

German Culture News

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Martin Luther King in East and West Berlin : Analysis of an Itinerary (1964)

November 29, 2017

On November 29th, 2017, **Michael P. Steinberg** (President of the American Academy in Berlin and Director of the Cogut Center for the Humanities at Brown University) presented on Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1964 visit to Berlin. Peter Hohendahl, the Jacob Gould Schurmann Professor of German and Comparative Literature and founding director of the IGCS, introduced Steinberg's talk which marked the 25th Anniversary of the IGCS.

previous conference Steinberg organized at Brown University and his work at the American Academy in Berlin. Exploring the implications of King's visit for both the U.S. and Germany, Steinberg opened up new pathways for future research into the topic. He was interested in the impact of King's religious thought, especially the question of Christianity as a unifying force against all walls and divisions, whether North and South or East and West, and also the many forms of human suffering that emerged from the legacy of the

but, as Steinberg stressed, less discriminatory history of African Americans in Germany when compared to the U.S.

The discussion that followed Steinberg's lecture was equally vibrant and elucidating, and included questions about research into the Stasi archives as a possible way to gain new perspectives into the social policies that were deployed in the GDR. Other questions addressed King's own strategies and political agenda in making his two speeches in East Berlin, and the kind



Steinberg spoke about the transatlantic relations of public humanities through the lens of Martin Luther King Jr. in Cold War Berlin. Even though this was Steinberg's first public presentation on the subject, his insight into the nuances of complex social histories captured the audience's attention and generated a lively discussion. Steinberg noted that very little has been written on Martin Luther King Jr.'s visit to Berlin and that more work still needs to be done on the subject. The talk at Cornell followed up from a

American Civil War and the Cold War. In East Berlin, King delivered two sermons, the first at the Marienkirche and the second at the Sophienkirche, both, to our knowledge, improvised for the occasion. King's Berlin sermons were all the more important as they took place at a time when the civil rights movement was dominating U.S. headlines. Steinberg related King's Berlin sermons to the struggles of African Americans in the U.S., where racial violence was surging, and concluded that King aligned himself with a troublesome,

of intellectual framework that would be needed to encompass such a multifaceted historical event. There was also some discussion about the implications that King's Berlin visit had for historiography, including the relationship between what Steinberg called "the micro-history of King's visit to Berlin" and "the macro-history of the Cold War." This stimulated many reflections on doing historical research differently due to the multiplicity and multilayered significations of Steinberg's research. (Søren Larsen)

Word from the Director

By Patrizia C. McBride

I am delighted to begin my tenure as the fifth director of the Institute for German Studies this fall (2018). I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the colleagues who preceded me in this office: Peter U. Hohendahl, the Institute's founder, as well as Leslie Adelson, Paul Fleming, and Peter Gilgen. I am eager to build on their outstanding work as highlighted by the year-long celebration of the Institute's twenty-fifth jubilee during academic year 2017-18. As I turn to colleagues in the humanities and the social sciences at Cornell and beyond for support in charting a path forward, I am eager to continue the rigorous interdisciplinary engagement that has made the Institute a beacon of inquiry in the German intellectual tradition and the humanities more generally. Over the years the Institute's commitment to Critical Theory has made it hospitable to continental and social theory in addition to the essential work of the Frankfurt School, and I look forward to continue drawing on this vital intellectual tradition.

In Fall 2018 the Institute will be home to an exciting medley of initiatives and events. In September 2018 it will host a two-day international conference on "Expertise and Authority" sponsored

by the Thematic Network "Literature, Knowledge, Media," a collaborative initiative of the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Cornell, Harvard, New York University, Princeton, Yale, and the University of California, Berkeley. The conference, which I co-organized with Paul Fleming (Professor of German and Comparative Literature and Taylor Family Director of Cornell's Society for the Humanities) will bring together faculty and doctoral students to discuss the relationship between expertise and authority within an interdisciplinary framework that draws on literature, philosophy, the history of science, political economy, and media studies. We are especially pleased to have Joseph Vogl, Professor of German Literature and Media and Cultural Studies at the Humboldt Universität, speak about "The Strange Survival of Theodicy in Economics" in his keynote lecture. In October 2018 the Institute will welcome another major international conference organized by Leslie A. Adelson, the Jacob Gould Schurman Professor of German Studies at Cornell. The event, "Alexander Kluge: New Perspectives on Creative Arts and Critical Practice," will delve into the work of German multimedia artist and storyteller Alexander Kluge, one of Germany's leading intellectual voices. Besides talks by a wide array of

American and international scholars, the conference will feature special presentations by Alexander Kluge via remote technology, a showing of his "Experimental Minute Films" at Cornell Cinema, and a literary reading by MacArthur Fellow Ben Lerner, who has recently co-authored *The Snows of Venice* with Kluge.

Looking ahead to Spring 2019, we are especially excited to partner with the Cherry Arts, a non-profit company created by Ithaca-area professional theater artists, to host Rebekka Kricheldorf in February as our 2019 Artist in Residence. A celebrated playwright, Kricheldorf will visit Ithaca on occasion of the English-language premiere of her play *Testosterone* at the Cherry Artspace (February 21-March 3). Featured events will include a conversation with translator Neil Blackadder.

These are only a few highlights on this year's packed event calendar. For a complete schedule of our initiatives, including our bi-weekly colloquia and the many events co-sponsored by IGCS, please check our website <https://igcs.cornell.edu/>. Please contact Olga Petrova (ogp2@cornell.edu) if you would like to receive regular e-mail updates through the IGCS listserve.

Call for Submissions

The Peter Uwe Hohendahl Graduate Essay Prize in Critical Theory

The Institute for German Cultural Studies is pleased to announce its 2018 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.

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. Only one submission per person. The author of the winning essay will be awarded a prize of \$250.

Essays may be up to 25 double-spaced pages in length. **Please submit your essay via email attachment. In the body of the email please include your name, the essay title, your department, and your email address.** The essay itself should have a title but not include your name anywhere. *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>.*

The Peter Uwe Hohendahl Graduate Essay Prize in Critical Theory is made possible by a generous gift from an anonymous donor.

Flanking Maneuvers: Laterales Denken

April 13-14, 2018

Panel 1

On April 13th & 14th, 2018, Cornell's Department of German Studies hosted its Graduate Student Conference *Flanking Maneuvers: Laterales Denken*. The subject of the first panel was the in-between of fiction and faction, friction and fraction, picture and depicted, stage and audience. Attempting to overcome these divisions, conference participants reflected on potential strategies that could help to bridge the praxis of differentiation and shape an understanding of the lateral. However, shifting these relations also enabled conference participants to question scenic devices, descriptions, and figurations of inclusion and exclusion. The panel explored the epistemic potential of what might be conceived as "lateral thinking" and showed what a lateral reading of culture might look like.

In the first presentation, **Annekatriin Sommer** (Cornell) elaborated her research on *Kippfiguren* in which she analyzed post-Oedipal narratives through the lens of multistable perception. After elaborating on the visual phenomenon of ambiguous images, Sommer discussed optical illusions that permit two distinct images to share the same composition. This doubling effect forces the brain to make a decision between the two images, evoking an oscillating effect of multistability. Sommer went on to discuss the epistemological potential of the *Kippfigur* as a heuristic for approaching literature. Central to Sommer's presentation were the questions of how to identify literary texts that contain *Kippfiguren* and the benefits that can be gained by applying this approach to the study of literature and visual culture. It is conceivable that both manifestations of the image have an equal ontological claim within a given environment—an outcome that effectively subverts any temptation to think of the images in a hierarchical framework.

The second presenter, **Hannah Fissenebert** (HU Berlin/ UC Berkeley), re-examined the use of spatial metaphors to show how they qualify as "paradigmatic modes of thinking." According to Fissenebert, time and space are essential for the narration and figuration of dramatic works. Space seems to hold a privileged position within drama theories

insofar as the poetological dimensions are expressed through metaphors like 'anatomy,' 'tectonic,' or 'architecture.' Fissenebert observed that neither the temporal aspects of drama narratives, nor the temporality of theater itself have played a crucial role in developing a theoretical vocabulary for the theater. In an effort to reconsider the conceptual structures that permeate drama theory, Fissenebert proposed a different, lateral approach to these texts, which would privilege a genealogical mode of engaging their paradigmatic metaphors.

The final presenter of this panel, **Arne Sander** (HU Berlin/ Cornell), discussed notions of decontextualizing time and space with the help of new technologies. His talk aimed at a conscious engagement with the time, temporality, and contemporaneity of images. By emphasizing the spatiotemporal dimensions of art works and literature, which in some moments would merge indiscernibly, Sander showed how notions of "the real," "the truthful," or "the genuine" are being destabilized by new technologies. The current and the virtual are being superimposed; they appear merely as simulacra. Yet, according

works of art that oppose and problematize vertical and binary orders of knowledge and thereby indicate a paradigmatic shift, most prominently embodied through the use of drone warfare post- 9/11.

