or the Other—in regard to categories such as gender and ethnicity. Accordingly, crime studies has taken an interest in these topics, and various disciplines have used the notion of 'crime' to gain different insights into the study of minorities.[13] For instance, since gender studies is interested in promoting social activism and achieving political change, 'crime' can be used strategically to question traditional notions of patriarchy, something feminist crime fiction authors, for example, have done. In the last decades, scholars in gender studies have expressed the need for a female point of view concerning theories of criminality, which have been predominantly male both in the analysis of criminal subjects and in the approach of the relation between crime and gender.[14] Due to the general neglect of female perpetrators, one specific area of research looks at the so-called gender gap in crime, discussing whether gender equality, behavior changes, or

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12 For a study that looks at the different roles the detective takes in German and American incarnations of the genre, cf. Schmieder.

13 A less obvious example would be the interest in the role of 'crime' for moral panics and how they construct minorities as deviant (Goode and Ben-Yehuda). In the 1980s, fears of a spread of AIDS resulted in a criminalization of homosexuals, who, in effect, fell "prey for scapegoating" (Seidman 188). Public discussions of AIDS, drawing on a language of crime, spoke of "punishment," "war" (192), or "fight" (Michie 328), creating a discourse that criminalized homosexuality and sexual liberty on the basis of morality (Seidman 189). This moral panic about AIDS encompassed a more general fear of the homosexual Other, whose sexual orientation was thus established as a crime, sometimes even forcing practicing homosexuals to register as sexual offenders (cf. Lawrence v. Texas). For more on AIDS and moral panics, cf. Altman; Weeks; and Thompson's comments about "sex and AIDS" (72).

14 For a female point of view, cf. Chesney-Lind, who has been regularly publishing articles on girls' delinquency and women's crime since 1981.

policy changes account for its narrowing.[15] Looking at the victim-perpetrator relationship, an interest in 'crime' has ultimately provided important opportunities to reconsider and reevaluate the gendering of social roles.

Using crime as a vantage point for discussions of the interrelation of race, class, and stereotypes, ethnicity studies has been similarly interested in social and political change. Studies have thus investigated how the media misrepresents crimes committed by minorities (Sacco 143), for example by showing how "minority crime victims receive less attention and less sympathy than white victims, while crime stories involving minority offenders are rife with racial stereotypes" (Dowler, Fleming, and Muzzatti 840). In light of racial stereotypes that see higher crime rates for some minorities simply as a given, scholars in ethnicity studies are determined to find more nuanced explanations. The resulting scholarship focuses on the social and cultural conditions of ethnic minorities. In fact, 'crime' triggers a debate between race-cultural theorists and structural theorists, who criticize the former's focus on cultural influences and, instead, rely on structural aspects like class to explain racial differences in crime.[16] Moreover, research on ethnicity and race has strategically used 'crime' to uncover facets of unjust treatment of minorities in the past.[17] Hence, 'crime' has helped scholars make repressed and silenced facets in the history of minorities visible and has facilitated discussions among various schools of ethnic studies.

As 'crime' is a productive concept in areas of study such as the media, literature, gender, and ethnicity, it is evident how much an interest in crime has triggered transdisciplinary exchange, turning crime studies into an inherently interdisciplinary site.[18] The fact that American studies has always defined itself by its very

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15 In discussing the gender gap, different hypotheses have been developed, such as the gender equality hypothesis, the behavior change hypothesis, and the policy change hypothesis (for an overview, cf. Steffensmeier and Allan; Steffensmeier et al. 74-75; and Steffensmeier et al. 75-77, respectively).

16 Jeannette Covington discusses these two camps in more detail: In her article, she introduces essentialist explanations for higher African American crime rates by race-cultural theorists, such as the so-called subculture of violence or African Americans' rather violent historical experiences in the US (551-54). She then contrasts these with structuralist accounts that emphasize the importance of, e.g., class, urban residence, and age (554-58).

