

German Culture News

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Futurity Now



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April 13-14
A.D. White House

Following introductory remarks by **Leslie Adelson**, co-organizer **Devin Fore** (Princeton University) delivered the first lecture of the conference in absentia because of illness. In "Fear of the Future: Franz Jung and the Industrial Novel" he outlined the intersection of capital, narrative and futurity that conditions the social history of the novel and the industrial novel in particular. Fore (whose talk was read by Andreas Huyssen) began with a reading of Franz Jung's *The Conquest of the Machines*

(1923) and contrasted the temporalities in the novel's opening vignettes: "Summer," "Electrotrust" and "Piblokto." Piblokto, or arctic hysteria, was an ethno-psychological pathology ascribed to Eskimo communities, the cause of which was believed to be either fear of relatives' ghosts or fear of the future. But as Fore pointed out, Jung attributes Piblokto solely to the latter cause. Fore thus reminded his listeners that futurity is in no way universal, but rather developed alongside the rise of Western capitalism. Drawing on Mumford and Deleuze

and Guattari, Fore claimed that a society's mode of production and its temporal models mutually condition one another. Jung's "nomadic and presentist eskimo" thereby is made to serve as the counterpoint to the capitalist "who lives in a state of permanent expectation."

To underscore the collusion between novelistic form and capitalism, Fore appealed to Bakhtin's and Lukács's social histories of the novel. In capitalism's "heroic phase" in the mid-nineteenth century, the *Industrieroman* and the *Familienroman* were genetically indistinct. With the rise of monopoly capital, however, the cycles of business diverged from those of natural reproduction; in the process, the novel lost its "human referent" and became modern. According to Lukács, the novel's sovereign ability to

Newsletter summaries of Institute-sponsored events are generously provided by graduate students in various stages of doctoral study in the interdisciplinary field of German Studies at Cornell University. These summaries are customarily written by students with a general audience in mind and highlight selected aspects of complex presentations by specialists.

form time that had once provided readers with models for navigating modernity's continual expectation yielded to an assortment of narrative techniques and devices beholden to the temporality of capital.

Fore then returned to the myth of pre-capitalist society through a reading of Brecht's *Three Penny Novel* (1934). The book's final scene stages the judgment of capital at the end of time. The proceedings ultimately fail to narrate the genealogy of capital because, as Fore argued, "capital is underivable" and "exempts itself from the rules of temporality it defines." Despite its futurity, its principle is "not genetic, but generic...not *chronos*, but *kairos*." Fore concluded that although the temporal experience of modern capitalism entails constant expectation, the complete severance under monopoly capitalism of the economic cycle from that of natural reproduction means that this radical futurity leaves no trace and produces no genealogy. The time of capital generates but one thing: "the incapacity to remember." (Bret Leraul)

Rüdiger Campe's (Yale University) talk, titled "Futures We Live In: Quetelet and Nietzsche," focused on two configurations of futurity that emerge in the writings of these authors: the "present in the future" and the "future in the present." The latter, according to Campe, privileges continuity, insofar as a moment in the future becomes present and a part of our actual world. Under this configuration, the emphasis of time is on fluidity, and a number of possible manifestations of the future can emerge from within the actual present. By contrast, the

"present in the future" privileges a form of discontinuity in which each future that becomes a present has no connection to any past or preceding present; the "present in the future" is thereby marked by radical presence.

After setting up these two contrasting configurations, Campe retraced some of the debates and practices that developed in the writings of Quetelet and Nietzsche. For Quetelet, the "future in the present" becomes apparent through discourses of probability and statistical data collection. Discourses of probability, Campe argued, enabled many nineteenth-century scientists to construe the social field, and for Quetelet, probability acts as a reference point for the social system rather than as a normative or prescriptive law. Campe then stressed how



Nahum Chandler

Nietzsche writes polemically against the use of probability by social scientists precisely because it introduced a concept of law into history. Nietzsche views the use of probability as both an attempt to invent a false agent behind

the phenomenal world and as a representation of the common man, against which he also polemicized.

Campe then identified similarities in the two writers by considering probability within the context of modernity. As modern societies progress and enlightenment becomes more deeply entrenched in social practices, anomalies and deviations from the average diminish. Yet for both Nietzsche and Quetelet, these deviations provide contours for the construction of the social field. Campe claimed that this point of overlap introduces the element of contingency and thereby the "present in the future" configuration into Quetelet's thought. He ended his talk by showing how Nietzsche's concept of the promise contains both configurations of futurity at once. Promising to do something entails a constancy that emphasizes that a future event will take place, but the fulfillment of a promise is also a disruptive moment, and as such, renounces continuity with the point in time when the promise was made. (Matt Stolz)

Working at the crossroads of German Studies and African-American Studies, **Nahum Chandler** (University of California, Irvine) spoke on "The Possible Future of an Interlocution: DuBois and Weber," in which he addressed the correspondence between these two scholars, the influence they had on each other, the implications of their interlocution and the direction their cooperation could have taken had it progressed beyond the point when their actual correspondence broke off.

Max Weber initiated contact with DuBois after a lengthy trip to

the United States, where he met DuBois only briefly in person, but was intrigued by what he heard and asked DuBois for an essay about the connections between race and class in the United States, to be published in the journal *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*. In his talk, Chandler described this correspondence as an intersection between two projects that focused on modern social forms in different ways, but that eventually came together on the question of difference, or of what or who is considered human. Chandler argued that both Weber's and DuBois's projects were closely connected to changes within the rural societies of their respective countries; both the so-called agrarian question in late nineteenth-century Germany as well as the changing situation of the African-American—especially in the rural American South—were, in Chandler's assessment, paradigmatic for historical transformations in the Western world during this epoch and also tie the questions of race and class together through the issue of unfree labor. Their perspectives vis-à-vis these social changes, however, differed on one point. While Weber lamented the loss of the "Gemeinschaftswesen" in modern society, DuBois saw potential for political reform within such social transformations, especially in regard to the question of race.

The conversation between Weber and DuBois broke off, just as the stakes for the future of modernity started to become visible. Chandler concluded by outlining the direction this dialogue could have taken and underscored the value of understanding interconnections between the two projects as a contribution to the

discourse about current or future societies. Chandler's talk also underscored the importance of DuBois for the interlocking fields of German Studies and modernity studies. (Hannah Müller)

In his paper, "The Future as Past: Ernst Jünger's Post War Narrative Prose" **Peter Uwe Hohendahl** (Cornell) demonstrated how Jünger's novels significantly modify conventional conceptions of time and, furthermore, the conception of time Jünger himself postulates in his early essays. Hohendahl focused his analysis primarily on two novels: *Heliopolis. Rückblick auf eine Stadt* (1949) and *Eumeswil* (1977), read as a continuation of the *Heliopolis* project.

Whereas in his early discursive writings Jünger's understanding of the experience of time focuses primarily on acceleration and the element of rupture, conceptualizing the future as radical change caused largely by



Samuel Weber

major technological advancements, *Heliopolis* foregrounds a different understanding of the future. In this

novel, the familiar organization of linear time is disrupted and the chronological future becomes a replica of the recent historical past. Hohendahl read the narrative choice to represent the recent past as a distant future as Jünger's form of working through the recent German past of National Socialism, which would have caused major reactions in the German public had he chosen to write in a more explicit form. Jünger's understanding of Germany under National Socialism—an understanding he shares with the cultural German right—interprets Hitler's rise to power as a continuation and radicalization of the revolutionary democracy that emerged in 1789. For Jünger, conservative forces can resist the impact of totalitarian democracy but cannot defeat it. Furthermore, the use of the future as past, Hohendahl suggested, can be read as a conservative trope employed to eliminate uncertainty otherwise associated with the future.

Hohendahl then argued that *Eumeswil* represents yet another shift in Jünger's conception of time, insofar as its epilogue introduces a second narrator and a different perspective. The use of two different perspectives looking back at the future leads to a widening of the gap between the physical and the historical past. The glance back at the city of Eumeswil reveals stasis despite the appearance of change; an exit cannot be found in the future since it is reduced to abstract measurable time.

In his reading of these two novels, Hohendahl showed how Jünger's conceptualizations of time significantly changed after 1945: Jünger's new goal was to slow down history and seek a synthesis between natural

and historical time, privileging continuity over rupture. (Andreea Mascan)

Samuel Weber from Northwestern University delivered the keynote address, “On the Aesthetics of Terror: Clouds,” which investigated the relationship between aesthetics and politics by juxtaposing scenes from Leni Riefenstahl’s 1935 propaganda film *Triumph des Willens* against photographic images of the Twin Towers during the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In the first part of the talk, Weber articulated an analytical framework that drew on Freudian psychoanalysis as well as the work of Benjamin, Derrida, Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe and Heidegger. Among the central theoretical tools employed to shed light on the relationship between visual aestheticization in the media and terror/terrorism were the Freudian concepts of *screen memory* and *isolation*. Weber highlighted the unique potential of digitalization for creating screen memories, opaque memory images that conceal more than they reveal and can easily become instruments of political manipulation. By contrast the isolation of experience is a defense mechanism that relies precisely on representation while severing associative links to affects and other representations. This form of representation was then discussed in relation to the “aesthetics of form and figure.”

