

Call for Papers

Fictions of Distance in Recent American Literature

AmLit – American Literatures – Themed Volume

Guest Editors:

Fabian Eggers and Sonja Pyykkö, PhD candidates at the Graduate School of North American Studies, John F. Kennedy Institute, Freie Universität Berlin

Paul Celan once stated that he sees “no principal difference between a handshake and a poem.” This comparison resonates powerfully with the ethos of social distancing that has emerged in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Seeking to understand the crisis by a recourse to the literary, a forthcoming themed volume of *AmLit – American Literatures* invites contributions on the topic “Fictions of Distance” in recent American writing. Our interest is sparked by the observation that the outbreak has caused paradoxes of intimacy and distance. Within weeks, a new awareness of distance was etched into our minds by the enforcement of social distancing regulations, quarantines, and public lockdowns, but distancing oneself from others does more than just separate and potentially alienate: By disrupting the boundaries between private and public, social distancing has enforced new kinds of intimacies on coworkers, cohabitants, and caretakers, to name but a few groups. Moreover, the potential for unparalleled connectivity makes the current pandemic unique in human history. The rapid switch from physical encounters to digital communion has demonstrated that it is possible to stay “in touch” without any physical contact whatsoever. Isolated yet hyper-connected, life during the pandemic consists of being *alone together*.

While the re-emergence of pestilence classics on bestseller lists indicates that relevance is not always a question of contemporaneity, recent literature is in our opinion uniquely able to reflect upon these paradoxes of intimacy and distance. For decades, disaster and pandemic narratives have captured the public imagination by exploring scenarios that are eerily similar to the present situation. Literature might also offer more suffused kinds of knowledge: Authors responding to the New Sincerity, for instance, frequently contemplate the potential for intimacy within an alienating, digitally-mediated environment, while contemporary life writers and poets conduct experiments with the dissolving boundaries of public and private selves both on- and offline.

The special issue *Fictions of Distance* explores the many shades of posthuman intimacy that occur in these interstices. Drawing on literary knowledge of the present enables posing questions that pertain to the current crisis: What is the relationship between individual alienation and digitally-mediated, posthuman communion? How does virtual intimacy relate to physical distance? How does the proliferation of ‘digital selves’ affect offline subjectivities? How will the already fading dichotomies of private/public and work/leisure fare in this new world order? What long-term consequences may occur due to the vigilant supervision of self and others mandated by the pandemic? *AmLit – American Literatures* invites contributions on the notion of “Fictions of Distance” in recent American literature. Essays may respond, but are by no means limited to, the following questions:

- Aesthetics of distance and presence: irony, sincerity, authenticity
- Affecting the other: intimacy, empathy, solidarity
- Corona journals and archives of the present
- Narrating digital and networked selves

- Posthuman constellations of race, class, and gender
- Temporal distance and crisis chronotopes
- Utopian possibilities and dystopian realities in disaster narratives

Please send a proposal, including an abstract of 400 words or less, via email to the guest editors Fabian Eggers (eggers@gsnas.fu-berlin.de), Sonja Pyykkö (pyykko@gsnas.fu-berlin.de) and the journal editors (amlit-journal@uni-graz.at). Completed articles will need to be submitted by January 31, 2021 to us and the journal editors.

Full-length essay submissions of 5,000 to 10,000 words (including endnotes and bibliography) in completely anonymized .doc or .rtf-format should be prepared in accordance with the current MLA citation style (8th edition). Articles may include visual material, providing it has been pre-formatted into the text by the author and the necessary rights have been secured. *AmLit* cannot commit any funds for the securing of reproduction rights. Only manuscripts in English can be taken into consideration. After submission, the editors will transfer the manuscripts to two reviewers (with an expertise in the given academic field) whose reports will provide the basis for acceptance or rejection.

We especially encourage submissions from graduate students and early-career scholars.

For additional submission guidelines, please see:
<https://amlit.eu/index.php/amlit/about/submissions>.