Lioba Foit: Collective Irony – Nation, Gender, Hipness (working title)
The project is based on the assumption that each message in everyday communication incorporates the possibility of irony, allowing a variety of possibilities to continue discourse. Irony displays a means which enables the agent to deal with competing and contradictory challenges: He or she can behave or represent themselves in certain ways, but refer to irony in situations in which these seem less appropriate. The gesture of irony as both identifying and distancing always inherently includes the ‘Other’. My research aims to examine the development of concepts of nation, gender and hipness at times when reference to them is frequently ironic. The subversive as well as the re-stabilizing capacities of irony can result in outcomes that are not intended or desired by the individual agents. Funded by DFG graduate school "Automatismen".

Inga Krutmann: Post-Race America? Debates, Theories, and Representations in Intellectual Discourse, Contemporary Literature, and Popular Culture
This dissertation project explores the concept of a ‘post-race America’, a highly controversial phenomenon in U.S. culture. Starting from ongoing debates on the first black president’s term in office, the thesis studies diverse post-race discourses and meanings of American society and the individual. Based on recent theoretical approaches to race and identity, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, the dissertation studies, analyzes, and compares contemporary representations in literature and popular culture. In this context, the project seeks to look into African American and White positions on the subject and to question and discuss the post-race concept as a trope oscillating between myth and reality. Gefördert durch: Förderlinie 1 im Rahmen des Gleichstellungskonzepts

Alice Stiefermann: Growing Up Poor: Documentary and Fictional Representations of the American Inner City, 1991-2011 (completed)
This project analyzes selected fictional and documentary accounts of American poverty from the past two decades. Their strategies and agendas are dismantled and related to both mainstream media and academic discourse on poverty. In the focus of the primary cultural texts are poverty’s youngest victims: youth and children from the inner city. The comprehensive, cross-media oriented approach strives to assess which signifying practices prevail in Post-Reagan America’s depictions of its presently increasing poverty – whether poverty porn, cultural blame, or more complex forces in favor of the poor, currently dominate the media. The project was funded by a two-year graduate scholarship of the University of Paderborn.

The project studies the contemporary American true crime genre from both a literary and a cultural perspective. It takes as a starting point the assumption that this type of literature works up real-life crime as it is perceived, discussed, and evaluated by a cultural group. True crime, this study assumes, uses a number of strategies to communicate its nonfiction claims as well as its status as an authentic text in order to answer to postmodern skepticism concerning objectivity claims and to constructivist and epistemological considerations. The project approaches the genre from the perspective of reception studies when it suggests that the authenticity status of the texts is negotiated between writer, reader, and true crime text. In a second step, the study looks at the genre in the context of a national identity when it raises the issue of the American fascination with violence and studies the texts’ appeal to the reader’s sense of identity. The objective is to illuminate true crime’s significance in contemporary America. (Dissertation submitted.)

New Projects:
Youming Hu: Questions of Travel in Emily Dickinson.