"As the ubiquitous vision and remote engagement of drones redefine contemporary policing and warfare, their impact is filtering into art and visual culture, generating new investigations into issues of visibility, technology and fear," Braeunert argued, and revealed the unique potential of art to further our understanding of, and give visual form to, modern drone warfare and digital surveillance. She illuminated how art participates in a far-reaching discussion about the rapidly shifting conditions of perception – of seeing, and being seen – made possible by advanced technology.

Braeunert's analysis concentrated on two artworks by Louise Lawler and Hito Steyerl and their specific use of visual techniques of distortion such as anamorphosis, or apophenia, to show the impact of drone warfare and how it embodies the condensations and displacements of the current technological disposition.



Sommer, Fissenebert, Sander

to Sander, a critical consideration "from the margins" might offer a perspective that historicizes these impositions and constructions within a constantly shifting episteme. (Marius Reisener)

The first conference day ended with a grand finale. The keynote lecture "Nebenschauplätze: Looking Askew in Contemporary Art" presented by Prof. **Svea Braeunert** from the University of Cincinnati turned to contemporary visual

Louise Lawler's *No Drones* pictures *Mustang-Staffel* (*Mustang Squadron*), a 1964 painting by the German artist Gerhard Richter that depicts a group of Mustang bombers, the planes that were used by Allied forces to help defeat the Nazis in World War II. Lawler photographed the painting at an oblique angle so that we see the hanging device attached to the stretcher bars behind the canvas. The title of the work is both a literalism (there were no drones during World War II) and a contemporary call to end the production and use of airborne instruments of war.

Anamorphosis is a distorted projection or perspective requiring the viewer to use special devices or occupy a specific vantage point to reconstitute a hidden or otherwise indecipherable image. The use of anamorphic images in Louise Lawler's work questions the idea of linear perspective, unsettling the viewing subject and the idea of a central or even certain point of view. There is no fixed position, only fractured, multiplied and polyvalent positions. The

viewing subject is forced to give up its visual mastery. Its own position begins to shift, which leads to uncertainty and discomfort.

The work by Hito Steyerl's that Braeunert discussed, depicts an image from the Snowden files of an aerial attack in Gaza. It is labeled "secret". Yet one cannot see anything on it. Rather, it turns blindness into an image.

Steyerl argues that "[n]ot seeing anything intelligible is the new normal. [...] Seeing is superseded by calculating probabilities. Vision loses importance and is replaced by filtering, decrypting, and pattern recognition. Snowden's image of noise could stand in for a more general human inability to perceive technical signals unless they are processed and translated accordingly" (Steyerl, *A Sea of Data*). The drone war is a secret and invisible war; its secrecy is based on invisibility—an invisibility that is tied to the exceptional conditions of such warfare. As a consequence, one of the pressing questions is how to visualize civilian victims of drone strikes.

The role of the witness of the conditions of warfare, which are conditions of urgency that put into question documentary trust and also the possibility of action and agency (specifically of active aesthetic agency) coincides with the decision to give visibility

into the open and reflected upon by exploring ways of making the unseen visible. Artists construe the drone both in terms of an object, a thing to be looked at, and as a subject, a viewing machine that facilitates looking.

Both Lawler and Steyerl question the alleged certainty of central perspective and vertical positions, thereby shifting our common understanding and opening up new meanings: what has hitherto remained unseen can thus come into view. Braeunert interpreted their art works as metapictures or images that show us how to see the world through the lens of lateral thinking and counteract the obfuscation of the brutal hierarchies characteristic of contemporary warfare. (Annekatriin Sommer)

Panel 2

On Saturday, April 14th, the 2018 German Graduate Student Conference *Flanking Maneuvers: Laterales Denken* kicked off its second day with a panel on "Flanking History." After the opening panel and keynote lecture the previous afternoon, this panel turned its attention from questions of visibility to historical philosophical and political problems in 18th and 19th century literature, keeping in mind keynote speaker Svea Braeunert's invitation to consider how literary analysis might profit from

media technologies and forms of social-media participation of their day. Thus, both Klopstock and Trump generated a new socially-acknowledged power independent of traditional institutional authority. Klopstock, argued Calla, confronts in his *Gelehrtenrepublik* the absence of a contemporaneous audience who recognize charismatic (poetic) leadership, priming them effectively to do so by reconfiguring channels of media distribution in such a way that Klopstock becomes directly linked to his readers and they to one another. This was achieved mainly through a subscription service garnering 3,480 subscribers whose names Klopstock printed in the distributed text. Like Klopstock's *Gelehrtenrepublik*, Twitter represents an audience's reactions to itself in the form of likes and comments. Trump's Twitter strategy exploits this potential of the medium to represent charisma by making controversial statements that elicit a barrage of positive and negative responses represented alongside all posts, demonstrating Trump's effectiveness to his audience and confirming his authority. Calla concluded that the comparison with Klopstock ultimately suggests that Trump's use of Twitter is not primarily about offering "alternative facts" to those found in traditional news media, but rather about utilizing the potential of social media to represent socially-acknowledged power or charismatic authority. This argument reveals authoritarian potential behind a medium typically praised for its democratizing structure.

Luke Rylander's talk, "Vital Aesthetics: Schiller's Appropriation of Vitalism in *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*," traced the historical change between Plato and Schiller in the relationship between the political and moral value of art and Idealist epistemology, finding that while for the former they were incompatible, for the latter they were necessary bedfellows. The explanation for this difference, Rylander argued, lies in the fact that for Schiller the nascent discourse of vitalism accomplished a previously implausible reconciliation between Idealism and Art through new notions of biological development and *Bildung*. Rylander showed how, starting with Blumenbach around 1780, the vitalist movement in natural science revolutionized discourses on form, replacing older mechanistic models with concepts of form as autopoietic emergence and expressions of vital forces. This argument stressed the debt of Schiller's moral philosophy not so much to Kant's critical work, as per received scholarly accounts, but rather to new natural-scientific thinking that was to be called "biological" after 1800. In both Rylander's and Calla's talks, the topos of laterality was addressed through historical cross-linking as well as methodological intersecting. (Juan-Jacques Aupiais)



Holeczy, Burnett, Stapelfeldt

to that which is sublimated by war and death. An asymmetrical scopic regime thus becomes the visual manifestation of an asymmetrical war in which the power to see without being seen is supplemented with the power to harm without being harmed. In short, drone warfare creates a hierarchy, a vertical typology that changes the way enemies are being seen. Approaching from above, the attacker is neither face to face with them, nor on the same ground. Hovering above the enemies leads to a different attitude towards them. The tight connection between drone warfare, asymmetrical warfare, and the concomitant asymmetry of looking supports the definition of drone warfare as a specific scopic regime, which can best be brought

lateral engagements with visual studies. The panel featured two speakers: **Matteo Calla** (Cornell) and **Luke Rylander** (Indiana University, Bloomington). Calla's talk, "Charismatic Media: Klopstock's *Gelehrtenrepublik* / Trump's Twitter," opened with an analysis of charisma in the political thought of Max Weber and went on to investigate appropriations and transformations of Weberian charisma in two political and medial contexts: Klopstock in 18th century Germany and Trump in contemporary America. Calla was able to show how Trump and Klopstock have in common—surprisingly, but vitally—certain "innovative" and effective rhetorical strategies for appropriating the cutting-edge

The Aesthetics & Theology of the St. Matthew Passion: Bach and Blumenberg

March 9, 2018

On Friday March 9th, 2018, Professor **Paul Fleming** (Cornell) kicked off the conference *The Aesthetics & Theology of the St. Matthew Passion: Bach and Blumenberg* with an invigorating talk entitled “Messianic Minimalism: Anecdotes of the Coming World (Benjamin, Bloch, Blumenberg).” The talk set the stage for a full day of dialogue around German philosopher Hans Blumenberg’s monumental study *Matthäuspassion* (currently being translated into English by Fleming and his collaborator Helmut Müller-Sievers). Fleming began by addressing the book’s peculiarities. Though putatively about Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, Blumenberg’s *Matthäuspassion* tends more to circle around Bach’s work than directly engage with it, taking as its object not the particularity of Bach’s music, libretto, or even intellectual-historical context (a “triple-neglect” for Fleming), but rather, the relationship of the listener as a figure of analysis to the Protestant artwork as such. In addressing this question Blumenberg pursues a distinct style: essayistic, musing, anecdotal, lacking any common thread or systematic argument. For Fleming, this choice of style is purposeful and programmatic, reminiscent of the late Adorno. Fleming argued that due to Blumenberg’s formal strategy, the book does not seek the historical meaning of or truth behind Bach’s oratorio, just as the oratorio does not represent the truth or historical meaning of the gospel. Instead, for Blumenberg, the oratorio addresses itself to a new listener and helps to create this new listener who is perforce a new Christian hearing a new gospel for himself, in true Lutheran fashion. Likewise Blumenberg’s book seeks a form of writing that performs for a new readership as the oratorio must perform for a new listenership. In Fleming’s argument, Blumenberg’s project is modeled in the theological and critical work of Benjamin, Bloch, and Scholem. These thinkers enquired into how a new *Kunstmythos* (Benjamin) could represent an alternative messianism, a Jewish messianism in a Christian or secular world, but a messianism that would have to be so compatible with our current world that it would have to be directly adjacent to it in the realm of possibility. This “minimal messianism” would pair with an aesthetic strategy of detours, small diversions, and lapses to find that almost-immanent soteriological potential it desires. Such, concludes Fleming, is Blumenberg’s plan for Bach. The philosopher asks through the composer: what would the music of messianic minimalism

sound like? (Juan-Jacques Aupiais)