17 One example is how the Jim Crow laws criminalized African Americans and led to higher crime rates in this ethnic group: "[S]everal laws were passed that helped keep the African American population in its place, including vagrancy, loitering, disturbing the peace, and Jim Crow laws. [...] One result of this practice was the shift in prison populations to predominantly African American following the war" (Shelden 170). Note also the role that the trope of 'crime' has played in abolitionists' attempts to outlaw slavery morally and legally (Newman 6).

18 The need for interdisciplinary research for the study of crime has been emphasized again and again (cf. Ferell 395; DeHart and Mahoney 29; Muncie and McLaughlin vii). Likewise, the study of crime and of society are frequently claimed to have a common heritage. André-Michel Guerry's work in "moral statistics," relating crime to other regional and social factors, has been called "the foundation document" not only of criminology but also of sociology (Stark i).

interdisciplinarity makes it particularly enlightening to look at the 'contact zones' between what researchers in crime studies and American studies are interested in. In addition to that, our triangular perspective helps explain why 'crime' is such an appealing and productive concept for American studies: Interested in the daily reality of life in the US, scholarship can discuss crime from a sociological perspective and read it as one important facet of American identity. Looking at the cultural sphere, the role of 'crime' as a symbol that can negotiate greater categories is of central concern.[19] Lastly, aiming for revisions inside the field, the strategic use of 'crime' enables scholars to challenge certain dogmas and myths, and to question American (national) identity and (self-)perception. As the seminal works by Richard Slotkin[20] demonstrate, 'crime' can be used to reevaluate existing convictions in scholarship. His intervention engages Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis, which established the frontier as one of the most important American narratives and governed "western historiography for over fifty years" (Comer 241). As Leo Marx summarizes Slotkin's argument, what the frontier actually "produced [...] was not democracy [...] but violence" (365). By strategically casting 'violence' in the light of 'crime,' Slotkin questions both what has previously been used to characterize America and what has been used as a myth in American studies scholarship, drawing attention to the questionable nature of a celebration of the frontier.

Generally, by discussing the myth of the frontier as a crucial factor in the construction of American identity, scholars linked 'crime' directly to the notion of national identity, marking a connection that has been most productive in a number of contexts.[21] D. H. Lawrence, for example, noted that James Fenimore Cooper's writings are based on the "myth of the essential white America" and thus depict the typical American as "hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer" (68).[22] Ultimately, both Lawrence's 'killer'

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19 Examples for the symbolic role 'crime' has played are abundant. Consider, e.g., the way that Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* engages the young nation's Puritan past in perpetually circling the presumed crime of Hester Prynne's adultery. Readings of the role of 'crime' for this work of fiction are diverse. For instance, Larzer Ziff reads it as one aspect in Hawthorne's balancing the actual and the imaginary when he explores the aesthetics of the romance (342).

20 Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence* investigates, among other things, the importance of violence in shaping the myth of the frontier and the American West. This approach is complemented in his subsequent books *The Fatal Environment* and *Gunfighter Nation*, the latter of which discusses Turner's frontier thesis most prominently.

21 For instance, by contrasting the American self-perception of a "peace-loving nation" with the violent wars the US fought as of its founding, David H. Evans describes the relation between the US and violence as follows: "The nation was born in one war and 'born' again in a second, far more traumatic one; its official anthem celebrates the national banner seen by the light of exploding bombs in yet a third" (1).

22 This exaggerated and cynical observation criticizes the presumed whiteness and masculinity inherent in American individualism, while the use of the word 'killer' points to the inseparable relation between 'crime' and America. Therefore, Lawrence's observation culminates in his pejorative comment about the American being "a saint with a gun" (55) and highlights that