During the second half of the presentation, Weber examined the problematic of aestheticism and violence by reading fragments from Riefenstahl’s film alongside images depicting the collapse of the towers, which the American media used to justify the war on terror. In

addition to presenting familiar filmic representations of the Twin Towers obsessively broadcast on television, Weber also examined a controversial photograph by Thomas Hoepker, which foregrounds a few detached New Yorkers relaxing in the sun as the towers are being swallowed up by a cloud of smoke in the background. Weber argued that the scene in Hoepker’s photograph epitomizes the “aesthetic image,” which presents the object from the secure perspective of distance and aims at integrating it into a larger, ostensibly meaningful narrative. In such depictions of violence, the upshot is to convert destruction and terror into “something consumable.” While the media instrumentalized images of smoke and dust clouds surrounding the falling towers to produce a screen memory and provoke a particular response to the attacks (one that directed inner terror toward an external enemy), clouds in both the Riefenstahl film and varying photographic responses to 9/11 can be more precisely grasped in terms of isolation, which renders inner terror proximate instead. (Ana-Maria Andrei)

Day two of the conference commenced with **Patrizia McBride** (Cornell), who presented on “Physiognomic Magic: Producing Experience in the Montage Narratives of the New Objectivity.” The talk focused on the mimetic multimedia innovations and narrative re-conceptualizations to which the movement New Objectivity gave rise in its search for adequate analogs of experience marked by the byproducts of metropolitan life, such as speed and movement.

McBride began with Hans Blumenberg’s remarks in 1964 on

the crisis of the novel and the fixity of print. She then identified montage’s mimetic modes as procedures that are no longer predicated on



Leslie Adelson

semblance in the material world but are, rather, aimed at manipulating perception and devising a kind of narrative that becomes implicated in acts of making. This can be seen, for example, in montage’s parodic repetition, which creates new forms, and in its production of analogies whereby meaning becomes one factor among many.

McBride paid particular attention to the photomontage featured in *Fotoauge*, which exploited photographic fragments that retained a realist presumption of veracity and then inserted them into non-realist situations. According to McBride, the piecemeal aesthetics of photomontage epitomizes a new realist sensibility by utilizing the absolute expressive power of objects. Here, the expression in question is not an outward expression of the artist, but rather an “ex-expression,” an exteriorized manipulation of objects and forms, which results from imitative engagement with objects. This both confounds the

reader and puts her in a position of control. At the same time, there is nothing sinister about this kind of manipulation: to the contrary, it contains the thrill of anti-illusionism, anarchy, the utopian promise inherent in simultaneity, and many semantic permutations as though by hypertext. Phenomenologically, such open-ended temporality counts as experience in the making, composed of encounters between recipient and artifact that result in what McBride called “conduct.”

The ensuing discussion touched upon the collapse of distance and difference across the sensual spectrum, shared mechanisms of perception particular to the crowd, and also the construction of the “modern woman” in the works of Hannah Höch. (Anna Horakova)

In his talk “Herzog’s Cave: Cinema’s Unclaimed Past and Forgotten Futures,” **Lutz Koepnick** (Washington University) argued that Werner Herzog’s 2010 documentary *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* imagines the paintings in the Chauvet Cave in France as earlier artistic productions that open up futures forgotten in teleological narratives of technological progress. Scholars, according to Koepnick, often tend to think of media in teleological terms, with each sophisticated technological medium displacing a previous one. In the case of cinema, 3D films would accordingly mark the conclusion of cinema’s quest to provide a totally immersive experience for the viewer by resituating the fourth wall, rendering it not just a window into the world depicted on the screen, but a site of interface with the user.

Koepnick, however, offered a reading of the film that moved beyond teleological views of the

development of the cinematic medium. Herzog’s documentary, while shot in 3D, figures the cave



Lutz Koepnick

images as forgotten media that challenge our presuppositions of how time should move in film. For Koepnick, this is the cinema of futurity, which looks at earlier artistic production as a way of reclaiming both cinema’s unclaimed past as well as its forgotten future. Herzog’s documentary does not subject the viewer to the linear time of narrative progress; instead, the making and the beholding of the cave images fuse in such a way as to produce different temporalities, rhythms and experiences.

Koepnick situated his analysis of Herzog’s film within the context of his larger project on “aesthetic slowness,” which Koepnick sees as a kind of promissory note to futurity. The aesthetic slowness practiced within Herzog’s film complicates maps of progress, revealing the co-temporality of media both past and present. Given the way that the images in the Chauvet Cave yield the impression

of movement in the flickering light of a torch, the film might implicitly call to mind Plato’s allegory of the cave. And indeed, Plato’s cave not only resonates with Herzog, but in theory also foreshadows cinematic experience as a series of captivating illusions. For Koepnick, cave cinema is a cinema of perceptual movement that offers sensory maps of the world, intensifies temporal experience and creates a sort of spatial stretch. It provides a respite from linear time. (Alex Phillips)

In his talk “Posthumous Modernism” **Andreas Huyssen** (Columbia University) examined futurity in what he called the modernist miniature, a literary genre, he argued, particularly capable of grappling with the changes in spatio-temporal orientation inaugurated by crises of sensory perception: the collapse of inner/outer dichotomies, the increasing stimuli of an urban environment, and other such influences on human experiences of modernity.

In particular, Huyssen focused on the miniatures found in the Austrian writer Robert Musil’s *Nachlass zu Lebzeiten* (1936). In his reading of Musil’s miniatures, Huyssen highlighted instances that challenge conventional understandings of humanism by exploring what he called the “porous boundaries” between the human and animal. One such instance can be found in “Das Fliegenpapier”—in which black flies stuck to flypaper are compared to humans—insofar as the short text abandons the referential register of allegory, according to which the flies would be understood as a reference to humans. Without foregrounding allegorical meaning, the narrator’s attempts to unfold

thought are translated into narrative, blurring any ostensibly stable boundary between subject and object. If allegory functions at all, Huyssen suggested, then it must be on the level of the writing itself, whereby the black fly bodies on the flypaper would be read as allegories of the words on the page. In this way, allegory would function as a type of “second voice” that thematizes acts of writing.

In a reading of another of Musil’s miniatures, Huyssen elaborated on Musil’s aesthetics of “Abspaltung” as a device of defamiliarization that opens up the possibility of seeing the world differently, and of engendering a non-instrumental relation between subject and object. Such an aesthetics, with its attendant critical function, is to be understood as an afterimage of interwar modernism, void of the latter’s futurist projection as featured, for instance, in the work of the historical avant-garde. In this way, Musil’s miniatures constitute a posthumous form of modernism and futurity. The “miniscule utopian dimension” of these miniatures challenges, in Huyssen’s account, both grand narratives of modernist futurity and critical concepts of “minor literature.” (Nathan Taylor)

In her presentation entitled “Thinking in Times of Danger: Adorno on Stupidity,” **Birgit Erdle** (Fritz Bauer Institute & Goethe Universität Frankfurt-am-Main) approached the notion of futurity through its formulation in the gesture of address. Juxtaposing the Westinghouse time capsule buried in New York City’s Flushing Gardens during the 1939 New York World Fair with the meaning of *Schwachsinn* in Theodor Adorno’s letters to Max Horkheimer shortly

after the former’s 1938 arrival in New York City, Erdle posed two main questions: what happens to thinking in times of fear? And what happened to Adorno’s thinking during his time?

The Westinghouse time capsule and its long list of contents intended to last 5,000 years can be understood as an antidote to fears of the future, Erdle argued. Against the later backdrop of World War II, the time capsule could be seen



Birgit Erdle

as suggesting a way of preserving life through technology capable of producing materials impervious to time; its burial attempted to instill hope that a future could exist through a self-reflexive mode of address. The time capsule can thus be seen as an attempt to allay fears of a catastrophic future through the promise of a future audience that will receive the memories stored within.

Adorno’s letters to Horkheimer, by contrast, establish a different mode of address. Rather than assuming a future audience and thereby positing it, these letters are, Erdle argued, messages destined for a future *in need* of an

addressee. Living with his wife Gretel in exile, Adorno wondered about the possibility of thinking of his writings as legacies. He wrote to Horkheimer about the feeling of inevitability and stupidity (*Schwachsinn*) he had when looking at the LaGuardia Airport. By tracing the textual instances of *Schwachsinn* and its related concepts (*Dummheit*, *Denkfaulheit*) in Adorno’s writing back to the figure of mutilation in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944), Erdle hinted at parallels between Adorno’s theoretical work and his later experience. In *Dialektik*, stupidity (*Dummheit*) results from the suffering of violence: the silent scar on the wound at the site of repeated violence that also stifles the pain. The scar may therefore bear witness to violence, but another manner of displacement is necessary to engender reflection on the violence that produced it. Erdle thus concluded that Adorno’s geographic displacement from the dangers of Nazi Germany enabled a form of epistolary contemplation regarding the fate of the Jews that was otherwise stultified by fear. (Katrina Nousek)

In “Reading Time: Oswald Egger’s *Die ganze Zeit*,” **Peter Gilgen** (Cornell) discussed the work of contemporary poet and book artist Oswald Egger. Gilgen argued that Egger’s innovative treatment of time in *Die ganze Zeit* (2010) raises the question of what futurity is by making apparent recursive temporalities. Through its avant-garde foregrounding of poetic language, Egger’s work sublates the linear temporality of time. *Die ganze Zeit* is comprised of various components arranged together: a prose narrative, one-sentence quatrains, diagrams of knot-like

objects, and extended quotations at the start of every section. Gilgen argued that these quotations suggest that the text is not written once and for all, but participates in what Roland Barthes calls a “perpetual present.”