Peter Uwe Hohendahl (Cornell University) presented his paper, “Against Kerygma: Blumenberg’s Critique of Rudolf Bultmann,” in which he explored Blumenberg’s criticism of the Protestant theologian Rudolf Bultmann. Blumenberg judged Bultmann’s interpretation of the New Testament, especially the passion narratives, as misguided. Hohendahl examined Blumenberg’s main objection, which concerns the idea (advocated by Bultmann) that contemporary religious belief needs the New Testament to be demythologized in order to make its underlying rational truth more easily accessible to modern readers and listeners.

Bultmann understood this as being vital for the reception of the New Testament. Blumenberg, however, disagrees and instead emphasizes the importance of the gospels remaining within their narrative context so that the rich particularity of their truths does not become unrecognizable through a process of abstraction—a process that Blumenberg took as essential for the modern reception of religion. Consequently, Blumenberg rejected Bultmann’s rigid distinction between myth and science and, on the contrary, supported the claim that the two are entangled. Bultmann’s aim had been to distance himself from historicist interpretations of the New Testament that tended to relativize religious truth. For him, stripping the myth from the gospels helped to restore a more universal sense of truth that he believed would be appealing to our modern scientific age. In contrast, Blumenberg calls for a return to a strictly historicist approach. He views myth as a form of knowledge still relevant for the modern age. For Blumenberg, the mythological elements of the New Testament are not incompatible with the idea of truth, whether in the theological, scientific, or some other sense. According to Hohendahl, Blumenberg simply rejected Bultmann’s distinction between myth and science, and instead looked for the legitimacy of myth in the meaning and significance that is the result of its interpretation. Hohendahl also noted how Blumenberg distanced himself from Bultmann’s conception of faith as a personal decision and thus as separate from the tradition of the Church. (Arne Sander)

as the basis for discussion and helped prepare audience members for the performance of Bach’s oratorio on May 5. Professors **Annette Richards** and **David Yearsley** (Cornell) from the Department of Music presented a talk titled “According to Matthew: Anecdote, Epic and the Great Passion.” Richards and Yearsley argued that the *real* Matthew was reanimated by anecdotes. For example, the annotations of Anna Magdalena Bach were rich in anecdotes, some of which provided details of the “writing hand” and eyes of the composer. This monumental work requiring two orchestras and two choirs was definitely a collective work even in the making. Richards and Yearsley not only demonstrated the well-known contributions of Anna Magdalena, but also the pre-existence of most of the chorales, which were part of the Saint Thomas Church repertoire until their unification in Bach’s *oratorium*. Richards and Yearsley also showed the signatures of Bach’s musical movements and actually offered an opportunity to experience their richest transformation as a musical body at their organ performance of March 23 at Anabel Taylor Hall Chapel.

At the conference on Bach and Blumenberg, Richards and Yearsley had presented samples of the *St. Matthew Passion* performed by the Berlin Philharmonic. Yet, those who attended the Bailey Hall performance on May 5, were elated and had nothing to regret. Robert Issacs, director of The Cornell Chorus & Glee Club collaborated with six world-class vocal soloists and thirty professional early music specialists from the NYS Baroque to present Bach’s musical rendition of the *St. Matthew Passion*. Bach is said to have felt that this epic, heartfelt oratorio was his finest piece, and many since that time have called it the single greatest work in the western canon. The Cornell Music Department went on to note that Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* had not been performed at Cornell for more than sixty years. (Mariaenrica Giannuzzi)



At the conference *The Aesthetics & Theology of The Saint Matthew Passion: Bach & Blumenberg*, excerpts of Bach’s music served

Artist in Residence: Clemens J. Setz

April 16-27, 2018

Literary Reading

In the first of three events during his time at Cornell as writer-in-residence, **Clemens J. Setz** gave a literary reading on April 18th. Setz is a highly acclaimed Austrian writer whose most recent publications include the novels *Indigo* (shortlisted for the German Book Prize in 2012), *Die Stunde zwischen Frau und Gitarre* (winner of the Wilhelm Raabe Prize in 2015), and *Bot* (2018). Setz read numerous short texts that were published for the most part in his most recent book *Bot: Gespräch ohne Autor*, an experimental work that was culled from his notebooks. The topics and themes of these entries vary widely, ranging from a radical re-interpretation of Rilke's famous poem "Der Panther," to the description of a hunt in Tokyo for fish said to have been born in space, and even to the discovery of odd words that have no legitimate etymology in literary lexicons and dictionaries. Though the texts themselves were all written and read in their original German, Setz filled in the spaces between the texts with anecdotes and remarks in a mix of German and English.

Bot takes as its starting point the notion that an official interview with an author can often become stifling. When Setz was asked to participate in a book-length interview, he made it clear that a different format was needed. He decided to send the interviewer all of his journals and notes (numbering a few thousand pages) and let her find his answers to her questions by searching through the digital documents for suitable words and themes. *Bot* was born of Setz's fascination with Philip K. Dick's robot "Philip" that was created after Dick's death, and whose "brain" was filled with all the texts he had ever written. People would ask the robot questions and it would search around for key words. At one point the robot malfunctioned and was not able to stop speaking, but instead of stopping the event, programmers just turned the volume down when a question was asked and then turned it back up in mid-sentence to let Philip "answer." This robot strongly influenced Setz's notion of authorship. He expressed his hope that "maybe if I write enough, people will speak to me after I die."

During the discussion that followed, many questions circled around Setz's idea of authorship and the relationship of an author to his/her influences, whether literary or not. Setz's responses were filled with colorful anecdotes. In keeping with his notion of authorship, Setz claimed: "I am not the best

authority on my own influences." Setz also proposed an aesthetics of connectivity, when describing fungus as displaying internet-like structures and pathways. Asked whether Setz had ever attempted to introduce "fake" words into the German language, he said that he had not, but that he had once attempted to change the atomic weight of Cesium on its Wikipedia page, in order to see whether anyone would actually notice. After a day or two, someone did, and they changed it back. With regard to his own Wikipedia page and his biography, Setz claimed to "have no biography." If someone were to change things on his page, it would probably go unnoticed. From this Setz drew the conclusion: "I don't matter as much as Cesium," and brought the discussion to a fitting close. (Daniel Binswanger Friedman)

Compact Seminar

On April 23, 2018, the German Department's writer-in-residence **Clemens J. Setz** held a compact seminar that was dedicated to lyric poetry and especially to poems that had had a significant impact on Setz's own mode of writing. Known primarily for his novels and other works of fiction, Setz has also published a volume of poetry. The poems that Setz chose for the seminar gave him an opportunity to demonstrate his expertise in working across different literary genres as well as his meticulous attention to detail as a reader. In his remarks, Setz focused on the materiality and creative use of language. The many texts selected for the seminar included a number of Ernst Jandl's sound poems, which were juxtaposed to poems from Jandl's lesser known contemporaries Ernst Herbeck and Edmund Mach. Setz also examined a poem written phonetically in a regional dialect by Christine Nöstlinger and some of the early writings by Werner Herzog, the famous film *auteur*. Setz concluded the compact seminar with a discussion of contemporary German-language twitter poets Kurt Prödel and Luni. The lively discussion focused on questions of authorship and the Austrian literary tradition as distinct from its German counterpart. (Sophia Léonard)