and Slotkin's rereading of the frontier as 'violent' strategically use 'crime' to contest notions of American exceptionalism. In different settings and with different dynamics, 'crime' has been central to opposing understandings of American national identity. Often, these have referred to 'imperial' crimes of the US to express sentiments that some have, in turn, decried as anti-American. Recently, the wake of 9/11 has seen a number of such debates in which the crime of the terrorist act has been compared to the presumed crimes of a hegemonic USA. These debates triggered angry responses that tried to outlaw such—often grossly simplifying—ideas by calling them anti-American.[23] Similarly, in reactions to the ensuing 'War on Terror' and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, 'crime' has been at the center of controversy: Opponents of the US government's actions insist on reading terrorism as a crime, not an act of war.[24] At the same time, there seems to be increasing international consensus that the invasion of Iraq was illegal in terms of international law (Burke 346) and that there may be a strategic benefit to calling it that.[25] Even more recently, the trope of 'crime' has been crucial for discussions of the financial crisis unfolding since 2007 and has impacted American (self-)perceptions of its capitalist roots. Here, references to 'crime' frame the capitalist goal of gaining more profit as being not a positive market dynamic but as evidence of an ultimately criminal form of greed.[26] In all these instances, 'crime' has been a potent rhetorical device to scrutinize—or criticize—different notions of 'Americanness,' underscoring the value 'crime' has as an object of inquiry for American studies.

Lastly, 'crime' relates to other larger categories of abstraction which also have been at the core of research in American studies, most prominently the concepts of power

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Cooper's myth seems to suggest that every member of society is potentially connected to 'crime' in one way or another.

23 Cf. the controversy surrounding Jean Baudrillard's comments. Immediately following the attacks, he called the US an "insufferable superpower" and spoke of "the terrorist imagination that (without our knowing it) dwells within us all." Cf. Kellner for commentary on the ensuing controversies and Goldblatt for one particularly unkind response.

24 Michael Welch emphasizes the originally metaphorical meaning of the term 'war' (as in the 'war on drugs' or the 'war on poverty') and laments a "sharp transition from the figurative to the literal" (103) that has led to "misguided military actions" (102).

25 Kofi Annan's assertion that the war was "illegal" ("Iraq War"), for example, can be read as one such strategic use.

26 This is most obvious in the role that Bernard Madoff and his Ponzi scheme have come to play in serving as a shorthand for the 'criminal' potential of investment banking. Cf. Mokyr's list of disillusionments with capitalism, "mismanaged banks, leveraged hedge funds, securitized subprime mortgages [...] shrinking 401(k) values, and Bernard Madoff" (445), or Freeman, Stewart, and Moriarty, who go as far as talking of an "Age of Madoff." Conversely, conservatives have tried to turn Madoff into a signifier of excessive greed (as opposed to capitalism). Cf. Froese (5) and, as an obvious example of these efforts, the Cato Institute's Niskanen (559). All exemplify the struggle over a narrativization of the crisis and the role 'crime'—signified by Madoff—plays for it.

and identity. In that it necessarily talks about the victim-perpetrator relationship, any discussion of 'crime' addresses power relations as well. This is certainly the case in the example of domestic violence mentioned in the very beginning,[27] but it also holds for any other of the areas outlined above. In a similar way, 'crime' enables discussions about cultural identities of ethnic groups. For instance, while organized crime can be read as a "systematic criminal activity for money or power" (Woodiwiss 3), it also provides a vocabulary to talk about identity. In this sense, 'crime' enables a discussion about what defines the identity of members of ethnic crime syndicates, like the Italian American Cosa Nostra[28] or the Jewish American crime organizations of the 1930s.[29] Finally, Slotkin's questioning of Turner's frontier thesis is an example that combines 'crime,' power, and identity with each other. By stressing 'crime' as a means to execute power, it becomes an influential factor in the construction of American national identity.

The productivity of this year's topic of Crime and America, then, lies exactly in the plurality of perspectives that any discussion of 'crime' entails. This very plurality brings together our art contributions and our academic papers and puts them in an interdisciplinary dialogue. The following paragraphs will outline these contributions, along with the professorial voice, in more detail, sketching out their interaction with each other as well as with our overall topic.

PROFESSORIAL VOICE

It has become a tradition of our journal to invite one European professor of American studies to contribute to the issue. In its third year, *aspeers* is on its way to being an established element in the broad landscape of scholarly journal publishing. For the current professorial voice, we are pleased and honored to feature an interview with a scholar who is well known for his extensive involvement in academic editorship in the field of American studies both in Germany and internationally.

Professor Alfred Hornung is chair of English and American Studies at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. In the course of his lasting and diverse career in the academic field, Hornung has become one of the first and most influential

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27 Kristin L. Anderson, e.g., notes how domestic violence as a crime discloses the relations of power to "maintain dominance and control" (655).