Like Egger’s earlier book *Diskrete Stetigkeit. Poesie und Mathematik* (2008), *Die ganze Zeit* engages intertextually with literature, philosophy and science. Gilgen thus commented on the beginning of this book, which quotes the opening line of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1321). But whereas Dante writes about losing the path, Egger’s work suggests that there is no path to begin with. Rather, Gilgen argued, Egger addresses the philosophical paradox of time being traced as continuous while being experienced as discrete moments (hence “diskrete Stetigkeit”).

Gilgen then analyzed the form of *Die ganze Zeit*, showing how Egger’s images of knots interrupt the rhythm of the language and suggest unforeseen consequences. Egger also structures his text such that it is impossible to read from left to right and up to down; rather, what comes next cannot be completely determined, thus simulating the passage of time. Egger is deeply interested in linguistic structure, evidenced, for example, by his use of palindromes. Thus according to Gilgen, the structure of language reflects most accurately, for Egger, the structure of temporality.

Gilgen concluded by considering the final two pages of Egger’s book, consisting of a complex knot-like drawing and an extended quote from Boethius. In particular, Gilgen analyzed an oddly placed ellipsis through which Egger renders Boethius’s sentence ungrammatical. Only by reading

the passage again is it possible to trace from the previous sentence what has been left out, namely, a reference to god. Through this device, Egger prevents the act of reading from coming to a rest. Thus, in encountering Egger’s work, the process of reading undergoes a qualitative change: the reader moves with unspecified directedness along the path that was absent all along, open to what is to come. (Tara Beaney)

In her talk on “Time Travelers and Native Informers: Escape Narratives from the Muslim Underground,” **Fatima El-Tayeb** (University of California, San Diego) showed how narratives informed by minority experiences of spatio-temporal dislocation challenge prevailing conceptions of Europe and “Europeanness.”



Fatima El-Tayeb

El-Tayeb began by noting that dominant discourses on minorities in Europe are structured around a teleological liberation narrative based on a secularized Christian conception of time as progress. Since the endpoint of this narrative is identified with European modernity, it allows

minorities movement in only one direction: towards assimilation and deculturalization, leaving behind traditions often associated with a “pre-modern” Islam. At the same time, the oppositions underlying the discourses (pre-modern/modern, rural/urban, fundamentalism/enlightenment) function as a mode of structuring Europe that makes it impossible for Muslim minorities to present themselves as fully European.

El-Tayeb then positioned herself against notions of “internal self-critiques of the enlightenment” aimed at changing these discourses. Such critiques, she argued, leave the underlying hierarchies intact by suggesting that the enlightenment—in contrast to pre-modern belief-systems projected, for instance, onto Muslim populations—can amend itself “out of itself,” thus affirming its master narrative of self-generated progress. Instead, El-Tayeb proposed adopting methodologies from post-colonial studies and queer studies to critique categories such as “Europeanness.” Minorities in Europe find themselves in “queer” space and time constellations: racialized as other and thus barred from fully arriving in European societies, they are cast as “eternal migrants,” permanently stuck in a temporary condition. Such experiences of dislocation, El-Tayeb suggested, provide the resources for a specifically European “queering” of ethnicity and an activism that subverts the timeline of linear progress. Among several examples, she cited the appropriation of the derogatory term “Kanake” by minority artists. Instead of establishing a homogeneous “migrant identity,” the indiscriminate “Kanake” describes the common

experience of being racialized while opening it up as the basis for a queer critique of fixed identities.

During the lively discussion, El-Tayeb affirmed the need to subvert discourses that function as control mechanisms and problematized notions of utopia that depend on a linear conception of time. (Johannes Wankhammer)

In her paper “Volatile Screens of Memory: *The Last Cowboy* and the Future of Utopia,” **Madeleine Casad** (Cornell) investigated media memory, identity and East German cultural disorientation after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the 1998 DVD-ROM artwork *The Last Cowboy* by Petra Epperlein and Michael Tucker. Drawing attention to the German Cold-War decade of the 1990s and the rise of digital media, Casad set out to explore these new global technological and epistemological conditions within the context of post-wall narrative desire and new subjectivities.

For Casad, literary and artistic theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Margaret Morse

offered conceptual frameworks for interpreting digital media that break down the binary between author and reader, performer and spectator. *The Last Cowboy*, however, resists this possibility of interactivity by being almost cinematic, seeking, rather, an “intuitive adaptation of the story or an intuitive interactivity.” The artwork offers “fluid movement” among medial forms (images, subtitles, video clips), depicting German cities, historical and social events and particularly *Indianerfilme* (a series of films about American Indians in the Wild West, very popular in the GDR), as well as the protagonists’ memories and desires in subtitles. Casad then explored the reason for the paucity of narrative choice in *The Last Cowboy* in the linkages between utopian desire in *Indianerfilme* and the phenomenon of *Ostalgie* common in the ‘90s. *Ostalgie* can be, she argued, “escapism...an inability to face the post-unification present and future.” *Indianerfilme*, on the other hand, both express utopian desire for an ideal society and locate this utopia in the past: the Wild West.

Furthermore, each of the post-war Germanies seeking to come to terms with the Nazi past characterized the other as backwards, and “the other [Germany] represented the national-cultural past against which its ideal national futurity could be measured.”

Casad finally pointed to a generation of authors and artists within the post-89 context whose work evinced an “atomization of experience.” In this vein, *The Last Cowboy* is much like an impressionistic travel narrative of the protagonist’s own imagination: its protagonist refuses the mainstream GDR identification with the American Indian, and in so doing, suggests complications involved in utopic desire and narrative choice after the Berlin Wall. *The Last Cowboy*’s exploratory narrative offers a “navigational tool” that reveals the interdependence of individual experience, collective history and the other. As such, it constitutes one step towards building a community beyond the Wall. (Gizem Arslan)

Call for Submissions

The Peter Uwe Hohendahl Graduate Essay Prize in Critical Theory

The Institute for German Cultural Studies is pleased to announce its 2012 call for submissions for *The Peter Uwe Hohendahl Graduate Essay Prize in Critical Theory*. This named prize honors a distinguished scholar of international renown for his many publications on German literatures of modernity, comparative intellectual histories, critical theory writ large and the Frankfurt School especially, and the history and desiderata of university education in Europe and North America. As Jacob

Gould Schurman Professor of German Studies and Comparative Literature from 1977 to 2011, Peter Uwe Hohendahl taught and inspired many Cornell students on the importance of critical theory for public life and the collective good.

Professor of Philosophy at Binghamton University and editor of *Globalizing Critical Theory*, Max Pensky summarized Peter Hohendahl’s significance for the scholarly field of

critical theory this way in April 2011, shortly before Prof. Hohendahl retired from the teaching faculty at Cornell University:

“Peter Uwe Hohendahl is one of the most influential German literary critics of his generation. Remarkably, he is also considered one of the foremost theorists and historians of critical theory in a broadly international field of scholarship. In seminal essays spanning several decades and collected in widely read anthologies, he explores the complexities of the Frankfurt School’s legacy in politics, philosophy, literature and culture with the precision of an exceptionally fine jeweler. Those familiar with his literary criticism will not be surprised by the combination of pellucid analysis, capacious scholarship and intellectual generosity that is the distinctively Hohendahl voice in his writings on critical theory as well. The extensive influence of his writing on critical theory—on both sides of the Atlantic—can additionally be explained by an aspect particular to critical theory and its academic study.

This distinguished scholar very deliberately—and exhilaratingly—takes as his subject *critical theory as a whole*. His focal commentaries on Benjamin, Adorno, Lukács, and Habermas would each justify Hohendahl’s status as a major interpreter of figures of the Frankfurt School. Taken together, however, this illuminating work powerfully challenges an orthodox academic division of labor, in which older figures of the Frankfurt School, specifically Adorno and Benjamin, are assigned to literary and cultural theory and area studies, while critical engagement with Habermas is delegated to philosophers and social theorists. As acute philosophically as they are as exercises in literary and cultural theory, Hohendahl’s critical interventions effectively render this orthodox division of labor obsolete. For this reason and many others, Peter Uwe

Hohendahl has played a crucial role in a fundamental realignment in current scholarship on the Frankfurt School.”

The Peter Uwe Hohendahl Graduate Essay Prize in Critical Theory is made possible by a generous gift from an anonymous donor. In the words of this donor, the named prize signals “that critical theory and critical historical inquiry are fundamental to engaged encounter with our times.”

Essay submissions may be submitted in German or English on any topic pertaining to critical theory, and registered graduate students in any relevant field of study at Cornell University are eligible to apply. The author of the winning essay will be awarded a prize of \$250.

Essays may be up to 25 double-spaced pages in length and should be submitted under an assumed name. Authors must indicate their primary fields of study on the essay and submit a sealed envelope containing the author’s identity, including student ID number, local address, telephone, and Cornell e-mail address. The title of the essay submitted for prize consideration must be entered on the outside of the envelope.

The deadline for submission is October 15. Entries should be submitted to Olga Petrova, Assistant to the Director of the Institute for German Cultural Studies, at <ogp2@cornell.edu>. IGCS offices are located at 726 University Avenue on the third floor (tel. 255 8408).

The Peter Uwe Hohendahl Graduate Essay Prize in Critical Theory is sponsored by the Institute for German Cultural Studies at Cornell University.

Lectures

In his talk titled “Kant, Autonomy and Modernity,” **Paul Guyer** (University of Pennsylvania) highlighted some of the distinctively modern aspects of Kant’s practical philosophy. While it would be tempting to suppose that the value of autonomy is among Kant’s contributions most typical of the Enlightenment, Guyer argued that in fact certain facets of Kant’s conception of autonomy can be traced back to Antiquity. If the negative notion of freedom as emancipation from the impulses and passions reaches back to Plato and the Stoics, it is positive freedom, understood as the capacity to set one’s own ends, that is the characteristically modern aspect of Kant’s construal of autonomy.