Frühe und späte Spiele: Von Samuel Delany zu Jason Rohrer

On April 25th, 2018, writer-in-residence **Clemens J. Setz** was invited by the Institute for German Cultural Studies 2018 to conclude this year's series of events with his lecture on contemporary aesthetics. In his lecture, entitled "Frühe und späte Spiele: Von Samuel Delany zu Jason Rohrer" ("Early and Late Games: From Samuel Delany to Jason Rohrer"), Setz sketched the development of

his personal "aesthetic coordinate system" by reflecting on the American writer Samuel Delany's novels and the computer games of Jason Rohrer, one of the foremost game developers of the 21st century (and a Cornell alumnus). Setz opened his lecture by recounting his experience reading Samuel Delany's 2012 novel *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, especially the profound sadness he felt after reading the end of the novel on New Year's Eve in 2012. When playing Jason Rohrer's game *Passage*, Setz noted that he experienced precisely the



same emotion that had taken hold of him after finishing Delany's novel, a feeling he described as "being dunked into the element in which I am forced to exist: time." Rohrer's *Passage* is an 8-bit game in which the character moves through life in a minimalist design setting, either individually or together with a partner, collects points, overcomes obstacles, ages, and finally dies. For Setz this perfectly captures human existence. In what followed, Setz not only discussed several other games by Jason Rohrer, whom he referred to as "the Rimbaud of game design," but also games like TETRIS, which he called "a metaphor for *something* whose significance is continually increasing" ("eine in ihrer Bedeutung ständig zunehmende Metapher für irgend etwas"). In drawing attention to computer games as an art form that reflects and captures the human experience of time and, moreover, provides further possibilities for experiencing time, life, and death, Clemens J. Setz addressed a fascinating dimension of contemporary culture in a compelling lecture that left the audience both deeply moved and eager to engage in further discussion. (Matthias Müller)

Retrospective: Fall 2017

Colloquium Series

Historicism, Anthropology and Goethe's Idea of World Literature

August 25, 2017

On August 25, 2017, **Stephen Klemm** (Cornell) presented his paper "Historicism, Anthropology and Goethe's Idea of World Literature," which offers a focused



interpretation of Goethe's views on *Weltliteratur* in light of his emerging historicist world view. In his conversations with Eckermann, Goethe states that the epoch of world literature has arrived, yet in evaluating national literatures we must still always look back to the Greeks insofar as their works exemplify the concept of beauty. In the responses to this statement, Klemm saw two opposing interpretations: (1) world literature as closely linked to neo-classicism, and alternatively (2) world literature not as classicist, but as a new kind of worldwide literary communication. Addressing this ambiguity, Klemm argued that Goethe's term is not neo-classical, but instead indicates a historicist shift in Goethe's thinking about literature and culture, which is further reflected in his philosophy of nature. From the standpoint of natural philosophy, literature comes to be seen as a product of nature and therefore conditioned by the environment in which it is produced. Given this position, Klemm argued that the concept of world literature is dynamic and corresponds to an evolving historical situation in which the local and global cannot be easily distinguished.

Looking at Goethe's *Winckelmann und sein*

Jahrhundert (1805), Klemm found a turning point from a classicist to a historicist interpretation of aesthetics and

history. In that text, Goethe chooses to introduce Winckelmann on a personal level, focusing on *how* he spoke instead of *what* he said, which indirectly subverts the foundation of Winckelmann's aesthetic project. Goethe focuses on Winckelmann as an object of empirical psychology, describing the psychological and historical conditions that made his thinking possible. Furthermore, in the third part of the *Farbenlehre*, Goethe does not offer any grand narrative of scientific progress, but instead claims that one should also understand new scientific discoveries as context-dependent. This position is advanced by Goethe's discussion of Newton in which he positions the latter's perceived shortcomings in light of psychological conditions. In this and other texts, Klemm explored the emergent historicism in Goethe's thought, which limits scientific truths to contextualized parts, never the whole.

In the second section of his paper, Klemm argued that Goethe's empiricism is rooted in a perspective that views the processes of human culture and material nature as fully integrated. Thus, Goethe begins to see human institutions and products as arising from their natural environment in a dynamic way. This anthropology, Klemm argued, differs from other projects of the time in its rejection of a mechanistic model of nature in favor of a vitalist theory. Thus, Goethe sees organisms not as strictly determined by their environment, but as endowed with the freedom to alter and change themselves in response to those conditions. Klemm concluded his paper by arguing that Goethe's world literature is hardly backwards looking, but instead anticipates new conceptions of world literature. (David Dunham)

Kant and Posthumanism

September 8, 2017

Whereas the outside temperature almost reached a historical low for early September, the second colloquium of the academic year proved that a good and intense academic discussion can provide some warmth and heat on cold Ithaca days. On September 8, **Carsten Strathausen** (University of Missouri) presented his forceful and polemical paper



titled "Kant and Posthumanism." It came as no surprise that the discussion following his introductory remarks often transcended the scope of German Studies as such to touch upon the role and responsibility of the Humanities more generally in today's polarized and highly fragmented political landscape. Touching upon topics as diverse as unicellular bacteria, Kant's categorical imperative, and president Trump's immigration policy, the overarching question guiding much of the discussion was the good old philosophical riddle of what it means to be human, especially in relation to current waves of posthumanism as seen from the perspectives of speculative realism and the new materialism. In his paper, Strathausen left the reader in no doubt where his own sympathies lay in this respect: rather than following the latest fashionable philosophical trends, he boldly proposed to move back to Kant for a more comprehensive and alternative understanding of what a human being is and how s/he relates to the world at large. However, whereas Strathausen's paper argued for a return to Kant based on philosophical grounds, the actual discussion soon turned into the realm of politics as he criticized the speculative realists for their refusal to engage with the political implications of their theories. Although many participants of the colloquium were sympathetic to Strathausen's critique of speculative realism, his alternative, namely, to move back to Kant, nonetheless raised some eyebrows in the audience. What followed was a lively and stimulating discussion on the relation between the ethical and the political in Kant, the problematic status of the transcendental subject vis-à-vis current evolutionary theory, and today's relevance of the famous Kantian question "what may I hope for." As is to be expected of a discussion that touches upon large themes like this, differences in opinion ultimately proved to be unavoidable. But this may

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.

have been exactly the point that Strathausen tried to get across all along. Perhaps his polemic was ultimately less about finding a solution, than about triggering discussion and stimulating accountability for one's own personal beliefs. (Sander Oosterom)

Gespiegelte Welten. Reflektionen des Kinos

September 29, 2017

On September 29th, 2017 **Manuel Köppen** (Humboldt University), professor of film and media studies, gave a presentation on the first chapter of his current book project on mirrored worlds, *Gespiegelte Welten*. Köppen discussed a number of possible functions mirrors could have for cinema, but focused his talk on five main "fields" related to the phenomenon of mirror-reflections. He related mirror-reflections in film to an epistemological problem—a "*mise-en-scène*"—while also considering their role as spatial entities bearing the hidden presence of the other (Foucault), yet never being the other space itself. According to Köppen, mirror-reflections appear somewhere between the poles of utopia as non-spaces (the unreal space of the mirror) and heterotopia, where the screen serves as a mirror in which the viewer finds himself affirmed as a subject and thus becomes real.

Köppen introduced five fields of representation in terms of a preliminary cartography of the mirror as a motive within cinema. More specifically, Köppen described these fields as follows: (1) *Transgression*, indicating an intrusion into the space of the mirror beyond its surface, a measuring of the mirror's utopian dimension. (2) *Dissociation*, which constitutes a special case for the mirror's heterotopic dimension—namely, the mirror function as a medium of self-examination, affirming the subject in its identity. In this case, the cinematography relegates the viewer to the insecurity of a constructed identity. This allows mirrors to gain independence from their originating object through a process of (3) *Duplication*, which refers to the mirror's capacity to double by means of "side-reversals." (4) *Mirror Surface* refers to a tautology in so far as it assures the self-reference of the reflected to the reflection itself, eliminating what lies beyond (the referent), and pointing to the insecurity of spatial diegesis. (5) *Circulating Time* refers to a three-stage model of parallel worlds that distinguishes between the simulated, meta-simulated and real world. Ultimately for Köppen, cinematic self-reflexivity occurs both implicitly, as every cinematic mirror image inevitably refers to its own status as constructed and negotiated from its own medial conditions in film.