28 As James B. Jacobs and Christopher Panarella point out, scholars debate "whether Italian organized crime in the United States was transplanted from Italy or is an essentially American phenomenon" (165).

29 For a study on the interrelation between Jewish blue-collar crime and the process of Americanization, cf. Hieke in this issue.

driving forces in the institutionalization of American studies in Germany. He was president of the German Association for American Studies (DGfA) from 2002 to 2005 and he also chaired conferences for the American Studies Association (ASA). Moreover, Hornung has been one of the editors of the monograph series *Amerikastudien / American Studies* since 1989 and coeditor of the *Transnational American Studies Journal* and the journal *American Studies / Amerikastudien*. In his interview, he talks about the excitements of the editing process: the fascination of being the first to read new work and learn about upcoming trends, the chance to guide young scholars into finding their voice, and the opportunity to shape the directions of scholarship by encouraging thematic publications. All three, Hornung explains, are reasons why he enjoys the responsibilities of editorship.

Asked about his current research interests, he mentions that life writing has been an intellectual passion of his for decades, as evidenced by his 1984 *Kulturkrise und ihre literarische Bewältigung* (*Cultural Crises and Literary Solutions*), a study of the autobiographical structure in America ranging from Puritanism to Postmodernism, his forthcoming edited volume *Autobiography and Mediation*, and many other publications.[30] This ongoing research has been complemented by a multitude of areas of expertise, such as narratology, cultural studies, modernism and postmodernism, and inter- and transculturalism. The latter subject, of course, is central to European scholarship and its integration with American studies in the US, as evidenced by Shelley Fisher Fishkin's 2004 presidential address, to which Hornung responded in the *American Quarterly* article "Transnational American Studies: Response to the Presidential Address." He has also authored numerous other articles and contributions on the subject, among them "Transculturations: A Transformation of European Civilization into American Culture" and "The Transatlantic Ties of Cultural Pluralism—Germany and the United States: Horace M. Kallen and Daniel Cohn-Bendit."

Transnationality is not only a matter of theory for Hornung. Throughout his academic career, he has been teaching courses in English and American literature and culture at universities in Europe, North America, and Asia. He credits the concept of transnationality with his recent stay at Peking University in Beijing, and he even connects his decision to become an American studies professor to his experience as a student abroad at Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT from 1969 to 1970. In the interview, he encourages students of American studies to "be open to all new possibilities," especially by going abroad, getting "another perspective of the world," and realizing how American politics and culture have a direct impact on their own

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30 Most prominently, *Autobiographie et Avant-garde* and the two volumes of *Postcolonialism and Autobiography* and *Postcolonialisme et Autobiographie*, respectively.

lives. One of the more important things students can learn is to find a balance between studying and leisure, in Hornung's words: "work hard and play hard."

Since our issue revolves around Crime and America, the interview ends with some questions on the topic specifically: Hornung shares a personal experience with law enforcement in the US, mentions his favorite crime fiction author, and chooses which American crime fiction character he himself would like to be.

ART CONTRIBUTIONS

The ways in which art reflects on 'crime' further underscore how much this year's frame topic brings together concrete social realities and abstract concepts. In dealing with 'crime' and America on the concrete level, our art contributions look at crime as acts. On the abstract and discursive level, they speak out for social change or reveal larger structures in society, such as power relations. Our contributions' topical variation and diversity of formats illustrate the range of public discussions about 'crime' and the multitude of perceptions they inspire. With 'crime' as the topic of their work, the artists make previously invisible issues accessible by connecting them to tangible realities. Our final art selection consists of contributions by Marie H. Elcin, Lauren K. Alleyne, Mirko Martin, and Valentin Beinroth and Florian Jenett. In art projects, photography, and poetry, they tackle personal experiences with 'crime,' reflect criminal real-life incidents, question the boundary between reality and fiction, or point at social problems by strategically using 'crime.'

