

American Models: Authoring the Official World(s) of the United States

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Since its founding, the ambition to live up to an “American ideal” has animated the United States’ political and cultural imaginaries. From the “Documents of Freedom” through to the present, writers and intellectuals have investigated, imagined, and inveighed the complex contours of a commitment to political freedom and the ever-expanding boundaries of democratic participation. Figures as varied as Walt Whitman, Frederick Douglass, and Abraham Lincoln in the nineteenth century and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Susan Sontag, and James Baldwin in the twentieth have illuminated the depth and challenges of reconciling the ideal of American society to its lived reality. In light of the United States’s global reach, recent scholarship has sought to expand the purchase of American literature and culture beyond the charted boundaries of the nation. Yet beyond such questions of its content, how is an American ideal performed, exemplified, and modeled in its artistic production?

With recourse to Mark Seltzer’s claim in *The Official World* (2016) that modern society is “self-inciting, self-legislating, and self-depictive”—always seeking to report an authoritative version of itself—this panel seeks to explore the idea of models and modeling in relation to an American ideal. How does this ideal produce and reproduce itself? How do literature and rhetoric author and authorize an “official” United States? What is the status of “unofficial” worlds in these spaces? What connection do physical models (scale, miniature, or planned) have to the worlds they depict? How does the American imagination animate intellectual and critical “worlds” and spaces?

Questions of new materialism, (new) formalism, historicism, digital humanities, Marxism, speculation and speculative realism, ideology critique, cultural studies, and other methodological approaches are welcome.

Please submit your **300-word** paper abstract through the online system here: <https://www.cfplist.com/nemla/Home/S/16831>.

Abstracts **cannot be accepted** if emailed directly. Paper and submission guidelines may be found here: <http://www.buffalo.edu/nemla/convention/callforpapers/submit.html>.

Deadline for submissions is **September 30, 2017**.

If you have any questions, please contact Emily Simon (emily_simon@brown.edu) and Stephen Marsh (stephen_marshall@brown.edu).