Köppen began his presentation with visual examples, illustrating the ways in which the phenomenon of mirror-reflection has been represented in historical works of art (mostly paintings), and concluded with an analysis of images from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). Köppen argued that a mirror facilitates the visualization of what lies outside of the field of vision, as in the picture-in-picture found in Jan van Eyck's *The Adolfini Wedding* where the convex mirror affords a quasi-divine perspective. The eye occupies a double function; being at once the medium of optical perception and a reversible figure or *Kippfigur*, this concept became one of the central themes of the discussion. The ways in which these questions may also emerge in the context of non-European cinema as well as literary texts were additional topics of discussion. At the end of his talk, Köppen returned to the reversible figure, when he referred to the difficulty of distinguishing between "the virtual" and "the actual" and drew on Deleuze's description of the process of reversion of qualities from the *Kippbild* to the figure of the crystal. (Sophia Léonard)

Time in a Text(ile): Gertrude the Great's Easter Vision

October 20, 2017

On October 20, 2017 **Racha Kirakosian** (Harvard University) continued the Fall IGCS Colloquium Series with her paper: "Time in a Text(ile): Gertrude the Great's Easter Vision." In her paper, Kirakosian investigated aspects of materiality in the earliest transmitted German translation of *Legatus Divinae Pietatis* (The Herald of Divine Piety) by Gertrude of Helfta, or Gertrude the Great. This late 13th century Latin text is a communal production by the nuns of the Helfta cloister, containing an account of Gertrude's Easter vision of a marvelous dress, fashioned out of all the thoughts and deeds of her life in chronological succession. About a century after the *Legatus* first appeared, a Middle High German translation (*ein botte der götlichen miltekeit*) of it emerged,



which, according to Kirakosian, adds layers of meaning that go beyond mere translation and offer new insight into both the reception of the *Legatus* in the Middle Ages, and the historical context of the German *botte*.

Kirakosian compared the image of the dress in both texts, focusing on the materiality of the dress in Gertrude's vision, and showed that the German version adds both technical vocabulary for textiles and a notion of linear, "merchant" time that is not included in the Latin version. However, Kirakosian showed that both texts make use of a circular notion of liturgical time, but whereas the *Legatus* reflects circular time through its syntax, the *botte* expresses circular time on the level of its homophonic sound. During the course of the discussion, Kirakosian fleshed out the importance of materiality in the *botte* as a response to the problem of representation posed by Gertrude's vision, since the materiality of the dress underscores the immediacy of the vision, circumventing the need for representation.

Kirakosian situated her paper within a broader chapter of her forthcoming book on the German reception of Gertrude of Helfta's *Legatus Divinae Pietatis* in the Late Middle Ages. Kirakosian's paper, along with her book, contributes to scholarship on the subject of medieval mysticism by leveraging the practices of material culture. Her book advocates for the merits of vernacular texts as objects of study, against prejudices that favor the authority of Latin texts. The entire project builds on her recently published book *Die Vita der Christina von Hane* by developing further insights into female mysticism of the Middle Ages. (Nicholas Zyzda)

"Nur das Kind erwischten sie nicht": Family and Collectivity in Nicolas Born's Wasteland

November 10, 2017

On November 10, 2017, the IGCS welcomed **Paul Buchholz** (Emory University), a distinguished scholar and former PhD student in Cornell's very own Department of German Studies. Buchholz presented a paper titled „Nur das Kind erwischen sie nicht“: Family

and *Collectivity in Nicholas Born's Wasteland*, which analyzed the experimental writings of Nicholas Born against the backdrop of environmental crises and eco-criticism.



The paper is part of a larger project that attempts to rethink human and non-human relations in an age of ecological crisis by examining

the “catastrophe-literature” of the New Left. Buchholz’s paper considered how the threats of environmental degradation and destruction have preserved familiar social categories and also created new notions of human collectivity in German literature after 1968.

Buchholz began by describing Urs Jaeggi’s 1981 novel *Grundrisse* as a vernacular version of a new “reproductive futurism” that was emerging alongside new discourses on planetary ecological catastrophes during the 1970s. Buchholz noted how this historical moment was marked by a shift in cultural assumptions about childhood. Whereas nineteenth-century literature on this subject represented the child as a figure needing protection from imminent ecological disaster, more recent accounts have viewed the child as a savior figure. Working with these more recent accounts, Buchholz showed how a child’s ability to adapt to the wasteland they inherited and make a new home of it became central to this reading. In other words, it was the children and not the parents who could save the planet from complete annihilation. Buchholz drew the conclusion that the legacy of the New Left, with all its ideals of countercultural solidarity with victims of environmental oppression, could only survive by yielding to a future

in which it had no control: the parental generation could take no part in building the wasteland communities of tomorrow.

In the second part of his paper, Buchholz compared Jaeggi’s writings with the emphatically dystopian writings of Nicholas Born. He argued that Born’s ecological pessimism echoed the alarmist warnings circulating within contemporary eco-criticism, yet exceeded their premonitions by casting doubt on the available forms of practical action and resistance. According to his analysis, Born’s *Radical Harvest* (another work of catastrophe-literature) bore witness to the limits of countercultural family and community models by resisting the capitalist-industrial “megamachine” that flourished under conditions of environmental desolation. In this case, neither the patriarchal nuclear family nor any form of communitarianism could sustain a natural way of living while still evading the authorities. Yet in Born’s *Radical Harvest*, too, the child managed to survive and overcome the technocratic “World of the machine.” According to Buchholz, Born’s writings suggest that if children had any future in a wasteland, it would not be the one to which their parents had any claim. (Arne Sander)

Retrospective: Spring 2018 Colloquium Series

Transmedial Storytelling in Nineteenth-Century Germany: Karl May’s Fictional Universe

January 26, 2018

On January 26th, 2018, **Leigh York** (Cornell University) discussed her paper “Transmedial Storytelling in Nineteenth-Century Germany: Karl May’s Fictional Universe.” York argued that Karl May’s (1842–1912) little-known novel *Auf der See gefangen: Ein Kriminalroman*, which appeared in 1878, explains the basis of May’s popularity and success, while also marking the birth of a new form of transmedial storytelling which is still important for popular culture and mass media today.

According to York, the episodic, open, and “loosely-connected structure” of the thirty-two installments of *Auf der See gefangen* causes some episodes to reach beyond the confines of the novel. In such expansions, argued York, lie the foundations of May’s larger universe of interconnected narratives and other media, which he continued developing throughout his life. As York remarked, such “transmedia world-building” is indeed

“unexpectedly contemporary.” At the formal as well as the narrative level, it anticipated the multi-media universes that dominate popular culture today, among them such outfits as the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, *Lucasfilm*, and the *Matrix* franchise.

York also pointed out how the rise of the periodical press in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to changes in the novel and narrative literature more generally. Drawing on the scholarship of Helmut Müller-Sievers, Nicolas Pethes, and Sean Franzel, York juxtaposed the German novel’s experiments in serialization and their incorporation in the periodicals’ heterogeneity and fragmentation to French and English realist serialization, which emphasized interrupted, but “irreversible forward motion.” She also stressed that the serialization in question did not amount to the subsumption of fragments under one unified narrative frame.

Analyzing the first installments of *Auf der See gefangen*, York emphasized the heterogeneity between the various episodes of May’s text, arguing that, as a whole, the novel resembles Pethes’s notion of *Archivliteratur*. York

showed in some detail how May’s narrative structure allows for continuity between installments by connecting different episodes through a moment of suspense, a “mini-cliffhanger,” and immediate resolution and satisfaction at the beginning of the subsequent episode. However, after quickly resolving the cliffhanger, May frequently pivots to a new storyline. Rather than integrating the different parts and narratives into a structured whole, May continually introduces new problems and questions, and thus produces “a heterogenous surplus of narrative material.” Combining these surplus elements, he creates an “episodic series of loosely-connected adventures.”

May’s expansive narrative material became the basis for later narrative works, such as short stories, novels, and trilogies that appeared in periodicals, as *Kolportageromane*, and in book series, forming “the fantasy of a fictional world that exists beyond the novel.” York contended that elements like characters, places, objects, and even types of humor from the early *Auf der See gefangen* form a “chain of associations” that link May’s narrative fiction and other media within one universe. She noted that already during May’s lifetime, his narrative fiction and other media were supplemented by other artists and writers, who created sculptures, dramas, and card games. Even today, franchised films, radio plays, comic books, television series, toys and video games take place in the narrative universe May created. May’s work

both produced and derived from this fictional universe, which subsequently became a pop cultural phenomenon that prefigured contemporary transmedia storytelling.

In her lively presentation, Leigh York also addressed questions of how unresolved storylines prompt reader participation; the status of worldbuilding and storytelling in narrative theory; and the role that May's celebrity status has played in holding the disparate parts of his fictional universe together. (Jacy Tackett)

The Truth Told Urgently: Finding the Voice of the Humanities

February 16, 2018

On February 16, 2018, Professor **Michel Chaouli** (University of Indiana, Bloomington) gave a colloquium entitled "The Truth Told Urgently: Finding the Voice of the Humanities." Chaouli is currently an Einstein Foundation Visiting Fellow at the Freie Universität where he holds a three-year tenure with the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School. Attempting to build on his two published books, *The Laboratory of Poetry: Chemistry and Poetics in the Work of Friedrich Schlegel* (2002) and *Thinking With Kant's Critique of Judgment* (2017), Chaouli presented a paper that is part of an ongoing book project entitled *The Shape of Poetic Criticism*. At its center, he seeks to confront foundational questions that sit at the intersection between aesthetic judgment, poetic potential and literary criticism. His research project at the Freie Universität titled "The Philological Laboratory: Models of Criticism Beyond Critique" will also address these questions.