Our first art contributor, Marie H. Elcin, uses the streets of Philadelphia as a canvas to install her "Embroidered Tags." The practice of tagging is most commonly connected to graffiti culture, thus evoking connotations of illegal trespassing, vandalism, and the marking of territory. Yet Elcin's art project exceeds these expectations by highlighting the multiple meanings of the process of tagging: When the artist shapes her surroundings to express herself, she crosses legal borders and transforms the public sphere into an experimental ground and into her personal vessel of communication. During her project, Elcin interacted with the local graffiti community and learned of tagging as a way of earning respect and as a form of communication specifically catering to a criminalized underground movement. As tagging is an "action or process of decorating" ("Tagging"), the artist's project emphasizes this decorative element by attaching unique and neatly stitched cloth markers to public and private venues. Unlike graffiti tags, these markers can be removed without traces. Still, by applying tags to beautify her environment and to engage the rough neighborhood in Philadelphia's Kensington district, the artist is guilty

of the crime of trespassing. In effect, her act of tagging subverts the logic of territory and property, and, simultaneously, the criminal appeal of graffiti.

With another take on 'crime,' the poem "John White Defends" by Lauren K. Alleyne taps into a public discourse about racial discrimination and hate crimes. It is inspired by the real-life shooting of a white teenager by an African American, John White, who wanted to save his son. Accordingly, the poem reminds the readers of prevailing discrimination against and violence towards ethnic groups in the twenty-first century. In the tradition of nonfiction writing, the act of killing is fictionalized in Alleyne's poem, which not only explores the cultural complexities related to this deed but also opens up related topics: Since the shooting occurs on White's neatly trimmed front lawn, the poem resonates with the motif of suburbia in relation to racial integration and existing prejudice. It raises questions about vigilante justice as well as the interrelation (and the possible reversal) of victim and perpetrator. Additionally, the poem blends past and present by invoking images of slavery, the Ku Klux Klan, and mob lynching, intertwined with contemporary references to gang violence and drug abuse. In pointing to these issues, the poem enters into different realms of discussing 'crime,' touching on the history of 'crime' and racism in the United States.

In his photograph series "L.A. Crash," Mirko Martin blurs the boundary between reality and fiction by mixing documentary-like portrayals of daily life in run-down areas of Los Angeles with images depicting staged scenes of movie sets. As the title of the photograph series suggests, the project creates intertextual references to Hollywood movies.[31] For example, a *Wanted* poster is displayed on an ad panel above the scene of a robbery or accident, and a *Casablanca* poster is clearly noticeable in the photo showing the arrest of a group of men, presumably of Mexican origin.[32] This particular photo raises the question whether ethnic minorities are reduced to stereotypes by oversimplified portrayals. Since taking a photograph is a selective process—the viewer only sees what the artist captures in the frame—the final result inevitably offers a limited point of view and omits contextual details. Thus, the unreliability and the constructedness of the photographs within the context of 'crime' question power relations in the media. For example, the policeman who looks straight into the camera while arresting the criminal appears to challenge the viewer. He reinforces his authority, also symbolized by his uniform, even though the controlling gaze is the spectator's. Additionally, the photograph showing an upside-down car in the middle of a street, with the passersby not even interested in potentially injured victims,

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31 *Crash*, also known as *L.A. Crash* in Germany, is the title of a movie directed by Paul Haggis.
32 Even the choice of these two specific films explicitly hints at crime: *Wanted* (dir. Timur Bekmambetov) is about a group of skilled assassins, while *Casablanca* (dir. Michael Curtiz) involves various criminal acts, from corruption to robbery to murder.

alludes to the stereotypical superficiality, indifference, and detachment of Hollywood. Ultimately, the interrelations of control and power are governed by the photographer who consciously chooses the final composition of his pictures.