Guyer located the beginning of the modern understanding of autonomy in Kant’s introduction to the 1784 text *Naturrecht Feyerabend*, where Kant stresses that freedom is valuable in every human being as an end in itself, rather than as a mere means to avoid the frustration caused by the unbridled pursuit of desires. The ability

to set one’s own ends is, for Kant, both what distinguishes rational beings from mere animals, as well as the value upon which all other values are founded. It plays a fundamental role in Kant’s ethics, Guyer argued, for it grounds both Kant’s analysis of the moral law and his fourfold classification of moral duties.

A second modern element in Kant’s practical philosophy brought to light by Guyer concerns the line of argument Kant proposed in support of autonomy. After initially adducing largely empirical evidence for this belief (very much in line with preexisting, Stoic approaches) in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant put forward a novel, a priori argument for autonomy. Although in *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) he had to withdraw the a priori argument for violating the epistemological exigencies to which he was committed, Kant advanced in its stead considerations that suggest that his position in metaethics was, at the time, a precursor of “reflective equilibrium.” (Ana-Maria Andrei)

Paul
Guyer



VISITING SCHOLAR

ANDREW ERWIN is spending the academic year 2012-2013 as a Visiting Scholar in the Department of German Studies at Cornell. He received his Ph.D. in Germanic Studies from The University of Chicago in 2011 and taught for a year at Bowdoin College before coming to Cornell. His work centers on Viennese modernism, classical German drama, and international cinema. This year he is completing a book on the problem of mimetic desire in Robert Musil’s novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* and beginning a new project on the relation between history and poetics in the German drama from Goethe to Büchner. His other work focuses on the reception of Germanic culture in American film. He has taught courses on Weimar cinema and film noir and has an ongoing interest in Freud’s influence on Ingmar Bergman and Woody Allen.

On April 18 **Adrian Johnston** (University of New Mexico) gave a talk entitled “This is Orthodox Marxism: The Shared Materialist Weltanschauung of Marx and Engels,” which tendentiously argued for a return to Engels—often maligned by Marxists as the “bad” humanist component of the Marx/Engels dyad—and a return to naturalism. According to the Italian Marxist Sebastiano Timpanaro, post-Marxist thought has largely failed in its engagement with science: the French Structuralists err by blurring the line between lived experience and experimental empiricism, while the Frankfurt School lapses into an idealist Marxism reliant on a Neo-Kantian dualism between nature and history. The solution to these divergent mishandlings of the place of nature and science in Marxist theory is, Johnston suggested, a return to Engels, rejected by both camps as a vulgar materialist and often blamed for the failure of Marxism.

Johnston justified his claim by invoking Marx himself. The elision of Engel’s empiricist “Weltanschauung” is precisely what causes Marxism to slide back into idealism: it becomes instead a “contemplative materialism,” derived from Marx’s “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845), which precludes real sensuous activity and a historical subject, producing thereby the dissatisfaction that necessarily leads back to idealism. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx suggests that naturalism and humanism differ from materialism and idealism, which he wants

to unify. From this perspective, natural science and the science of man will be dialectically transformed into a consistent materialism.

This is why, Johnston argued, Engel’s science-informed dialectical materialism is needed to complete Marx’s political economy. Human beings are presented in Marx precisely at the nexus of the nature/history dialectic policed by Frankfurt School Marxism; they are socially-laboring beings, creatures with needs in culture. Humans set in motion subject-object processes that transform both,

thus arising from nature and naturalizing it in turn: from this perspective, human history is a real part of natural history. Such a thesis is both Darwinian and, crucially, Engelsian, as it attempts to create a naturalistic dialectical history. And thus against both Lukács, who tries to eliminate nature from the dialectic of history, and the French/German post-Marxist establishment that disavows Engels altogether, Johnston championed a historical materialism that is also a form of natural history. (Matteo Calla)



Urban Guerillas, the 2003 film written and directed by screenwriter and playwright **Neco Çelik**, screened at Cornell’s Schwarz Center for Performing Arts in February and was followed by a discussion with the director. The film’s opening credits classify the production as a *Heimatfilm*, a genre made famous by Edgar Reitz in his ironic reaction to the idyllic black and white films of the 1950s that highlighted country life and landscape beauty.

In the post-punk era, *Urban Guerillas* (also the name of a punk band) proposes a redefinition of the *Heimat* genre and offers humorous modes of reterritorializing cinema and framing national identity. Through quick camera movements and snippets of language, sound and movement, the movie celebrates a rising youth culture embodied by second and third generation minority youngsters—mostly though

not exclusively Turkish-Germans—as well as their milieu: Kreuzberg, Berlin. Youth slang, urban angst, break- and hip hop dance, graffiti designs and improvised artistic contests create an alertness of language and image, which is reproduced faithfully by syncopated camera movements.

The movie also presents humorous quid pro quos (a character called Danger is not a man but a woman yet fits perfectly into stereotypes of masculinity and is accepted as such by other male graffiti artists), episodes of homo-sociality and clique behavior. Above all, the film epitomizes a confrontation with the everyday, and one that does not explode into violence but rather materializes in graffiti art, in celebration of both the dead and the living. (Arina Rotaru)

Lectures

Are details the rhetorical domain of the stickler and the obsessive, or do they serve a more vital role in the telling of history? **Trevor Pinch** and **Richard Swedberg** (Cornell) addressed this question in their joint paper, "Wittgenstein's Visit to Ithaca in

1949: On the Importance of Details," which described the details of the philosopher's three-month stay

at Cornell. During the summer of 1949, Wittgenstein took up residence at the home of one of his students, Cornell philosophy professor Norman Malcolm, and Pinch and Swedberg furnished accounts of this visit by drawing on letters, telegrams, interviews and notes from conversations.

Wittgenstein was apparently disputatious during his stay: one student recalls passing Malcolm's house and peering in the window to see Wittgenstein arguing with a visibly strained professor. But Wittgenstein discussed non-philosophical topics as well, particularly with Max Black, the co-founder of the Society for the Humanities and the A.D. White Professor at Large program. Black, who met Wittgenstein at Cambridge in 1929, would allegedly entertain the philosopher with, for example, the sensory illusion that one had two noses created by crossing one's fingers and rubbing them over his or her nose. Of Black Wittgenstein said, "Black was intelligent, surely. But not serious."

Wittgenstein's visit was largely kept secret,

and no public talk at the university was scheduled at his behest. The philosopher did, however, appear at a philosophy club meeting, where nobody recognized him. Dressed in a tweed cap and oxfords without socks, he was mistaken by one attendee

for a janitor. As a discussion of Kant's categorical imperative ensued, and the problem of whether ought implies can, a knowing

participant shocked the group by turning to ask, "What do you think, Professor Wittgenstein?" to which Wittgenstein replied, "A nurse asked me to shove a tube down my throat. You ought, she said. I can't, I replied. Does ought imply can?"

Pinch and Swedburg concluded their presentation by stressing the importance of the "telling detail" as a necessary palliative to the popularly circulating accounts of history that obscure what actually happened. Such eccentric detail, they suggested, is not only found in the anecdotes of Wittgenstein's visit, but remains true to Wittgenstein's own hostility to generalization and theory, summarized in his dictum, "theory blinds." (Matteo Calla)

Trevor Pinch & Richard Swedberg February 27, 2012



In co-sponsorship with the Institute for German Cultural Studies and PG Kino, Cornell Cinema presented four films by German filmmaker **Alexander Kluge**. The film series, offered in conjunction with Professor Leslie Adelson's German Studies graduate seminar on Alexander Kluge's literary works, included screenings of *Yesterday Girl* (1966), *The Artists in the Ring: Perplexed* (1968), *The Power of Emotion* (1983), and *Germany in Autumn* (1978). ACLS Faculty Fellow in the Department of Theater, Film and Dance, Brian Hanrahan introduced Kluge's films, contextualizing them historically and theoretically while highlighting their indebtedness to avant-garde and neo avant-garde film aesthetics, the Frankfurt School's conceptual and critical framework, and Kluge's personal engagement with the social unrest of his time.

In many ways, the selection of films foregrounded exemplary features of Kluge's work as a whole: the idiosyncrasies of his montage technique, his complex construction of narratives that often proceed non-linearly, his attention to expression and gesture, and his emphasis on emotion, or rather, behavior indicative of emotion. The film *Yesterday Girl*, based on Kluge's short story *Anita. G.* (1962), serves as a representative example. As one of Kluge's "Lebensläufe" or "curriculum vitae," the film tells the story of a young East German migrant's attempts to gain a footing in West German society. The story

becomes, however, less a narrative progression than a story of flight or perpetual fleeing from one's past, as signaled by the film's German title, *Abschied von Gestern*. The film portrays the precariousness of the girl's situation and social status through its scenes of running or travelling and its images of restlessness and insecurity, whereby its montage principle resists depicting the causal connections typical of conventional narratives. The film also retains a strong connection to its historical conditions: the petit-bourgeois atmosphere of the early Federal Republic of Germany is unmistakably present; the Jewish background of Anita G. and the film's musings on justice index both the Holocaust and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in post-war Germany, though neither of these discourses is mentioned by name.

