What do we see when we consider Amazon as the corporate subject—or protagonist—of contemporary American literary history? Beginning with a discussion of the literary practices and programs “organic” to the Amazon digital ecology—Kindle Direct Publishing and its brethren—the talk will then branch out to questions of how the logic, ethos, and even temporality of “customer service” might be taken as the dominant logic of contemporary American fiction. These explorations will be nested within a more general discussion of methodologies for the study of contemporary literature.

Mark McGurl is Professor of English at Stanford University, where his scholarly work centers on the relation of literature to social, educational and other institutions from the late 19th century to the present. He is also the Director of the Stanford Center for the Study of the Novel and works with the Stanford Literary Lab.

McGurl is the author of The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing, which was the recipient of the Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism in 2011. McGurl’s previous book was The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James. He has also published articles in journals such as Critical Inquiry, Representations, American Literary History, and New Literary History.

McGurl received his BA from Harvard and earned his PhD in comparative literature from Johns Hopkins. He has held fellowships from Office of the President of the University of California and the Stanford Humanities Center, and has also taught at UCLA and Washington University in St. Louis.