By referring to waste as America's biggest crime, Lauren K. Alleyne points out another facet of our frame topic in her second poem for this volume, "Grace Before Meals." The poem criticizes society for turning a blind eye towards social inequality and for not sufficiently appreciating its own easy access to food. Vivid images of the ghosts of starving children in an empty grocery store embody feelings of guilt about the abundance of food in the US. This dichotomy of wealth and scarcity is reinforced by contrasting the available space and opportunity in the United States to the lack thereof in poorer parts of the world. In the store, the absence of people suggests the image of a wasteland, illustrating the double meaning of 'waste.' As there are countless products ready to be consumed but no customers, this metaphor also emphasizes the imbalance of available resources and population density in the world. Thus, the poem criticizes consumerism and capitalism in the United States via the strategic use of 'crime' and by employing references to religion: Not sharing food and restricting the mobility of disenfranchised populations to migrate to the United States evokes associations of the Cardinal Sins of gluttony and greed. By bringing up morality and highlighting that 'crime' is not limited to a legal definition, the poem raises the question of what exactly constitutes a crime.

In their art project "Freeze revisited," Valentin Beinroth and Florian Jenett evoke questions about society's exposure to weapons. By trivializing guns and the normality of routine gun use, the project turns firearms into mere products and consumable objects. The selection of pictures in our issue shows art gallery visitors coming into contact and interacting with ice replicas of guns. Since the ice guns can literally be consumed, the gun as a symbol of power and strength is belittled. The project also playfully blends the threats of real-life guns and the pleasures of the frozen ones: While the viewers of the photographs immediately associate a suicidal intent, the visitors eat harmless popsicles. Additionally, when reading the gun as a phallic symbol, the visitors' oral interaction with the guns contrasts and yet underlines the usually violent connotations of weapons. The project can thus be interpreted as alluding to the discussion of the cult around firearms as a byproduct of Americanization and the exposure to violence in Western media. Using an outside perception of the US and a title that evokes mediated clichés of American police officers (with their shout "Freeze!"), the overall project resonates with stereotypes of America as a gun-crazy culture.

Our art contributions approach the topic of Crime and America from all three perspectives discussed earlier. On the concrete level, the art contributions work with acts of crime. Second, they connect these acts to broader concepts such as

discrimination and imbalance, hence using 'crime' to address power structures of society (Alleyne, "John White Defends"; Beinroth and Jenett). In a similar way, the art contributions focus on stereotypes and divergent perceptions; consequently, questions of identity arise (Elcin; Martin). By looking at the art pieces' use of 'crime,' we can see and understand structures of predominant and marginal cultures. Finally, Alleyne's "Grace Before Meals" strategically uses 'crime' by labeling waste a crime, which uncovers additional motifs that would have stayed invisible if not for this labeling. In this respect, the art contributions of 2010 use the particular freedoms art grants to spotlight various aspects in the representation of 'crime.' Parallel to the academic contributions, they emphasize the productivity of looking at 'contact zones' of 'crime' and America.

ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

The broad category of 'crime' enables scholarship to question and challenge dominant American myths and dogmas. In our academic contributions, this becomes especially important in discussions of the process of Americanization, shaping who or what is American, and simultaneously determining the social, cultural, and political consequences for those considered the Other. Processes like Americanization, integration, identity construction, and the struggle for independence involve power dynamics that become apparent in social hierarchies and conflicts. Therefore, 'crime' provides a vocabulary that allows for debates about the cultural repercussions of fears and desires, encouraging evaluations and judgments, but also triggering unjust attitudes, intolerance, and 'punishments.' Our academic contributions by Magnus Nissel, Wieland Schwanebeck, and Anton Hieke exemplify how an analysis of actual deeds and abstract forms of 'crime' can contribute to a richer, more precise understanding of American culture and society.

This issue's first academic contribution, "The Ever-Ticking Bomb: Examining *24*'s Promotion of Torture against the Background of 9/11" by Magnus Nissel, critically examines in how far the television show *24* promotes torture on the basis of the collective trauma of 9/11. Therefore, the article deals with crime on the level of torture, i.e. a combination of specific acts, and with its palliation in the show, indicating the cultural dimension of torture. To a certain extent, Nissel implies that the fictional government agent Jack Bauer cannot be punished for his—in other contexts criminal —deeds since he saves the world from terrorist attacks on a regular basis. In the process, the characteristics of crime fighter and criminal become increasingly hard to distinguish. Despite Bauer's excessive use of violence and torture, his actions are portrayed as permissible because he saves America. In an even broader perspective, the

author's observations connect Bauer to our discussion of President Nixon, as both consider their deeds 'legal' due to their presumably patriotic motifs. Accordingly, Nissel's discussion engages public conversations about torture and the prevention of terrorism, while reinforcing the notion of a post-9/11 patriotism and a national community united by fear (cf. also Niday).

