

[Familiar Perpetrators Worskshop CFP](#)

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Call for Papers

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July 10, 2022

Subject Fields:

American History / Studies, Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies, Popular Culture Studies, Women's & Gender History / Studies, Sexuality Studies

This is a Call for Papers for a one-day online workshop titled **Familiar Perpetrators: On the Intimacy of Evil in Contemporary American Literature and Popular Culture**, which explores what happens when perpetrators become familiar figures, either because their representation is well-circulated in works of American literature and popular culture, in ways that make the audience feel intimately connected to them, or simply because they are represented either by themselves or by their own family members and friends. By “perpetrators” we refer to “those who had a hand...in the physical destruction of other individuals” (Strauss 2017), but this workshop also attempts to expand this definition, which does not cover certain other more insidious acts of perpetration, like those that led to the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement or the “genocide by default” produced during the current global pandemic (Gonsalves qtd. in Moran 2020). Additionally, this workshop begins—but also departs from—an understanding of “evil” that follows Hannah Arendt’s interpretation of the concept as an act performed by people engaged in a system of everyday systematic oppression, whose interpretation of the world is not profound, but shallow, and who are willing to erase their own personhood by claiming that they are mere cogs in the system (Arendt 1963; Eaglestone 2017).

Perpetrators and their crimes have often been sensationalized and even turned into figures of fun, romance or adventure in contemporary American literature and popular culture, in a recent boom of productions that both rely on and fuel the public’s appetite for extra-ordinary stories. One of the paradoxical effects of this process is the public’s enhanced familiarity with these figures of evil, which can often make them appear trivial, but also intimately close to the public that consumes cultural products about their deeds. This trivialization is often denounced by survivors and victims’ families; however, it remains an important component of perpetrator portraiture in the public space. It is, thus, not the purpose of this workshop to examine the more historically-minded representations of famous

perpetrator figures like Adolf Hitler, but rather to inquire what happens when the very iconicity of someone like Hitler as a transcultural figure of memory makes him a familiar (even anecdotal) figure whose everydayness draws attention away from his considerable crimes. At the same time, it is this familiarity—through the representation of perpetrators of various kinds in popular culture—that may both offer and block access to important questions about how evil becomes possible.

By examining acts of perpetration from genocide to sexual assault and other, more pervasive contemporary forms of perpetration, this workshop will also attempt to enrich the still developing vocabulary of perpetrator studies, a recent discipline with roots in memory and trauma studies, as well as moral philosophy, history, and cultural studies.

These are some (but not all) of the questions this workshop will engage with: What are the implications of a perpetrator becoming familiar, intimately close to the public, either because they are portrayed by a family member, or because they are the subject of a TV series, film, or documentary that presents them in such a light that inevitably draws the audience into their intimate space? What happens when acts of perpetration become so familiar that we no longer identify/read them as such because they have already moved into a realm of inevitability and everydayness? How can we employ heavily theorized and emotionally laden terms such as “trauma” and “postmemory”—terms that originate in the study of the experience of Holocaust survivors and have generally been applied to victims of violence—in order to better comprehend the aftermath of perpetration and the effects of perpetration upon the families of the perpetrators? What can humor and satire contribute to the current conversation about the proper representation of perpetrators? How does the examination of the perpetrator shade new light on what it means to be human, as the quality (being human) is usually mobilized either as a descriptive for the victim or the perpetrator?

Please send all inquiries and proposals (a title, 250-word abstract, and 100-word bio) to Mihaela Precup at mihaela.precup@ils.unibuc.ro. The deadline for proposals is July 10, 2022. The workshop will take place online on September 30, 2022.

A selection of the papers will be published in the 2023 issue of the open access double blind peer reviewed journal *[Inter]sections* (www.intersections-journal.com).

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