

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

# Flyover Fictions



The term “flyover country” has specifically US-American roots and has developed into a metaphorical condensation of several interrelated issues: a geographical image that suggests many (political, social, cultural) forms of marginalization; a technological image that speaks of different forms of human mobility in space and time; an economic image that hints at a class of people who can afford to take three-dimensional shortcuts across two-dimensional maps; a populist image that juxtaposes this elite with the mass of others who live in the periphery of their centers; and finally an image of identity that creates a sense of unity, authenticity, and community that derives from being passed over. Most crucially, this notion is based on a particular dialectic, a double moment of imaginary construction: “Flyover country” was not coined as a term by those in the urban centers of the US West and East Coast to arrogantly describe everything in between, but rather by those who live in this ‘in-betweenness’ to describe how people on the Coasts must think about them. It is thus a projection of a self-image, a double construction of how one group thinks another group thinks about them, and both groups are imagined in the process and set in complex relations to each other while glossing over their numerous internal differences.

This dialectic phenomenon is what we call “flyover fictions,” and the fictional here should not be understood in opposition to the real but rather as a powerful constitutive aspect of the realities we make through cultural expressions. In our conference, we want to detach this concept from its particular origin—the US-American Midwest since the 1950s—to see how it can be adapted to various other contexts in the US as well as globally. We want to explore how it can be productively used to update, complicate, and challenge more traditional critical perspectives that usually address such imagined hierarchies in terms of binaries of center/periphery or urban/rural that are still valid but also often fail to address more complex circumstances (as the case of the urban center of Detroit and its particular neglect has forcefully shown). “Flyover fictions” can be used to constitute, describe, and critique situations and identities that are perceived to be disregarded in many other ways beyond those binaries, and their dialectic is relevant for its imagination of *both* those who are passed over and those who are doing the passing. Such imaginations may be both fundamentally based on or utterly ignore other aspects of identity, such as class, race, and gender, and they themselves may merit critique for their homogenizing tendencies and their own disregard in imagining disregard. At the same time, preterition is not always imagined as a *negative* phenomenon: Being passed over can also open up spaces of difference and counternarratives under the hegemonic radar of a (perceived) mainstream or elite.

Our conference seeks to provide a forum for theorizing and exploring the critical concept of “flyover fictions” from different disciplinary perspectives and in different contexts. Even though our own approach is rooted in American Studies, we invite scholars from all disciplines to submit contributions – in parallel to lifting the notion of “flyover country” from its original context, and assuming that different times and places have their own equivalents in terms of imagining difference.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

Possible areas for contributions include but are certainly not limited to:

- What are the aesthetics of flyover fictions? What rhetorical, narrative, symbolic, visual, or stylistic strategies are used to create these fictions of disregard? How do these relate to different contexts, ranging from journalism to social media and from political speeches to encyclopedic novels?
- What are the media-specific qualities of the transmedial notion of flyover fictions? How do these fictions work – and work differently – in texts, on film, in music, on stage, in photographs, and in video games?
- To what end are flyover fictions constructed? What is their social, cultural, or political function or goal? Who is constructing them, and who is barred from their construction?
- Do flyover fictions serve an ideological function in late capitalism, or do they offer potential sites of resistance as they insist on differences in an all-encompassing system? Are they symptoms of tensions within that system, or do they speak of a desire for its further extension?
- How do flyover fictions intersect with other discourses of identity that may or may not operate along similar lines? How are they superseded or enlisted? For example, how do they relate to concepts such as W.E.B. DuBois's double consciousness that explore a similar dialectic in a different way?
- What histories of flyover fictions can be told? When and how did certain imaginations of preterition come to be, what actors were involved, and what was their lasting impact? What histories have been disregarded in these histories of disregard?
- How are flyover fictions used in populist discourses whose construction of the people relies heavily on their opposition to an elite? How may flyover fictions subvert such populist fantasies in turn?
- How are flyover fictions used to construct or challenge authenticity effects that turn flyover country into “the Heartland,” and how do these relate to concepts of the local, the national, the transnational, and the global?

- How are flyover fictions tied to certain technological conditions? Are there equivalents such as drive-through country where highways efface local communities or the railroad passes by but does not stop, or areas where Internet bandwidth is still where it was in 1995?
- What are the target audiences for flyover fictions, and how are they distributed and marketed? What are the economics of this imaginary? How do they function in discourses of tourism or ethnography?
- Finally, how do we theorize and exemplify not-even-flyover-fictions, the paradoxical imagination of that which is not even imagined, the things we may pass over without our knowing that we are disregarding them?

## SUBMISSIONS

We invite scholars to submit abstracts of around 300 words along with a brief bio statement (in one file) to [cornelia.kleckner@uibk.ac.at](mailto:cornelia.kleckner@uibk.ac.at) and [sascha.poehlmann@uibk.ac.at](mailto:sascha.poehlmann@uibk.ac.at) no later than **December 1, 2021**. We will send out notifications two days later so you can plan your trip and actually come to Innsbruck instead of flying over or driving by.

## CONFIRMED SPEAKERS

The conference will feature keynote lectures by Dominika Ferens (University of Wrocław) and Anthony Harkins (Western Kentucky University), as well as a reading by Tom Drury.

## ORGANIZATION

The conference is scheduled to take place on May 27-28, 2022, as an in-person offline event, of course observing any precautions that may be in place then; we are simply hoping for actual people in a room, great coffee breaks, and good live conversation. There is no conference fee; all are welcome.

## PUBLICATION

A selection of essays based on the conference papers will be published in an edited volume.