Each screening was followed by a discussion of Kluge's style and the historical content of the respective film. One especially lively debate ensued around Kluge's *Germany in Autumn*, a collaborative film effort produced Kluge, Fassbinder and other New German Cinema filmmakers that addresses left-wing terrorism in the post-war Federal Republic. Concerned with the issue of violence in light of its conspicuous absence in the film, audience members further speculated about the film's stance on violence and discussed the responses provoked by the film's controversial material at the time of its release. (Nathan Taylor)

Films by Alexander Kluge



Jetzt:

Contemporary and Historical Figurations

(March 31 - April 1, 2012)

The 2012 graduate student conference, “Jetzt: Contemporary and Historical Figurations,” opened with a panel entitled “The Now and the Visual Arts,” featuring three graduate students from Cornell’s M.F.A. program. Motivated by the challenges posed by the now’s protean nature, this experiment provided insights into some of the ways the now lends itself to be screened, configured and conceptualized through the lenses of three distinct media: painting, sculpture, and photography.

Gaby Wolodarski, Oakland-based painter and installation artist, opened the panel with her reflections on how border-crossings between image and text relate to space and temporality. Citing from the Catalan artist and poet Joan Brossa alongside Lacoue-Labarthe, Wolodarski’s pieces engage with the paradoxes that result from practices such as documenting, localizing, textualizing or freezing something in time through the use of various semiotic systems and modern technology. Her presentation was accompanied by an installation outside the conference building, which entailed stretched out pieces of yellow caution tape she had customized herself by painting the letters of proper names that

referenced places, persons or plants.

The second speaker, **Christina Leung**, has worked as a practicing sculptor since 2007. The contemporaneity of Leung’s sculptures lies precisely in “re-looking” at the (art) objects of cultures such as the Shakers and making them anew, often adding twists that drive them *ad absurdum*. In one of her engagements with history, she photographed a series of 1960s concrete monoliths at Cornell’s arboretum and projected the daytime snapshots on the sculptures at night. Leung’s exact replica of an IKEA drying rack, in which she imitates a serially produced commodity for the purpose of playful aesthetic appreciation, is an update of Duchamp. Leung’s presentation also included excerpts from Mark Leckey and Harun Farocki, who also engage with modern technology, simulation, domesticity and social practice.

The work of the last speaker, **Bernard Yenelouis**, has been on show in Berlin, New York and Los Angeles. On display during his presentation were arrangements of collectible and genre photographs, which prompted Yenelouis to discuss



Christina Leung

the temporal discrepancies between the socially codified *studium* and the *punctum*. Yenelouis’s own photography uses the image to reflect on the modernist and industrial reverie of urban architecture from the perspective of its contemporary decay. His work also employs the characteristic blurring technique to articulate notions of intimacy, longing and nostalgia, which are then amplified through the juxtaposition of these images against one another in various installations and collages. (Anna Horakova)

The panel “(A)temporality of Crisis” opened with **Tara Beaney** (Freie Universität Berlin), who was a resident at

Cornell during 2011-2012. In “‘Zusammengeschnürt in der Zeit’: Absent Past and Abject Future in Jenny Erpenbeck’s *Geschichte vom alten Kind*,” Beaney offered a close reading of Erpenbeck’s 2008 novella that paid particular attention to the impact of traumatic events on the development of adult identity. The paper analyzed the protagonist’s difficulties in affirming and locating her identity in light of psychological theories of trauma, which interfere with the development of coherent identity by making both the past and future inaccessible. Beaney argued that Erpenbeck’s novella establishes enigmatic links between past and present by creating moments of affective intensity, which saturate “the now” with pointed emotional and physical experience. In this way, past and future, common elements of trauma narratives, become indirectly accessible through a present experience.

Alexandra Hills

(University College London) presented “The Now always comes after: Post traumatic bodies and Creaturely Subjectivities in Ilse Aichinger’s *Der Gefesselte*” (1953). Hills’s presentation resituated Aichinger’s short prose text within a postwar historical context, reading its leitmotifs of physical pain and torment as symptoms of trauma—implicitly, of the historical trauma suffered by survivors of World War II in Austria. Hills read the imagery of enchained and captured human bodies in *Der Gefesselte* in dialogue with Eric Santner’s theories of “creaturely life,” proposing that forms of altered physicalities in Aichinger, which

unsettle the boundaries between human and animal, respond to the condition of trauma. Human subjectivity, Hills suggested, surrenders to animalistic modes of experiencing the body within time just as it locates experience in the immediate now, during which physical pain is detached from the traumatic event yet continues to express itself as both a symptom and a marker of a violent historical moment.

The panel concluded with **Stefan Hilpert**’s (Cambridge University, Friedrich Schlegel Graduiertenschule FU Berlin) presentation “‘Jetzt kriegst du alles zurück, deine ganze Tat. Und



Stefan Hilpert

dann wird Ruhe sein.’ Trauma and repetition in Christian Petzold’s *Toter Mann* (2001) and *Wolfsburg* (2003).” Hilpert’s comparison of Petzold’s films, associated with the “Berliner Schule” of young German filmmakers, accentuated their intertextually arranged and shared motives of trauma. Taking his cues from both Freud’s notion of latency, which structures the response to a traumatic event, and from concepts of repetition

in theories of trauma, Hilpert analyzed the character’s motivation of revenge and the re-visitation of the scene of trauma in order to expose *Toter Mann*’s engagement with trauma on both individual and historically contextualized planes. The setting of *Wolfsburg*—famous for being the location of Volkswagen’s headquarters—Hilpert argued, evokes how the recent German history of economic growth and postwar productivity operates in the shadow, but also in avoidance of the historical trauma of World War II. (Christine Schott)

Elizabeth Romanow

(Stanford University) opened the panel on “Conceptualizing the Present” with a paper entitled “Francis Ponge and Gottfried Benn: A Poetics of Presentation and Latency.” Drawing on Heidegger’s artwork essay and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s work on presence, Romanow argued that Ponge’s and Benn’s poetry should be understood as creating “presence effects,” moments of heightened intensity and immediate experience. While Ponge’s poetry aims at exhibiting everyday objects in an auratic way, Benn’s poetry displays the tragic transitoriness of presentation and the ephemeral quality of all appearance. Romanow concluded that for both poets, an aesthetics of presence is key to a redemptive utopian project, since it enables forms of subjectivity attuned to everyday objects constituting our lifeworld and cognizant of the ephemerality of appearances and creative acts.

Via Skype, **Patricia Gwozdz** (Universität Potsdam) presented a paper on

“Parnassius Mnemosyne: Morphogenetic fields and the feeling of what happened in the works of Walter Benjamin, Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges.” Working within a “poetics of knowledge” (*Poetologie des Wissens*), Gwozdz explored parallels between the biologist Rupert Sheldrake’s notion of “morphogenetic fields” and experiments with narrative time and memory in the works of the writers mentioned above. According to Sheldrake’s heterodox theory, memories are not merely stored in the brain, but constitute a hitherto unknown type of field that influences future events through “morphic resonances.” Gwozdz likened this notion to the literary historical

concept of *mémoire involuntaire* coined by Proust and appropriated, among others, by Walter Benjamin. Finally, Gwozdz argued that their “meta-epistemological position” allowed literary works such as Borges’s short story “Funes el memorioso” (1942) to thematize the phenomenon theorized by Sheldrake before it was taken up by scientific discourse.

Christina Lenz

(Universität Frankfurt/Yale University) presented the third paper of the panel, “Blanchot’s instant.” Proceeding from a close reading of Blanchot’s short story “L’instant de ma mort” (1994), about a young man’s experience of his expected assassination and sudden escape, Lenz elaborated Blanchot’s understanding of the

instant as a moment of radical discontinuity. She then sharpened this notion by contrasting it with both Hegel’s *Jetzt*, whose *Aufhebung* transforms the single instant into the continuous succession of a line, as well as with Heidegger’s *Augenblick*, which describes an encounter with death that opens up an authentic relation to time. Against all such “metaphysical” appropriations of the point in time, Lenz argued that Blanchot’s instant should be understood as a moment of radical indecision that arrests the passage from past into future and resists its stabilization within an authentic temporality. Citing *Demeure* (2001), Derrida’s book on Blanchot, Lenz concluded by characterizing Blanchot’s

Visiting Scholar from Berlin (September 1-13, 2012)

Das IGCS freut sich sehr, Prof. Dr. Ulrike Vedder von der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin im September an Cornell begrüßen zu dürfen. Ulrike Vedder ist seit 2009 Professorin für „Literatur vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart / Theorien und Methoden literaturwissenschaftlicher Geschlechterforschung“ am Institut für deutsche Literatur. Zuvor war sie an den Universitäten Hamburg und Paderborn sowie am Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung Berlin tätig. Auf eine komparatistische Promotion zur Mediengeschichte des Liebesdiskurses um 1800 und um 2000 (erschienen unter dem Titel *Geschickte Liebe*) folgte die Habilitationsschrift *Das Testament als literarisches Dispositiv. Kulturelle Praktiken des Erbes in der Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Fink Verlag 2011).