Chaouli is interested in the shortcomings of criticism. He approaches literary texts, including their formal features and historical contexts, by seeking to find a path that critically engages literary objects while skirting rigid models of criticism. The concern of his current project can be formulated as "encountering poetry with poetry." This methodology offers new perspectives that allow critics to include personal, "poetic" statements that run counter to the more impersonal, "objective" approach to criticism.

Beginning with conceptions of the poetic that stem from the German tradition of Romanticism (especially Friedrich Schlegel), Chaouli seeks a radical return to an expansion of the conception of the poetic outside the domain of poetry itself. These blurred boundaries between what classifies as poetry, criticism, and literature as such, paired with the focus on the poetic as a site of inevitable personal intervention opened up questions

concerning the reader's vulnerability. Chaouli is concerned with how the self is at stake in an aesthetic encounter with literature, and how that personal vulnerability can be manifest in a productive and unique critical approach to the text. This focus on vulnerability provided the most central and intense source of debate throughout the colloquium, which addressed questions of privilege, feminist perspectives, and how Chaouli himself conceived of such an attitude of vulnerability. This tie to the personal and poetic *as criticism* also brought up questions pertaining to style and tone, as well as to voice and subjectivism with respect to individual experiences of art objects. Chaouli's stylistic approach called for greater creative freedom in literary criticism. He stressed the importance of particularity throughout and confirmed his literary passion and intensive interest in staying close to texts while conducting criticism.

Much of the lively debate centered on the validity of prescriptive and descriptive conceptions of criticism and what such criticism actually can, and should be asked to do. The answers to these questions may well hinge on the role that the "I" of the critic plays in criticism. Chaouli acknowledged the difficulty of this problem, stating that the "I" is the most difficult voice to get right. (Daniel Binswanger Friedman)

"Schaue her!" Hans Blumenberg on Bach's Matthäuspassion and the Problem of a Protestant Artwork

March 9, 2018

What do you get when one of Germany's most profound philosophers attempts to analyze one of the most sophisticated musical compositions in the history of German music? The answer: a complex book that defies easy classification; a book that refuses to resolve its many complexities; and a book whose appeal consists in its ability to perpetually elude the reader. In short, Hans Blumenberg's *Matthäuspassion*, currently being translated into English by Paul Fleming and **Helmut Müller-Sievers** (University of Colorado), who presented the keynote colloquium paper at the *Aesthetics & Theology of The Saint Matthew Passion: Bach & Blumenberg* conference on March 9, 2018.

After three captivating presentations by Cornell professors, Müller-Sievers concluded the event with his paper titled, "'Schaue her!' Hans Blumenberg on Bach's Matthäuspassion and the Problem of a Protestant Artwork." In his introductory remarks, Müller-Sievers took stock of the ambiguities in Blumenberg's reading of the *Saint Matthew Passion*, seeing it less as a conversation with Bach about the musical

composition, and more as an attempt to mimic the oratorio through letters. In his paper, Müller-Sievers described Blumenberg's *Matthäuspassion* as a confrontation with Christianity itself; a direct conversation with the same God that Bach explicitly addressed in his *Erbarme Dich*, often recognized as the most famous and emotionally laden aria of the *Saint Matthew Passion*.

A recurring question at the event was how to make sense of the controversial double address to God. Müller-Sievers pointed out a disjoint between the oratorio's liturgical function in 18th century Germany and its current aesthetic reception, citing it as a moment when the Protestant artwork's liturgical function gives way to a modern aesthetic that calls for the autonomy of art. In this respect, Müller-Sievers reads the aria's direct address to God not so much in the words with which Saint Peter begs God to witness his personal pain and suffering ("Schaue hier, Herz und



Auge weint vor dir bitterlich"), but rather through the majestic and angelic quality of Bach's music that accompanies these words. At the same time, Müller-Sievers points out a blind spot in Blumenberg's own reading of Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion*. For all its eloquence, Blumenberg neglects the formal and aesthetic qualities of the work, focusing almost exclusively on the words and text of the libretto without paying much attention to the music itself. As a result, Blumenberg's reading remains somewhat enigmatic within Bach scholarship.

So ultimately, what is the sense of Blumenberg's book on Bach? And how is one to make sense of his own personal address to God in relation to the *Saint Matthew Passion*? Although these questions were more easily raised than answered, there seemed to be a consensus in the room that Blumenberg's book was engaging Adorno's concept of late style. For Blumenberg, who is fully aware of the insurmountable distance separating Bach's Protestant context from his

May 4, 2018

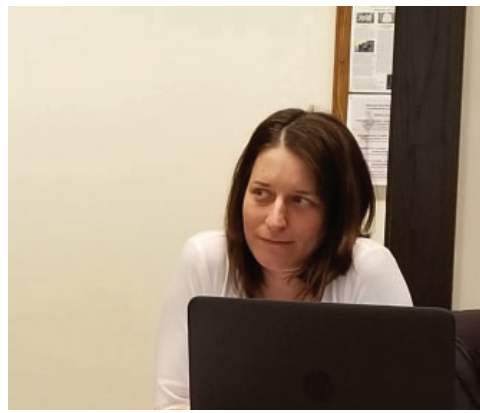
own secular one, the *Saint Matthew Passion* forms not merely the pretext, but also supplies the occasion for his own address to God. It is through his reading of Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion* that Blumenberg discovered a conflict at the heart of Christianity; a conflict that speaks to a personal and existential need for redemption in secular times. Refusing the modern solution of simply rejecting Christianity, Blumenberg's *Matthäuspassion* represents a personal attempt to come to terms with this question by addressing God directly in the first person. Informed by decades of erudite study, Blumenberg's account of the *Saint Matthew Passion* is a confessional text that reminds its readers of long forgotten questions that still lie concealed in liturgical works like Bach's oratorio. Answers to these questions, however, are not easily found or provided. If there is some hubris to Blumenberg's attempt to speak directly with God, it is the hubris of someone who is in complete control of his material and rejects easy solutions. This characteristic feature of late style also accounts for the openness of the text and its refusal to offer complete closure. At the same time, one is left to wonder what perspectives might have been opened up if Blumenberg had engaged with the formal and aesthetic qualities of the music as well. (Sander Oosterom)

The "Distant Child": Religious Engagement and the Globalization of Aid in the Late 19th Century Germany

March 23, 2018

On March 23rd, 2018, the IGCS welcomed **Katharina Stornig** (Justus-Liebig Universität Giessen), who presented her paper titled "The 'Distant Child': Religious Engagement and the Globalization of Aid in the Late 19th Century Germany." Expanding upon the work of her current book project, Stornig's presentation examined the emergence of transnational aid organizations in Germany, specifically those aimed at invoking the religious commitments of children. In this context, she explored the print material of contemporary Christian charitable organizations that encouraged the depiction of geographically distant believers as members of a globalized religious community. At the center of her paper stands the figure of the "distant child," which Stornig analyzed as a recurring theme across religious aid organizations, paying special attention to how "the distant child" influenced the education of young Germans, who were discovering their place in an emerging globalized world.

Focusing primarily on German publications of the late nineteenth century, Stornig discovered how the Christian child was treated as a formable individual, which corresponds to the emergence of a new mission aiming



to educate young people as members of a universal Christian community. Religious aid organizations promoted a diverse range of children's periodicals through which young people could come in contact with their Christian counterparts in geographically distant places, such as China and Africa. In doing so, these print sources facilitated an imaginary connection between German children and Christian youth across the world. For example, the *Annals of the Holy Childhood* was a key periodical through which missionaries in China could relate their work to young Christians in Germany. Moreover, the development of this form of literature was linked to an increased emphasis on the active role that young people played in converting other youths in distant lands, encouraging young readers to materially support their peers through the work of the Church.