The significance of the concept of national or collective trauma (cf. Wirth; Neal) makes Nissel's topic a prominent example for the underlying cultural dimension of 'crime' in the context of torture. Nissel shows that *24* presents torture as "actions" (41) or as a series of acts that are, to an extent, justified, since the fictional US is constantly in a state of exception fearing terrorist attacks. He points at the symbolic level of 'crime' by focusing on society's fear of terrorism and by identifying the cultural trauma that Americans have been dealing with since 9/11. Placing *24*'s promotion of torture in the context of American trauma, Nissel reads the show as successfully binding viewers and intertwining both reality and fiction by referring to the political decisions and the rhetoric of the Bush administration's 'War on Terror.' Likewise, Nissel highlights how the show's specific lingo is used in real-life political rhetoric to reflect pro-torture attitudes. Consequently, Nissel criticizes that *24*—instead of creating awareness for the implications of torture—promotes pro-torture attitudes by displaying only a minimum of rival opinions, which are openly rejected by radically killing off opponents on screen. The author thus connects multiple features of 'crime' in order to highlight television's (specifically *24*'s) potential influence on shaping society in regard to crimes like torture, but also in regard to human rights, American identity, and international relations.

In his paper "From Shakespeare's Kings to Scorsese's Kingpins: Contemporary Mob Movies and the Genre of Tragedy," Wieland Schwanebeck offers a reading of Martin Scorsese's movie *The Departed*, linking it to the tradition of iconic gangsters in American cinema and exploring its roots in drama. By comparing Greek and Shakespearean tragic heroes to mobsters, the paper places the film version of the American gangster in a global context. Continuing a prolific tradition of American studies scholarship, Schwanebeck compares classical and pop-cultural texts by examining similarities in their plots and motifs. In his analysis of intertextual connections, he points out that plot structures and character constellations override genre conventions. Moreover, like Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* trilogy or Brian De Palma's *Scarface*, Scorsese's *The Departed* is situated in an immigrant context: the Irish American milieu of Boston. Instead of focusing on processes of these immigrant groups' marginalization, the genre of mob movies envisions a particular kind of integration by blurring the line between villains and heroes. In that vein, Schwanebeck's paper discusses an overlooked version of a story of success in that it concentrates on the iconic status of the criminals in mob movies: Not only the figure of the crime

fighter but also that of the criminal (e.g. Vito Corleone or Tony Montana) eventually becomes an icon in American popular culture.

Using Robert Warshow's study of classical mob movies' relation to Aristotelian poetics as a departing point, Schwanebeck examines the connection between Aristotelian drama theory and contemporary mob movies by mapping classical terminology on this popular genre. As his paper's title suggests, Schwanebeck draws parallels between the kingpins of gangs and the royal protagonists of Shakespeare's tragedies. Focusing on the notion of *hamartia*, he then traces contemporary echoes of different Shakespeare plays and analyzes the themes of the fight for the throne, of violence, and of filial succession. While *The Departed*'s recurring motifs of violence and corruption are portrayed as a means of success—as in the classic tragedies—they also play on fears of not living up to existing expectations, thus bearing an even greater risk for the protagonists' failure. By linking the Aristotelian and the Shakespearean tradition of tragedy to American popular culture, the paper enriches the perspective on our topic of Crime and America: It taps into the complex cultural dynamics between European literary traditions and American genre conventions, reflected in discourses of crime in contemporary film. Ultimately, Schwanebeck demonstrates the persistence of tragic patterns in Western culture, hinting at their influence not only on film but also on the historiography of crime more generally.