Zu ihren Forschungsschwerpunkten zählen: Literatur des 18. bis 21. Jahrhunderts, Generationen- und Geschlechterforschung, Wissenspoetik und kulturelle Transformationen von Dingen. Aktuelle Forschungsprojekte gelten den Themen „Arbeitswelten in Literatur und Film“, „Wissenschaftliche und literarische Narrationen an der Grenze des Todes“, „Junggesellendiskurse im 19. Jahrhundert“ sowie „Literatur, Geschichte und Systematik des Museums“. Zu ihren neuere Publikationen gehören u.a. *Das Konzept der Generation. Eine Wissenschafts- und Kulturgeschichte* (Suhrkamp 2008) (verfasst mit O. Parnes und Stefan Willer), *Passionen. Objekte – Schauplätze – Denkstile* (Fink Verlag 2010), Themenhefte „Literarische Dinge“ und „Alter und Literatur“ der *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* (2012), *Wirklichkeit und Wahrnehmung: Neue Perspektiven auf Theodor Storm* (2013) und *Das Leben vom Tode her. Zur Religions-, Wissenschafts- und Kulturgeschichte einer Grenzbestimmung* (2013).

Im Rahmen des Fakultätsaustausches zwischen Cornell und der Humboldt-Universität wird Ulrike Vedder vom 1. September bis zum 13. September an Cornell zu sprechen sein. Am 7. September lädt das IGCS besonders gern zu ihrem German Studies Kolloquium zum Thema „Junggesellen in Literatur und Wissenschaften des 19. Jahrhunderts“ ein. Weitere Details und Textvorlagen sind im September erhältlich.

instant as a singular experience of exposure to alterity to which only poetic language can testify. (Johannes Wankhammer)

Joan and Sarepta Harrison Professor of Literature **Peter Fenves** (Northwestern University) delivered the conference's keynote address, "Temporal Entanglements around 1935: Benjamin, Heidegger, and Schroedinger," which addressed the *entanglement* of the three thinkers' thoughts on aura and reproducibility, metaphysics and *Dasein*, quantum physics and uncertainty.

Central to the paper was the quantum physicist Erwin Schroedinger's concept of entanglement (*Verschränkung*), best understood as the exclusive relation between our knowledge of a particular body and the physical presence of the body itself. A rule governing quantum mechanics, this notion is summarized in the famous Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle: one can know the momentum of a particle (possess knowledge about it), or its position (the presence of the body itself), but not both at once. The relation between observer and object, then, is said to be entangled; as a consequence, quantum physics is believed to *violate locality*. Yet it remains, in the view of the physicist Arthur Eddington—referred to by Benjamin as one of the three most revolutionary thinkers of the twentieth century, together with Lenin and Freud—just beyond the mathematical laws of classical physics, which can be deduced from a priori constructions and thus contain no

reference to the actual world.

Fenves proceeded to relate this notion of entanglement to the twin concepts of aura and the reproducible artwork in Benjamin. If the auratic artwork is the singular presence of the image or thing, it is entangled with its reproduction; that is, we can behold an image in its singularity, but this precludes knowledge of it. Conversely, in the reproducible



Peter Fenves

artwork, we can have knowledge of the thing, but only at the expense of its presence.

In a final gesture, Fenves connected this dichotomous entanglement to the notion of "pure life" put forth by Schroedinger in his curious late book, *What is Life?* (1944). Here, Schroedinger predicts a reproducible code script, prior to the discovery of DNA, to be the basis of life. This code script is pure information—what he calls "negative entropy"—that violates the second law of thermodynamics, the tendency towards disorder or decay in a closed system. Pure life as code script is not subject

to decay: the code script that will become DNA is reproduced on a one-to-one basis, yet is devoid of presence. Returning to Benjamin's terms, Fenves concluded that aura has nothing to do with life. Life lies, instead, in the statistical realm of the reproducible, condemning theory to incompleteness. (Matteo Calla)

Miyako Hayakawa

(Cornell) commenced the panel on "The Textuality of Nowness." Her talk, "'Beginning and end of my fish-like emotion': Experience and Time in the Diaries of Franz Kafka," considered how Kafka's diaries inscribe a sense of "nowness" through strategies of fragmentation. Using Phillipe Lejeune and Maurice Blanchot as theoretical interlocutors, Hayakawa gave a nuanced analysis of how Kafka both adheres to and departs from some of the expectations associated with the diary genre. She then emphasized how many of Kafka's diary entries can be read as the sites in which he develops his signature prose style. Kafka's *Tagebücher* furthermore challenge traditional notions of the genre insofar as they boast of an eclecticism and even resist the basic convention of dating one's entries. Hayakawa finally concluded that the experience of "nowness" emerges precisely from the eclectic and fragmentary nature of Kafka's diaries.

Patrick Carlson

(University of California, Irvine) next gave a talk entitled "Photography and Fragmentation in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*"

(2001), which addressed how trauma and memory are dealt with in Sebald's novel. Of particular interest for Carlson are the eighty-seven photos presented throughout the novel, whose relation to the unfolding of the narrative, he argued, disorients the reader. At the same time, the way the photos are presented creates a space for the reader in which historical understanding can be obtained, which, when conceived in a broad sense, can include uncertainty and ambiguity. He concluded that the interplay between text and image in Sebald's novel emphasizes how traumatic events such as the Holocaust disorient the reader yet provide him or her with a path to meaning.

Mordechai Hodkin's (Northwestern University) talk, entitled "Here Now: Spatiotemporal Emblem and Narratological Uncertainty in Kafka's Stories," focused on how the notion of "now" emerges in Kafka's "Ein Landarzt" (1918). Hodkin argued that in "Ein Landarzt," the distinction between story, the space in which the characters "experience events" and "live," and discourse, the mechanics and strategies that go into a story's telling, is called into question. He pointed to the manner in which Kafka plays with the discourse through sudden shifts in verb tenses. These shifts, Hodkin argued, create perplexing spatiotemporal relations for the characters in the story—and ultimately for the reader as well. Hodkin concluded that the spaces between these shifts demonstrate a "nowness" and a "hereness" that come to define the story's theatricality. (Matt Stolz)



Mordechai Hodkin

In his plenary address "Why not now?", Professor **Geoff Waite** (Cornell) began by talking about the etymology of the German words for "now": "jetzt," "nun" and "da," and the ambiguity of their meaning in regard to spatial and temporal specification. He showed how etymology renders the meaning of a word ambiguous, pointing out the impossibility of locating the origin of any word: "That origin, that meaning, we have no choice but to invent, and this absolutely necessary decision is violent—a violence we must live with and which remains primed to explode in all words we think we are speaking, as long as speech speaks us."

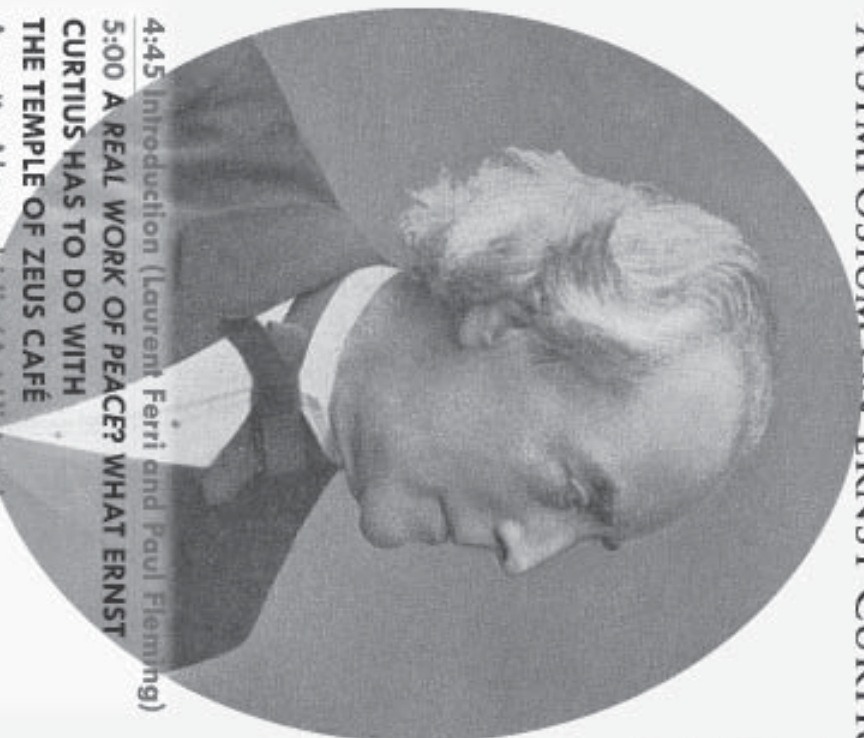
Drawing the comparison between the speech act and an act of violence, and suggesting that every act of deciding and thereby naming is necessarily a violation of what is being named, Waite next discussed what he called one of the most exemplary understandings of now: the moment of death, the awareness that "now I am dying." The consciousness of one's own death at the moment it happens

erases all of the ambivalent utterances that are commonly used to talk about death (like "everyone dies someday"), which obscure its certainty and turn the most individual and personal experience into something general and impersonal. But death, Waite continued, also waits at the end of the search for origins: the "asterisk before the word *now*" that marks the inability to define a word's linguistic origins "is in effect a primal scream in the here-and-now of life projected onto death, though this asterisk is transcribable as 'aaarrghh!'"

