

Editorial Note

Simge Irmak Çınar & Jia Shen Lim

As we publish the third issue of *In Progress: A Graduate Journal of North American Studies* in the summer of 2024, we find ourselves celebrating our first anniversary with a contemplative eye on the very essence of progress that the title of our journal evokes. What does it mean to progress? Or what does progress entail? In the first sentence of his seminal essay “Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (1784), Immanuel Kant writes that “[e]nlightenment is mankind’s exit from self-incurred immaturity” (58). Kant believed that a lack of maturity comes not from an inability to think, but from a reluctance or lack of determination to trust our own reasoning without relying on others for guidance, thus urging us to be brave enough to understand the world through our own perspectives. While the convenience of being guided by others is the path of least resistance, it ultimately hampers personal and societal development. Kant’s emphasis on autonomy serves as a reminder that progress is often driven by those who dare to think and act independently. Michel Foucault revisits the same question two centuries later with a postmodern counterpoint in his 1984 essay “What is Enlightenment?” He proposes that enlightenment is less of a final state that is to be achieved, but more of a continuous process of critical self-examination, and self-improvement (305). Expanding on Kant’s motto of enlightenment – “[s]apere audere!” (courage to know) – Foucault further asserts that true enlightenment, however, must be accompanied by the courage to challenge the status quo, to question the authorities or institutions that claim to guide us towards enlightenment (306). Enlightenment, and thus progress, becomes a collective endeavor that invites young and emerging scholars in American Studies to not only work within the fields of their understanding but push beyond them. This pursuit of transcending the limits of knowledge is a collective work, one that resonates with *In Progress*’s commitment to continuous reassessment and broadening of scholarly thought, as presented in each issue’s Academic Section, Independent Studies Section, and Open Section.

This issue’s Academic Section begins with five articles that were selected through our journal’s peer-review process. In these articles, our respective authors engage with varied research inquiries, offering us valuable insights on a range of different subjects: First, Niklas Zabe examines the music video of Laura Branigan’s 1984 song “Self Control,” arguing that it exploits the allure of transgression and appropriates queer aesthetics from the disco era to create a commercially appealing yet detached entertainment product. Then, Elisabeth Kashulskaya delves into the horror genre’s capacity to articulate the inexpressible by exploring how author Carmen Maria Machado’s short story “Real Women Have Bodies” (2017) uses body horror to expose readers’ biases and redefine female identity through the lens of abjection. In the third academic article, Leonie Amann explores another short story, Octavia Butler’s “The Evening and the Morning and the Night” (1987). Amann discusses the portrayal of disability and systemic oppression, highlighting how Butler’s short story addresses the importance of community and intersectionality in overcoming discrimination. This is followed by Claudia Alea Parrondo’s analysis of how affect theory and



Timothy Morton's concept of hyperobjects can render complex environmental issues more understandable. Using Juliana Spahr's poem "Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache" (2005/2011) as a case study, Alea Parrondo's article explores poetry's empathetic and decision-making impact on audiences. And finally, Alissa Lienhard's article analyzes Alice Oseman's novel "Loveless" (2020), examining how its use of metafiction and autofiction challenges traditional romance narratives and affirms queer joy, particularly in the context of aromantic and asexual representation. These articles, while diverse in subject matter, collectively interrogate themes of transgression, identity, disability, environmental empathy, and non-normative romance across various forms of media and literature.

Next, this issue's Independent Studies Section showcases some of the work produced for recent seminars that were taught in our North American Studies Master program's "Independent Studies" module. These seminars offer students the opportunity to pursue creative projects that point beyond conventional academic boundaries – as in Abigail Fagan's advanced seminar "Poetry Workshop," for instance, which took place over course of the 2023 summer term. The poetry published in this issue was written by students in the context of this workshop seminar and includes works by Shayan Rahmanian ("Shiraz in the heart" and "trilingual"), Lena Schröder ("The Bare Minimum"), Charlie Geitlinger ("Words Inherited I" and "Words Inherited II"), Sarah Willeford ("The Quilt" and "13 Ways"), Anne Dirks ("Bathroom Prayers"), Nientke Peters ("Pleasure in Pain"), and Mandana Vahebi ("On the Bar"). Composed in a number of styles, all of these poems highlight the power of poetry as a tool both for capturing and reflecting on experiences ranging from the everyday to the traumatic. Next, the Independent Studies Section features a selection of video essays originally produced for Kathleen Looock's seminar "Videographic Criticism," which was taught in the winter term of 2022/23. Each engaging with a different film, these video essays by Lida Shams-Mostofi ("Representing the Unrepresentable: Trauma in *Rocketman*"), Shirin Shokrollahi ("Trauma Unleashed"), Mandana Vahebi ("Traumatic Grief"), Sadjad Qolami ("A Reading in the Machine"), and Kerem Ak ("Benh Zeitlin Breaks the Ice"), couple insightful analyses of trauma, narrative structure, and visual storytelling with innovative ways of re-assembling audiovisual material in order to make their arguments – and thereby offer yet another example of the wide range of exciting creative work done by our program's Master students.