In "*Farbrekhers* in America: The Americanization of Jewish Blue-Collar Crime, 1900-1931," Anton Hieke analyzes American organized crime from a sociohistorical perspective in order to discuss the ways in which crime syndicates facilitated the Americanization of their ethnic members. By focusing on the evolution of Jewish gangs during the first half of the twentieth century, he scrutinizes how this ethnic group adopted American corporate structures, thus professionalizing crime. Accordingly, the paper neither focuses on fictional representations of crimes nor on crimes as actual deeds, but rather deals with the historic organizations and the personnel who have been committing crimes. As such, the paper is interested in the broader cultural dimensions of 'crime': It investigates how these gangs were changed by the American environment and how they became (truly) American gangs. Likewise, Hieke analyzes in how far Jewish American crime then shaped organized crime in general, as Jewish gangsters, like Arnold Rothstein and Meyer Lansky, laid the groundwork for its professionalization. In their profession, they were revolutionaries because they established long-term cooperations with partners of other ethnicities, most notably Italians like Lucky Luciano. Since these Jewish mobsters become representatives of a darker, more criminal incarnation of the American Dream, Hieke's discussion of the history of Jewish blue-collar crime questions existing dogmas of American identity by telling an alternative story of Americanization.

Hieke argues that Americanization has caused both Jewish blue-collar crime's rise and its demise in the first half of the twentieth century. He emphasizes that the striving for power (as possibly one part of the pursuit of happiness) and the repercussions of Jewish crime's success have triggered complex interactions: By looking at a number of examples, such as Murder, Inc., the article shows how Jewish gangs successfully established themselves due to the professionalization of their internal structures and how they, in turn, modernized American crime. As Jewish gangsters rose in social status, they increased their influence on New York's Lower East Side. This gain in power went hand in hand with a shift from monoethnic criminal structures to an inclusion of multiple ethnicities. In the long run, undergoing an Americanization altered the Jewish immigrants' social status in the US in that Jewish crime lost many of its most important foundations. Finally, looking at a history of crimes and their perpetrators, the paper not only complements more established narratives of the emergence of American identity, but also explores how such cultural integration at the margins of American society has catalyzed modernization at its center.

This year's contributions share an exceptional interest in exploring ambivalent moments in distinctly American topics which can only be uncovered and incorporated into larger discussions with the help of 'crime.' All authors capture similar dynamics of social acceptance insofar as their contributions are all interested in how 'crime' becomes a means of (social) success. Although each author finds a working definition in order to explore 'crime,' the papers underscore that 'crime' has to remain vague and uncertain due to the interdisciplinary and broadly applicable nature of the concept. In addition, all papers deal with power dynamics in the broad sense outlined before: They successfully contrast authority and the individual, analyze the shifting dynamics connected to the discrepancy of Anglo-American and ethnic minority identity, and challenge notions of cultural dependencies. Since these concepts are interconnected and influence each other as well as every member of society, they cannot be examined in isolation. Its ability to connect such different areas of discussion makes 'crime' a productive tool of analysis for investigations of American culture and society. Simultaneously, these investigations establish links to debates about national and individual identities, ethnicity, mediated realities, and genre conventions—debates that are central to contemporary American studies.

Despite their shared interests, all of our contributors have created unique, complex, and interdisciplinary projects. Two of our contributions deal with primary texts of the past fifty years; yet, altogether, they topically cover the time period from the early twentieth century to the post-9/11 era. Judging from the substantial body of overall submissions we have received, our selection of published papers reflects the interest graduate scholarship takes in contemporary material, as well as a tendency to

use fairly recent scholarship to develop their arguments. In fact, the strong focus on recent fictional texts might be traced back to the rising media awareness of 'crime' as well as to the ever-increasing amount of crime-related fiction since the late nineteenth century, a development mirrored by the growing numbers of scholarly publications on 'crime' in recent years.

In this sense, the current issue of *aspeers* features contributions that spotlight the relationship between American society and 'crime,' underscoring the productivity of our triangular perspective on 'crime' outlined in the beginning. As one edited volume on the topic, our issue investigates 'crime' as a social reality of deeds, as a discourse operating in the symbolic realms of culture, and as a strategic operation serving cultural and often sociopolitical purposes. This multitude of perspectives creates unique moments of dialogue, and it is with these moments of dialogue in mind that we invite our readers to explore the contributions, both art and academic, in this third issue of *aspeers*.

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