Waite concluded his presentation by showing a number of cinematic examples of this scream, the "aaarrghh" that marks origin and death at the same time. The wall inscription of a cry of death in a scene from the movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) was contrasted with Jesus's scream of agony upon the crucifixion, and a child's weeping in Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964) was juxtaposed against scenes from both Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and Sivan's *The Terrorist* (1998). There, in the act of violence, the wordless scream marked the moment of death, or the experience of the "now." (Hannah Müller)

EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENCES:

A SYMPOSIUM ON ERNST CURTIUS AND ERNST ROBERT CURTIUS



4:45 Introduction (Laurent Ferri and Paul Fleming)

5:00 A REAL WORK OF PEACE? WHAT ERNST CURTIUS HAS TO DO WITH THE TEMPLE OF ZEUS CAFÉ

Annetta Alexandridis (Art History)

5:30 LAST GLIMMERS: E.R. CURTIUS AND THE EUROPEAN REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

Laurent Ferri (Kroch Library Rare and Manuscript Collections; Comparative Literature)

6:00 WHAT A DAY JOB: PHILOLOGY AS DEFAULT
William J. Kennedy (Comparative Literature)

6:30 BEGINNINGS – METHODOLOGY

IN E. R. CURTIUS AND ERICH AUERBACH

Paul Fleming (German Studies)

**TUESDAY,
SEPTEMBER 4**

4:45-7:00pm with reception to follow
A.D. White House

Approximately one hundred letters written by Parisian intellectuals, poets, and scholars to Ernst Curtius and Ernst Robert Curtius were recently catalogued and described in the Kroch Library. Please join us for an afternoon symposium to mark this find and to address the abiding significance of these two prominent European intellectuals.

Ernst Curtius (1814-1896) was an eminent philologist and archeologist at the Universities of Göttingen and Berlin, who led the famous excavations of the Olympia site in Greece.

His grandson, Ernst Robert Curtius (1886-1956), was one of the foremost literary scholars of the first half of the 20th century. Unique in producing path-breaking work on both Medieval and contemporary French literature, his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948) remains a classic in the field today.

All presentations moderated by

KITZER WALKER

Director of Collection Development

for Cornell University Library

Co-sponsored by
Institute for German Cultural Studies,
French Studies Program,

Cornell Institute for European Studies,
Dept. of German Studies,
and Dept. of Comparative Literature



Colloquium Series

Spring 2012

Zeitrechnung: Non-Canonical Events in Zsuzsa Bánk's *Der Schwimmer*

February 17, 2012

Katrina Nousek (Cornell) opened the Spring 2012 colloquium series with a paper entitled “Zeitrechnung: Non-Canonical Events in Zsuzsa Bánk’s *Der Schwimmer*” (2002), which approached aspects of time and narrative in the eponymous novel via the theoretical framework of postclassical narratology. Drawing primarily on David Herman’s work in *Story Logic:*

Problems and Possibilities of Narrative (2002) and *Basic Elements of Narrative* (2009), Nousek highlighted the concepts of “duration” and “non-canonical events” for her reading of narrative temporality in Bánk’s debut novel.

In conceptualizing duration in terms of narrative speed and as ascription of value, Nousek drew on both Gérard Genette’s original use of the term in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1972) in an attempt to relate the speed of a perceived event to the amount of narration devoted to it, as well as on Herman’s understanding of the term as a “metric of value or at least attentional prominence.” Nousek utilized the concept of duration in her close readings of different instances of prolonged narration as well as of the desire voiced by the “homodiegetic figural narrator” to slow down and even stop the flow of time. The non-canonical events, a term coined by Herman, refer to breaches in the constitutive laws of the storyworld. While attempting to explore the interplay of local and global events, of events that pertain to the microcosm inhabited by the main characters and major events inscribed in the grand historical narratives of the Cold War era, Nousek noted that only local events figure as non-canonical. Non-canonical events drive the narration by disrupting the order of the storyworld and influencing the reaction that should follow.

Often, the reaction translates into an explanatory effort meant to restabilize the storyworld and constitute a reordering of character constellations and their attendant narrative temporalities. In an effort to comprehend the storyworld after a non-canonical event, the figures often realign themselves within it. These explanatory narratives demand constant attempts at subjective alignment among multiple temporalities: collective, individual, official, etc. Nousek concluded that by avoiding inclusion of 1989 as the major event at the end of a historical development—conventionally regarded as the portal for accessing and understanding the Cold War era—Bánk highlights the need for a subjective *Zeitrechnung*. (Andreea Mascan)



Contingency as Media and Content in the 18th-Century Novel

March 9, 2012

Christina Lupton (University of Michigan) presented her paper “Contingency as Media and Content in the Eighteenth-Century Novel,” in which she proposed methods of approaching the eighteenth-century novel in light of its material qualities as codex and its narrative form and content. Lupton’s paper drew from both Luhmann’s Systems Theory and the narrative theories of David Wellbery, Michael Warner and Paul Fleming to explain how the novel can accommodate its fundamentally paradoxical nature: that it is bound and self-contained on the one hand, yet accessible to external intervention on the other.



Lupton understands this intersection similarly to the way Luhmann understands closed social systems, seeing the novel as a system that is simultaneously closed and open, necessary and contingent. Her paper thus summoned various examples of narrative engagement with the materiality of codex in the British eighteenth-century novel, which performatively point to the book’s characteristics as closed totality, confined by print and bound paper, but which through self-conscious reflection point to the possibility of readerly intervention (such as page-flipping) and to the surprising turns of plot. The novel, Lupton argued, is comprised of gaps and accidents generated by the process of content selection and rearrangement along a simulated axis of time, yet presents itself as a self-sufficient and organically complete closed system.

Lupton next addressed another paradox taken up by the eighteenth-century novel: marriage. As the event that motivates plot development while also bringing closure to the novels of the period, such as Fielding’s *Amelia* (1751), Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1799) and Nicolai’s *Das Leben und die Meinungen des Herrn Magister Sebaldus Nothanker* (1774), marriage dramatizes both its own and the novel’s paradoxical nature. Marriage pledges stability and the duration of a relationship, but at the same time thrives on the contingencies of everyday life and the emotional turmoil of intimacy. As an alternative engagement of form in her reading of marriage, Lupton included a discussion of the materiality of the book medium. She pointed out that Luhmann’s own discussion of love in *Liebe als Passion* (1982) emerges not only from literary analysis but also relies on media, implicitly the mass-printed book, which allows the novel to become a territory for the closed system of love. (Christine Schott)

Pfropfen als Schriftmetapher und Kulturmodell- Vorüberlegungen zu einer Greffologie

March 30, 2012

In “Pfropfen als Schriftmetapher und Kulturmodell: Vorüberlegungen zu einer Greffologie,” **Uwe Wirth** (Justus-Liebig Universität Gießen) explicated core concepts for the development of a critical *Greffologie*, illuminating certain paradigms in cultural studies motivated or influenced by the horticultural procedure of grafting, or *Pfropfung*. Grafting involves cutting or wounding a host organism in order to insert a sample from another organism for the profit or survival of both. It is closely related to hybridization, which mixes two species to produce a new, third entity. However, unlike hybridization, no genetic change occurs in the organism through grafting, and no further reproduction is possible. Professor Wirth thus contrasted the logic of hybridization with the logic of grafting: in the former, two elements become three; in the latter, two become one.



Wirth took his point of departure from Bruno Latour, who posits that nature and culture are not in a binary, but rather in a networked relationship as “Natur/Kultur.” Where modernity would seek to keep nature and culture clearly divided, such efforts only serve to expose their affiliations. For Wirth, the slash that seemingly divides nature and culture in this formulation is, in fact, the embodiment of *Propfung*, an intervening act or sideways cut that generates and networks knowledge. As experimental procedures, hybridization combines two disparate systems, while *Propfung* represents the moment in which new models are produced.

Grafting is also related to inoculation or immunization, through which a small sample of a virus is introduced to the human body, ensuring the survival of the host. Grafting and immunization have thus been viewed as the triumph of science over nature, representing the ability to control deadly outbreaks by imposing a human-controlled scale onto nature. In applying this model to the case of intercultural exchange, however, attention is drawn away from the wounded host and toward the products of exchange: hybrids. Wirth then elaborated on how models of hybridization and grafting interfere or coexist in writings on language ranging from Schleiermacher to Bakhtin.

Wirth finally emphasized the two generative cores of his project: first, *Natur/Kultur*, specifically the slash between them embodying the procedure of *Propfung*; and second, the interferences between models of *Propfung* and hybridization. The former intervenes where hybridization is insufficiently treated, expanding the field into a more variegated panorama of cultural paradigms. (Miyako Hayakawa)



Das Buch der Natur zitieren: Carl Schildbach und die Autorschaft von Holzbüchern

April 27, 2012

In her colloquium presentation entitled “Das *Buch der Natur* zitieren: Carl Schildbach und die Autorschaft von Holzbüchern,” **Sibylle Benninghof-Lühl** (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin) sought to expand the concept of legibility through an investigation of wood books, which are book-shaped boxes made entirely out of a single tree and contain inside them the tree in dried and prepared form. This three-dimensional content also often illustrated the various stages of the plant’s development.

Benninghof-Lühl concentrated her analysis on one of the richest and most skillfully prepared historical xylotheques of Germany, by Carl Schildbach (1730-1817), longtime keeper of count Friedrich II’s zoological gardens in Kassel and one of the greatest natural historians of Germany. The spines of Schildbach’s wood books were constructed from the bark of the tree from which the book was made and included a title that specified the tree’s biological classification in accordance with Linnaean taxonomy. The medium of the wood book, Benninghof-Lühl suggested, can revise the concept of the legibility of the world and of what has been called the “Book of Nature,” as expounded by such thinkers as E. Robert Curtius, Erich Rothacker and Hans Blumemberg. According to Benninghof-Lühl, the materiality of wood books as wood, wax, glass, and paper needs to be reconstructed, developed and reconceived in order to arrive at a new concept of legibility.