Stornig argued that these periodicals sought to universalize the status of Christian children, and invite young readers to identify with their counterparts within an increasingly globalized world. However, Stornig also pointed to the ambiguous status of these periodicals in relation to colonialist hierarchies of race and culture. In many cases, these print media only reinforced the hierarchical dichotomy of white, "civilized" children who are responsible for protecting the distant "heathen" children. However in other cases, Stornig noted the transformative potential of missionary knowledge that shows children as innocent victims of foreign aggressors. From this perspective, the universal figure of the Christian child temporarily undermines the colonial hierarchical dichotomies. Stornig concluded that missionary literature ultimately is a key site in which children play an active role in the process of globalization and thereby contribute to the emergence of an imagined transnational Christian community. (David Dunham)

Professor **Bethany Wiggins** (University of Pennsylvania) was invited to the German Department Colloquium on May 4th to discuss her paper "Liquid History and Floating Archives," which developed from the work in her forthcoming book *Utopia Found and Lost in Penn's Woods*. While Wiggins originally conceived the book project to cover the years between 1610 and 1748, the colloquium paper instead highlighted the need to project her research questions into a much broader time frame, especially with respect to the construction of a historical archive. Beginning with a quote from Hans Blumenberg, Wiggins used his reversal of the



term "terra firma" to show that firm ground is "increasingly hard to produce" and suggested the concept of a floating archive, which she defined as "a modest repository that might help us adequately represent the present and so consider a future in which we might not go under, a starting point for liquid histories."

In order to demonstrate what floating archives might look like, Professor Wiggins pointed to three thematically and temporally distinct documents, which she suggested could be used as building blocks for a historical perspective that does not sit on stable ground. The first document was a text from a recent Sunday newspaper entitled "Shorebirds, the World's Greatest Travelers Face Extinction." Wiggins interpreted Fitzpatrick and Senner's essay as a call for action: the decline of migratory shorebird populations and the vital loss of habitat at mid-migration stop-over sites since the 1950s proved that "the network of aquatic systems is fraying." The second document was a 1749 frontispiece for an almanac featuring Christoph Saur's woodcut in the *Hoch-Deutsch Americanische Calender*. The woodcut pictured the Delaware River in

Philadelphia, where the colonial settlers had landed a few decades earlier. This location marked one of the first environmental crises recorded in the area, which, was caused by rapid population growth as a result of German and Scottish-Irish immigration. The third document was a photograph taken in 2017 of a sinking sculpture-barge, which was taken in the context of the *Wet Land* project. Wiggin was involved in the development of this installation artwork that featured a moveable, floating barge on Philadelphia's Schuylkill River, which was used as a short-term artists' residency program between 2015 and 2017. The residency helped bring in artists who would reflect on the barge itself

and its dynamic location through their work.

Attending to these documents Wiggin sought to frame our current time through the perspective of an increasingly "liquid history." "We need," she argued, "to cultivate forms of scholarship and knowledge communities that reject what Donna Haraway calls the God trick, a perspective that refuses to look down from a point of great elevation on our liquid histories, soggy presents, and watery futures." For Wiggin this means that we must "consider our histories from an on-water perspective" and re-think notions of what *terra firma* represents.

The discussion raised the issue of perspective by asking what kinds of representations would be needed to portray the dynamic causality of liquid history and what metaphors might be most effective in this context. A collective mode of being was envisioned that connects to the post-humanist notion of species-being and offers a counterweight to individual modes of being. After all, we are all faced with the collective destiny of climate change and its catastrophes. (Sophia Léonard)

Lectures and Events

Anti-Academicism: Old and New, German and American

September 13, 2017

On September 13, 2017 an interdisciplinary crowd of students and scholars gathered at the A.D. White House to listen to the highly anticipated IGCS 25th Anniversary Lecture given by **Eva Geulen** (Director of the Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, Berlin). Her talk, titled "Anti-Academicism: Old and New, German and American," was co-sponsored by the Institute for German Cultural Studies, the Department of German Studies and the Society for Humanities.

In her talk, Geulen rejected anti-academicism as a topic for academic discussion. The academy, she contended, cannot justify itself from within. Instead, Geulen found the relationship between academicism and anti-academicism to carry broader political implications. It was, therefore, on political grounds that Geulen demanded that academics speak in favor of the viability of academic institutions and mount a defense of them, independent of their motives, contents, and political affiliations. Geulen spoke of the need to defend against a new form of anti-academicism by examining the historical relationship between academicism and anti-academicism. She cited A.W. Schlegel as an example of a highly critical voice against academicism who later became an academic himself. Trading his cosmopolitan existence for an academic position in Bonn, Schlegel later became a target for anti-academic attacks on professorial vanity and scholarly pretentiousness. Inversely, argued Geulen, academic life inherently requires being critical of the academy. So, while anti-academicism has attracted figures like A.W. Schlegel to the academy, academics

have always had to turn a critical eye toward the institution. Furthermore, many radical thinkers such as Nietzsche, Freud, and Benjamin who were rejected by academia eventually became recognized by the academy as producing groundbreaking and foundational works. Geulen argued that this symbiotic relationship between academicism and anti-academicism has produced change in the academy over time, while also maintaining academia as a space for project-oriented, non-directed research. Here, she pointed to many examples ranging from Schlegel's establishment of Indian languages as a field of study, to the recent rise of theory, and to the youth movements of the 1970s.

Geulen contended that, until recently, what has differentiated academic from non-academic spaces is that academic spaces have never been subject to monitoring or control. However, several factors, including competition between universities for funding and students, increased political victories by figures that promote anti-academic sentiment like Donald Trump and the *Alternative für Deutschland*, and increased threats to institutional privacy in the name of transparency, have threatened academicism with a new form of anti-academicism. Geulen noted that academicism and anti-academic impulses in the United States formed a symbiotic relationship during the 1970s. According to Geulen, the rise of the Internet, which allows boundless distribution with virtually no cost, lies at the root of today's new menace of anti-academicism. In threatening the institutional privacy of the academy, the Internet also threatens the boundary between academia and politics. Geulen related this observation to Germany, where both the rise of right wing populism and digitalization's erosion of the public sphere have led journalists to anachronistically turn

to university professors for solutions to all kinds of world problems. However, Geulen contended that modern academia cannot provide an answer to the question: "What should I do?" Indeed, she invoked Kant, Weber, and Foucault to argue that a scholar must engage as a citizen, rather than as a representative of the institution, even when defending the existence of the institution itself. But that does not mean that scientists should stay in their laboratories. Indeed, Geulen contended, academia's citizens ought to mobilize as strong a defense as possible in favor of the institutional autonomy of academia. To mount this defense of academia



as a laboratory of free thought, Geulen emphasized the importance of politicizing, forming alliances with the press, and using the strengths of rhetoric. Academics must take to the streets, but at the same time, they must not confuse the street with the classroom.

(Jacy Tackett)

Harbingers and Echoes of the Shoah

October 17, 2017

On October 17th author and journalist **Andrea Pitzer** gave a talk entitled: “Harbingers and Echoes of the Shoah.” Pitzer’s recent work traces the historical, linguistic and geographical origins of the term “concentration camp,” and seeks to better understand how the term develops across modern discourses. In her talk, she analyzed the origins of the term up to its horrifying implementation in WWII, and then noted the ways in which contemporary society is still deeply entangled with this concept.

After speaking about the origins of the concept, Pitzer pointed out that the idea of the concentration camp has not been static. She discussed, for instance, the rebellions in Cuba during the 1890’s, specifically how the Spanish Monarchy failed to suppress the rebel’s guerilla warfare tactics. In attempting to contain and combat the rebels, the Spanish government developed a new strategy: gather up the non-combatants (i.e. civilians) from villages, bring them to cities, and place them in designated communities that could be closely monitored. This measure effectively exposed combatants living outside the designated city-centers. Pitzer argued that focusing on civilians rather than combatants was an unprecedented approach—one that represented a dangerous step in the development of our contemporary understanding of how concentration camps function.

According to Pitzer, this process of

“Reconcentración” caused moral and political outrage within the international community. There were editorials written around the globe condemning states that targeted and interned innocent civilians within their own borders. Yet, these critical voices gradually diminished once other states and allied countries began to accept this new military strategy. By the outbreak of WWI, these tactics were adopted around the globe and slowly became a part of the status quo,



whether to round up political opponents or to isolate specific groups of people deemed dangerous by the ruling powers on account of their identities. The rapid advancement of weapons and surveillance technologies during the first half of the twentieth-

century made it relatively easy for states to manage large numbers of people in limited spaces. Thus in WWII, the Nazi’s took full advantage of these technologies and worked to desensitize the public in order to adapt this tactic to their own genocidal goals, which far exceeded the original conception of “Reconcentración” by the Spanish Monarchy.

