



## **The Biopolitics of America: Bodies, Environments, and the Liberal Imagination**

**International Conference, Würzburg, July 28-30, 2016**

Sandow Birk. *Salinas Valley State Prison (SVSP) - Soledad, CA*. Image courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery.

**Christopher Breu (Normal)**

### **Materializing Time and Occupying Space: The Reconfiguration of Biopolitical America in Karen Yamashita's *I Hotel***

This paper reads Karen Yamashita's celebrated novel of the transnational, Asian-American and Asian left in the 1960s and 70s as articulating what remains both suggested, but underdeveloped in Michel Foucault's writings on biopolitics: the possibility of a positive biopolitics structured around sustainability, materiality, and justice. As much assemblage as novel, *I Hotel* is many things: a semi-fictional documentary history of the Asian-American left as it coalesced around the titular dwelling, San Francisco's International Hotel; a spatial reconfiguration of dominant, exceptionalist mappings of American literature; a temporal deformation of the synthesis produced by exceptionalist history; and a utopian, if unrealized vision of a new kind of leftist politics and writing practice, one organized around the intersecting materialities of texts, labor, bodies, political ecology, political economy, and modes of living. To draw on Jason Moore's recent work, if capitalism needs to be resituated within a larger web of life in order to produce a thought that is at once red and green, then Yamashita situates her anti-capitalist vision around an understanding of sustainability and justice that equally economic and ecological. In doing so, she imagines a vision of biopolitics that is about a valuation of the material, of the very practices which sustain life for the collective, and of a practice and understanding of home as transnational and in process. In doing so, Yamashita challenges the racist and liberal coordinates of conventional American exceptionalism, producing instead an understanding of inhabitation and racial/national identification that is radically open and yet collective in its vision.