Wood books elicit the reading of irregularities, defects, and seams in that they continually call attention to their materiality, making their readers “stumble.” They therefore blur the boundary between the book and the non-book. Moreover, because of the craftsmanship they demand and their claim to re-presenting even extinct plant species, they also force us to revise inherited concepts of authorship, representation and mimesis within the context of the book’s relationship to nature. Benninghof-Lühl finally proposed that the “Book of Nature” was more than a metaphor, and that wood books set in motion the materialization of this metaphor. (Gizem Arslan)



Wittgenstein among the Disciplines

April 21, 2012

The symposium "Wittgenstein among the Disciplines," organized by Gizem Arslan (Cornell) and Althea Sircar (UCLA), opened with a panel of cross-disciplinary "Conversations." These presentations demonstrated approaches to Wittgenstein's work through the respective disciplinary practices of philosophy, literary criticism and political science, while also exploring the ways in which Wittgenstein and his interlocutors enrich debates within each respective discipline.

Zach Abrahams (Cornell) began the conversation with his presentation, "Wittgenstein and Radical Contextualism." Abrahams described Wittgenstein's influence in the fields of philosophy and linguistics by tracing the tension between Formalist and Anti-Formalist approaches to language and meaning, or Formalism and Pragmatism. For Abrahams, this trajectory within intra-disciplinary discourse leads to a radical contextualism, or radical pragmatics, championed by Charles Travis among others.

Jacob Brogan (Cornell) presented on "Fragments, in Conversation," in which he engaged the formal and fragmentary aspects of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) and its ramifications for a broader program for literary criticism. Brogan first interrogated Stanley Cavell's assertion that criticism "[makes] its object available to just response," and the subsequent conclusion that Wittgenstein's text prompts readers to produce this "just response." Brogan argued further that the fragmentary, citational and dialogic form of the *Investigations* teaches readers how to read fragments as fundamentally conversational. He departed from Cavell's description of the text as "aphoristic," however, to allow for myriad possibilities, in accordance with Wittgenstein's dictum to "see connections." When Wittgenstein theorizes his own style, he describes his writing as sketching and his book as an album. Brogan observed that this type of album is concerned with the relationality of images, concluding his presentation with a reading of Marie-François Plissart's photographic work, *Right of Inspection* (1999), as well as Jacques Derrida's

"reading" of the work, published



Arslan

simultaneously.

Althea Sircar concluded the conversation with her paper, "Perilous Possibility: Wittgensteinian Political Theory." Sircar defined Wittgensteinian "peril" as "gentle danger," a seemingly innocuous threat, and then probed the repercussions of "perilous possibilities" within the context of political theory. She then brought her analysis of Wittgensteinian humanism—aware of potential danger and cognizant of its own frailty—into dialogue with several critics whose work questions the category of the human for contemporary social and political situations. Cary Wolfe's work on posthumanism, for example, points out the human-centeredness of the designation "we," which dominates most rights discourse but is destabilized by alternate possibilities, such as the category of the animal. To allow for increased possibilities in political subjectivity, Aletta Norval emphasizes "aspect-seeing" or "aspect-shifting," which Sircar posited as akin to Hannah Arendt's term "natality." Sircar emphasized natality because it warns of the possibility of danger, even in moments when humankind endeavors to start anew. Nevertheless, most of the models presented still propagated a type of inclusion that positioned the human subject at its center. Sircar thus finally warned against forgetting the possibility of violence and of human frailty in any "grammar of politics": remaining open to "perilous

possibility" and aware of human finitude allows for autocritical engagement as human subjects. (Miyako Hayakawa)



Sircar

Professor Martin Puchner's (Harvard University) keynote address, "Wittgenstein and his Literary Heirs," primarily examined Wittgenstein's impact on his "literary heirs" from the 1950s up through the 1990s. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1918) is often viewed as both a literary and philosophical work, but for Puchner, this statement has often overdetermined the way that Wittgenstein relates to literature.

Instead, Puchner identified a range of authors who were struck by Wittgenstein's form and style, which they, in turn, attempted to fold into their own literature. The first was Iris Murdoch, whose debut novel *Under the Net* (1954) features a Wittgenstein-like character. Puchner characterized the novel as being entranced with dialogue. The character resembling Wittgenstein is a figure with charisma and mystique, but is also presented in a generic way as someone who struggles for and against language. The next literary response Puchner looked at was Thomas Bernhard's novel *Korrektur* (1975), where Wittgenstein appears under the guise of Ludwig Roithamer. Here, the emphasis is placed on family background, capturing the figure of Wittgenstein in his perfectionism and his relationship to Austria. As with Murdoch, however, Bernhard engages Wittgenstein at the level of form and language. The next case study was Tom Stoppard's

play *Dogg's Hamlet* (1979). This play is taken directly from a scene in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*; it features two characters, designated "A" and "B," and concerns the relation between their spoken conversation and the materials in their surroundings. Stoppard explores the possibility that the objects stand for words—none of the words that "A" and "B" utter have any relation to the actual work of building, which they are engaged in during the



Puchner

scene. But while the scene from which the play is drawn is about the relation between words and actions, Stoppard is primarily interested in the moment of miscommunication. The play thus reflects, Puchner argued, the dramatic current of Wittgenstein's later work.

The late group of heirs Puchner considered consisted mostly of North Americans working in the medium of poetry. Jan Zwicky's *Wittgenstein Elegies* (1986) draws heavily on Wittgenstein's lexicon while maintaining a fascination with the person of Wittgenstein himself. Rosemarie Waldrop's *The Reproduction of Profiles* (1987) contains prose poems that draw on and add to Wittgenstein's metaphors, bending his questions in other directions. Jorie Graham's *Materialism* (1993), meanwhile, works in quotes from the history of philosophy. Puchner concluded with a scene from Peter Forgács's 1992 film *Wittgenstein Tractatus*, which explores language by imposing upon its images a textual overlay. (Alex Phillips)

NEW FACULTY PROFILE:



Claudia Verhoeven
Department of History

Claudia Verhoeven joined Cornell's History department in 2009. She is a historian of modern Russia and Europe whose primary research interest is the history of terrorism and global revolutionary culture. Her first book, *The Odd Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity, and the Birth of Terrorism* (2009), is a cultural micro-history of the first attempted assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1866. She is also the co-editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism*. This year she

will be a fellow at the Society for the Humanities, where she will be developing a project on terrorism, modernism, and time under the working title of *Revolutionary Adventurism*. She also retains a strong interest in German Studies that dates back two decades. As a philosophy major at UC Berkeley, she was especially interested in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German thought; from 1994-1996 she lived in Berlin and studied at the Humboldt University; as a graduate student at UCLA, before switching to Russian history, she was for three years committed to the study of *Germanistik* and twice attended the School of Criticism and Theory to participate in German-themed seminars (Fredric Jameson's seminar on Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and Robert Pippin and David Wellbery's seminar on "Theorizing Modernism: Philosophy and Criticism"). In the future she hopes to integrate her interests in German and Russian Studies further (perhaps, for example, by writing on Benjamin's time in Moscow) and to work more closely with both faculty and students in Cornell's Department of German Studies.



INSTITUTE FOR GERMAN CULTURAL STUDIES

FALL 2012 COLLOQUIUM SERIES

FRIDAYS @ 3PM

181 GOLDWIN SMITH HALL except 10/19

August 24

CARL GELDERLOOS

German Studies, Cornell University

"Simply Reproducing Reality":

Brecht, Benjamin, and Renger-Patzsch on Photography

September 7

ULRIKE VEDDER

Institut für Neuere Deutsche Literatur, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

**Jungesellen in Literatur
und Wissenschaften des 19. Jahrhunderts**

September 28

B. VENKAT MANI

German and Global Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Shelf Lives of Books:

Libraries and the Institutionalization of World Literature

October 19

N.B. 201 AD White House

HELMUT WALSER SMITH

History and European Studies, Vanderbilt University

The Shape of Nineteenth-Century Germany

co-sponsored by Dept. of History and

Cornell Institute for European Studies

November 30

CHRISTIANE FREY

German Literature & History of Science, Princeton University

**Leibniz and the Aesthetics of the
Infinitely Small**





Fall 2012

Calendar of Events



SEPT. 4

EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENCES:

A SYMPOSIUM ON ERNST CURTIUS AND ERNST ROBERT CURTIUS

Organized by Paul Fleming and Laurent Ferri

4:45-7pm AD WHITE HOUSE

Reception to follow

SEPT. 11

THE GERMAN LITERARY ARCHIVE AT MARBACH

ROLAND KAMZELAK (Director of Development, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach)

4:30pm AD WHITE HOUSE

Reception to follow

SEPT. 21-22

GLOBAL ANARCHISMS: No GODS, No MASTERS, No PERIPHERIES

Conference organized by the Institute for Comparative Modernities

MULTIPURPOSE ROOM, AFRICANA STUDIES & RESEARCH CENTER

OCT. 26-28

THE HISTORY, THEORY & AESTHETICS OF THE MUSICAL CANON

Festival & Conference Honoring James Webster

LOCATION TBA

Nov. 1-3

WALTER BENJAMIN: ARCHITECTURE, MEDIA, ARCHIVE

Conference organized by Peter Gilgen (Cornell University) and

Karl von Solibakke (Syracuse University)

LOCATION TBA



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Additional information about all events listed is available on our website: www.arts.cornell.edu/igcs. Event listings will be updated throughout the semester. If you would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact Olga Petrova (ogp2@cornell.edu).

Archived copies of past newsletters are available electronically at <http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/10777>

Contributions to German Culture News are welcome. If you would like an event listed or have a brief review or article to submit, please contact Olga Petrova (ogp2@cornell.edu).