Pitzer ended her presentation by discussing the Guantanamo Bay American Naval Base. After pointing out the many reasons why she would classify this facility as a contemporary manifestation of the concentration camp concept, she noted a poignant irony. In 1898 the United States entered into the Spanish-American war, partly in response to the Spanish “Reconcentración.” Through the course of the war, the US occupied the Philippines (where the Americans later implemented their own version of “Reconcentración”) and then entered Cuba, establishing the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base: the site where concentration camp ideology continues to evolve today, in accordance with American interests. Pitzer also indicated how it might be possible to prevent Guantanamo from simply repeating the mistakes of history, namely, by calling on people to pay close attention to small details within legislation that have larger effects in the future than one would think. Pitzer concluded her talk by arguing that this threat is still very present, quoting former Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who, when asked about Japanese interment camps during and after WWII, said: “You’d be crazy to think this can’t happen again.” (Daniel Binswanger Friedman)

Apocalypse and History

March 28, 2018

On March 28th, 2018, **Susan Buck-Morss** (CUNY), Professor Emerita at Cornell’s Department of Government where she taught between 1978 and 2012, returned to Cornell to give a rich, interdisciplinary and invigorating lecture on “Apocalypse and History.” Buck-Morss explored the biblical *Book of Revelation* and the life of John of Patmos. She challenged widespread narratives about identity politics and clear-cut religious distinctions in the Middle East, through a re-reading of John, a text that has informed many prevailing binaries of western thought, which she attempted to undermined in her talk. In lieu of these widespread narratives, Buck-Morss offered a way out of the “traps of modernity and postmodernity” by emphasizing the hybridity of religious and cultural identities that were already embedded in John’s work, which thoroughly shaped western conceptions of religious history and future hopes. Claiming



that western history, including secularization, has viewed the *Book of Revelation* as a prediction of future catastrophe, Buck-Morss argued that to the contrary, “apocalypse is not a prophetic prediction of the future, but

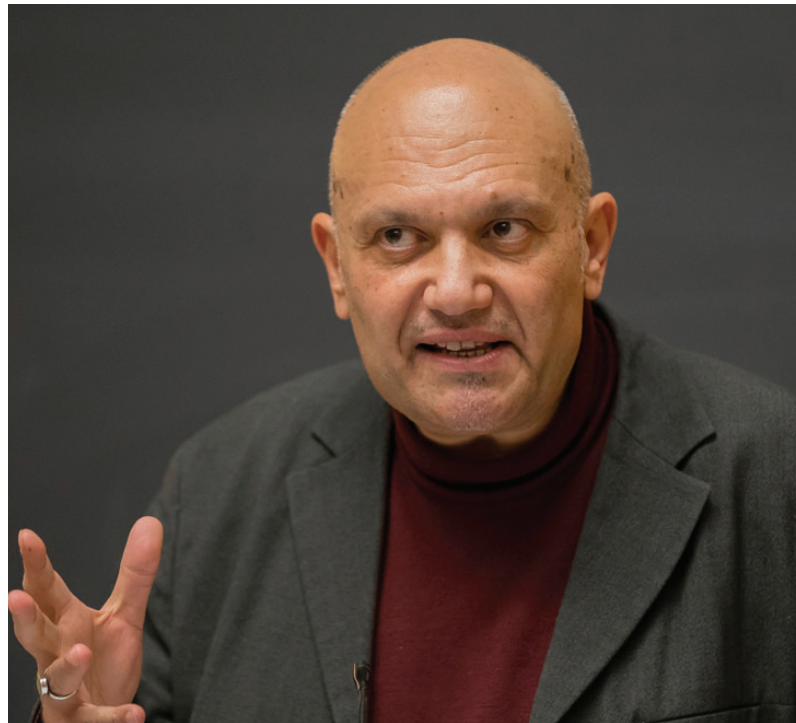
a prophetic accounting, almost a historical accounting of the recent past.” The lecture, a summary of the first chapter of Buck-Morss’s forthcoming book-project, investigated how the *Book of Revelation* exposes the historical actuality of the world, in which it was written. This materialist perspective opens up new horizons for historical inquiry into the early Church. According to Buck-Morss, scholars are no longer limited to just “a history of Western Christendom, but one that embraces those eastern ‘others,’ moving us away from a clash of civilizations, to a history of cultural overlaps and networks of interconnections.” Buck-Morss argued that John’s work presents an exemplary case of categorical confusion—namely, the confusion that plagues historians of this period, because at the time no distinction between Christian and Jew could be firmly established. Instead, the *Book of Revelation* describes hybrid identities and other forms of community that cannot be restricted to binaries of the Pauline imaginary. (Søren Larsen)

Zafer Şenocak presents...

November 14-15, 2017

On November 14th and 15th, 2017, the Institute for German Cultural Studies at Cornell University hosted one of the most engaging voices of Turkish-German background: **Zafer Şenocak**. On the first day of his residence, the writer delivered a lecture about the motives and affective practicalities of migrations. On the second day, Şenocak was introduced by Professor Leslie Adelson and read excerpts from his last book, titled: *In deinen Worten—Mutmaßungen über den Glauben meines Vaters* (Babel Verlag, 2016). These excerpts described the inherent difficulties of translating values from one space of belonging to another.

Şenocak's speech gave a dauntless account of the passions that connect a father to his son, in many of the decisive moments of life—moments of being at home, of bravery and of imitation. Şenocak also reflected on the difficult task of translating ritualised gestures and beliefs into (literary) language. A central question that emerged during his talk concerned the difference between first- and second-generation immigrants in regard to their identities. He then discussed how the natural flow of generations has been interrupted both by modernization and by absorbing nationalities. Perhaps more striking, under such circumstances, is the continuity that sons may feel in relation to their fathers. One often assumes—especially



in moralizing discourses on integration—that levels of patriarchy and democracy strongly differ, as much as one civilization differs from the next. Not so much, according to Şenocak's experience. For him, existential dependency on the father is shared in both the first and second generations, which seems to obscure and limit the maternal through a dimension of secrecy. Relations with fathers are not transparent either; their substance is the result of a *Mutmaßung*, a conjecture, a supposition, an accusation, and the hypothetical ways of expression that

deny transparency. Communication here is never dialogue, nor revelation. Rather, father and son share a confusing bundle of ritualized gestures that calls for sustained interpretation.

Şenocak discussed *Verstümmeln*—mutilating, disfiguring, or garbling—as the movement of writing by which one is carried away from this bundle of ritualized gestures that defines patriarchal relations. Such an operation is

risky and cannot rely on knowledge about the ways in which political speech ought to be uttered. The operation of deciphering gestures, within their religious and affective meaning, is closer to a poetic act of daring than to a handbook of Islamic patriarchy in Germany, which is often what is—quite unreasonably—expected from Muslim public intellectuals. (Mariaenrica Giannuzzi)

Ambiguous Promise of European Decline: Race and Historical Pessimism in the Era of the Great War

February 27, 2018

On February 27th, 2018, **Donna Jones** (UC Berkeley, English) presented a lecture titled “The Ambiguous Promise of European Decline: Race and Historical Pessimism in the Era of the Great War.” In her lecture, Jones discussed the rise of pessimism in Europe around the time of the First World War. Earlier that day, Jones also led a seminar titled “Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Negritude and Negrismo.” These events were sponsored by the department of Comparative Literature in conjunction with the IGCS and many other departments at Cornell, testifying to the interdisciplinary appeal of Jones' work. Jones drew the material for her lecture from the introduction to her current book project, *The Ambiguous Promise of European Decline*. She put a number of important western intellectuals in dialogue with one another as she explored the unique



historical period around the First World War, when many authors expressed a growing

sense of crisis and pessimism at what seemed to be a Europe in decline. Two works in particular were central to Jones' discussion: Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* and Paul Valéry's *The Crisis of the Mind*. Jones advocated for a synchronic, rather than a diachronic view of the period and in general suggested a complex and subtle view of the topic, drawing on multiple sources within Europe, as well as on non-European perspectives including a number of fascinating images from Latin America. Jones's thorough familiarity with the Western intellectual tradition as well as the expansive range of her insights on the topic will be presented in greater depth and more detail in her forthcoming book. (Nicholas Zyzda)

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A.D. WHITE HOUSE

ALEXANDER KLUGE: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON CREATIVE ARTS AND CRITICAL PRACTICE CONFERENCE / OCTOBER 11-13, 2018

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Fall 2018 Colloquium Series

181 GOLDWIN SMITH HALL

FRIDAYS @ 2:30PM

SEPTEMBER 7 Carl Niekerk

Germanic Languages and Literatures,
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

**Buffon, Blumenbach, Herder, and the Origins
of Modern Anthropology**

NOVEMBER 2 Vance Byrd German, Grinnell College

Intermediale Selbstthematisierung:

**Nineteenth-Century Illustrated Periodicals,
Panoramas, and Commemoration**



NOVEMBER 16 Matthew Stoltz

German, Cornell University

Lessing, Novalis, and the Redemption of the Image

NOVEMBER 30 Samuel Frederick

Germanic & Slavic Languages and Literatures, PennState

Collecting. A Poetics

Advance copies of each paper will be available at the Dept. of German Studies, 183 Goldwin Smith.
For more information, please contact Olga Petrova at ogp2@cornell.edu.

Additional information about all events listed is available on our website: <http://igcs.cornell.edu>. 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).

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