Finally, this issue's Open Section presents a comprehensive conference report on the German Association for American Studies' 33rd Annual Postgraduate Forum (PGF), which was held Leibniz University Hannover in early November 2023. Written by Holly Louise Anne Marie Fischer, Ioana-Marina Pantelici, and Simge Irmak Cinar, the report provides critical insights into the topics and discussions of last year's conference, offering readers an in-depth discussion of its primary themes and key moments. The Open Section further includes a video interview with conference organizers Lujain Youssef and Katerina Steffan from Leibniz University Hannover, who took the time to share their thoughts on their goals and aspirations, as well as on the numerous challenges they encountered in planning such a significant event. Afterwards, a second video interview with keynote speaker Anne Potjans from Humboldt University Berlin offers a glimpse into her research and the experience of being a keynote speaker. In line with the transdisciplinary and creative outlook of our journal, the Open Section furthermore includes an introductory video that captures the essence of conference experience, as well as some carefully crafted scrapbook pages that give an impression of how their creators, Holly Louise Anne Marie Fischer, Simge Irmak Cinar, and Ioana-Marina Pantelici, perceived the event.

As with previous issues, this number of *In Progress* is the product of a joint effort by the members of our editorial boards and the participants of the "Editing a Scholarly Journal"

Independent Studies seminar taught by Felix Brinker and Kathleen Loock during the 2023/24 winter term. In that seminar, a new cohort of student editors explored the basics of academic publishing, honed their editorial skills, and eventually went on to make crucial contributions to our journal's peer-review, proofreading, and editing process. Accordingly, we thank them for their indelible work: Without Simge Irmak Çinar, Holly Fischer, Adebola Oluwasanmi Ojo, Ioana-Marina Pantelici, and Mandana Vahebi, this issue would not have been possible. We are also immensely grateful to our general editors Felix Brinker and Kathleen Loock, whose guidance is instrumental to the journal's seamless operation. Finally, this issue's success also owes much to the dedication of our fellow associate editors, Sahar Al Kharsa, Eiman Alkhatib, Lukas Fender, Jessica Hille, Alissa Lienhard, and Marielle Tomasic. Additionally, we would like to extend a warm welcome to our new editorial board members Simge Irmak Çinar, Farima Fallah, Holly Fischer, Zeinabossadat Ali Zadeh Hosseini, and Zoe Lecht and thank them for joining our team. This recent expansion of our editorial board has already borne fruit, too: In addition to working on key tasks such as corresponding with authors, as well as the formatting and editing of articles, the new members of team have been a driving force behind the creation of our new Instagram page [@inprogress_journal](#), which has been set up to engage with a wider audience. From this point on, the social media platform will serve as a space to share updates, announce Call for Papers, highlight contributions, and foster discussions that reflect the journal's dynamic and evolving nature – an exciting step forward in connecting readers and authors alike. As we celebrate all the work done for and the contributions to this issue, it becomes increasingly clear that the English Department at Leibniz University Hannover is at a crossroads of a transdisciplinary exchange. Moving forward, we remain dedicated to broadening our horizons and engaging in scholarly dialogue. Here is to more years of *progress!*

Author Biographies

Simge Irmak Çinar is currently pursuing a Master's degree in North American studies at Leibniz University Hannover. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature from Kocaeli University in Turkey. Her areas of research interest are wide-ranging and include media and cultural studies, as well as the intersection of postcolonialism and gender studies. She currently takes part in *In Progress*'s editorial board as an associate editor. Through her contributions, she aims to engage readers with insightful perspectives and encourage cross-disciplinary communication.

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