

## CFP: The Uncanny States of America: Encountering the Planetary (EJAS Special Issue)

Editors: Dominik Steinhilber (University of Konstanz), Florian Wagner (University of Jena)

Taking into consideration recent developments toward a Planetary Cultural and Literary Studies, this special issue of *The European Journal of American Studies* aims to **rethink and recontextualize the American project** not through the homogenizing impulses of the global sublime but through the decentered relationality of planetarity—the act of “making our home *unheimlich* or uncanny” (Spivak 74). Such a planetary approach to American Studies may be able to more adequately address the **multilayered social, political, and ecological crises of the 21st century** than previous cosmopolitanist, globalist, or post- as well as transnationalist approaches.

To this day, Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* stands as the poetic bible of American democracy and its project of nationhood. Yet the voice that speaks “I am large. I contain multitudes” also connotes the sublime dream of an **American national experiment** that *cannot be contained by the nation alone*, “the manifest destiny redreamed” into “a spiritual and secular unity that will unite the globe as one organism” (Fuller 2022). Through the **sublime** experience of being able to contain multitudes beyond itself (Kant 109), the rational self transcends, sublimity figuring the world as little more than a resource to be absorbed and consumed. Applying the sublime’s inherently anthropocentric and logocentric logic to the national project reveals justifications of **dominance over the Other** that is ‘Not-Me’. The sublime greatness of the American experiment hence always already contained its deepest abysses, from the **exploitation of the racialized other** and the **environment**, excessive **nationalism**, to U.S. **imperialism. Globalization**, primarily driven by American capital and culture, and the subsequent crises of **global climate change** are only the last figuration of the sublime idea of America.

While (ecologically) regulative principles have remained largely inaccessible to the likes of **post- and transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalism**,<sup>1</sup> the ecocritically informed discourse of planetarity may be better positioned to take on a sense of “stewardship” with fewer politically fraught connotations of paternalism, colonialism, and monopoly capital. In its orientation toward “the radical otherness of the planet” (Chakrabarty 25), planetary thought can leave behind all too narrow notions of nationness and think **ethics and relationality** beyond

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<sup>1</sup>A notable exception being for instance Ursula Heise’s “ecocosmopolitanism” in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008).

the human and beyond national borders and global structures. A form of stewardship based on the planet's uncanny otherness may thus connote "both an ethics of care for both organic and inorganic planetary resources and a social stance mindful to conserve cultural legacies" (Elias&Moraru xxiv). In this vein, we propose the **planetary uncanny** as an alternative mode of thinking—about our current planet-wide crises. In many ways an uncanny double of the sublime that, however, rescinds sublimity's sense of closed-offness, mastery, elevation, and control—the uncanny may help construct horizontal ethics and imaginaries of intimacy and contact grounded in otherness. To think globally, is to think the sublime; to think the planetary, on the other hand, is to think uncannily.

Against this background, we seek to mobilize the uncanny as a mode or **method of a literary and cultural examination** of (a not-yet-realized) planetarity. The special issue invites contributors to think through different modes of the uncanny in order to investigate its potential for subversion, destabilization, and defamiliarization, but also for contact, affect, and *jouissance*. We want to encourage American Studies scholars from various fields and disciplines to **rethink the American project through the planetary uncanny** to explore modes of imagining coexistence and contact not through increasing familiarity—meaning an absorption of the other into the self that may only serve homogenization and control—but rather through a profound and indelible, radical alterity. How can American Studies (re)think the sublimity of the American experiment, egalitarianism, democracy, humanism, yet also ecology at large, in terms of the uncanny? How may a closer look at the uncanny states of America, from its beginnings until now, destabilize our traditional perspectives on U.S. ideology, imperialism, and globalism, and allow for the return of a repressed planetary thought and imaginaries that deal in coexistence and uncertainty?

Potential contributors should send a **500 word abstract and a short biographical note** to dominik.steinhilber@uni-konstanz.de and florian.wagner@uni-jena.de by **December 31, 2024**. Contributors will be notified of their acceptance by January 19, 2025 Finished articles (**5,000-7,500 words**; newest MLA style) should be submitted by **May 31, 2025**. All disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches are welcome, and topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Critical (re)readings of American canonical and non-canonical texts through a planetary lens
- Theoretical and historical reflections on the sublime and the uncanny in the context of globalism, imperialism, and the planetary.

- Indigenous methodologies and literatures in relation to planetarity.
- Issues of planetarity and eco-cosmopolitanism, environmental responsibility.
- Critiques of the Anthropocene and related concepts (e.g., Capitalocene, Cthulucene etc)
- Human and non-human agencies in the Anthropocene in relation to notions of the uncanny, the eerie, and the weird.
- Issues relating to material ecocriticism (e.g. questions of materiality and ‘storied’ matter)
- Multi-species ethnography, plant life (writing)
- Engagement with petrocultures, petrochemical landscapes
- Religion and the supernatural in American literature and thought

The special issue is planned to be published in late 2026. Please feel free to contact [dominik.steinhilber@uni-konstanz.de](mailto:dominik.steinhilber@uni-konstanz.de) and [florian.wagner@uni-jena](mailto:florian.wagner@uni-jena) if you need further information.

### **Works Cited:**

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