

YOUNG SCHOLARS FORUM 2004 ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE, POLITICS: TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES

Seminar at the GHI, May 27–30, 2004. Conveners: Charles Closmann (GHI) and Frank Zelko (GHI). Made possible by a grant from the Friends of the German Historical Institute.

Moderators: Christof Mauch (GHI), Joachim Radkau (University of Bielefeld), John McNeill (Georgetown University), Verena Winiwarter (University of Vienna), Donald Worster (University of Kansas).

The 2004 Young Scholars Forum offered graduate students and recent Ph.D.s from Europe and the United States an opportunity to develop their research in the field of environmental history in collaboration with peers and distinguished scholars from both sides of the Atlantic. The GHI invited submissions from scholars working on the environmental history of Europe (especially Germany) and the United States since the nineteenth century, while also encouraging applications with a broader international or comparative perspective. In addition, this forum emphasized the following topical themes: the environmental consequences of industrialization and/or agriculture; changing ideas about nature from the standpoint of cultural and intellectual history; and environmentalism, including movements originating in government agencies, activist groups, and other organizations.

After considering numerous strong applications, the conveners chose fourteen outstanding participants for the conference, including eight from Germany, five from the United States, and one from Russia. The conveners identified several key research areas, including: early nature protection groups; activism and protest in modern Germany; nature, discourse, and environmental awareness; transforming woods and landscapes; science, farming, and environmental change; and rethinking the urban world.

The conference began with a discussion of Richard Hölzl's and Laurence Christian's essays on semi-official and privately sponsored nature protection organizations in southern Germany. Analyzing the records of two Bavarian groups, the Landesausschuß für Naturpflege and the Bund Naturschutz, Hölzl challenged a long-standing overemphasis among scholars on the anti-modern, romantic roots of Germany's early conservation movement. According to Hölzl, supporters of these early twentieth-century groups employed concepts like *Heimat*, patriotism, and eco-

conomic rationality in order to “find an alternative, more sustainable and careful path to modernization.” Laurence Christian also examined the rise of south German conservation in the context of modernization. Comparing awareness of conservation in nineteenth-century Germany and England, Christian maintained that supporters of the Black Forest Association sought to prevent a “British-like industrial invasion” from decimating their beloved woodlands. He argued that German conservationists were more concerned about forest preservation than their English counterparts because of Germany’s comparatively late industrial revolution and the massive scale of that revolution when it occurred.

Jeffrey Wilson and Anselm Tiggemann also studied environmental reform in Germany, focusing especially on public activism. Wilson’s paper on a widely popular campaign to preserve Berlin’s Grunewald in the early twentieth century demonstrated, in his words, the “rational and progressive nature of the nature enthusiasts,” and not the reactionary rationales usually attributed to such groups. Studying this case of environmental protest, Wilson found that a host of social reformers, urban planners, scientists, and liberal politicians wanted to preserve the Grunewald forest in order to protect public health, provide recreation for the city’s laboring class, and win the political support of Berlin’s workers. Anselm Tiggemann’s exploration of the controversy surrounding a nuclear processing site at Gorleben also illustrated a wide range of rationales among environmentalists. According to Tiggemann, protests at Gorleben in the late 1970s demonstrated, among other things: concerns with the protection of future generations, “equity among regions and communities,” the “limits of scientific knowledge,” and a host of peripheral issues. As with Wilson’s Grunewald example, environmental protesters at Gorleben succeeded because they successfully marshaled broad public support.

Scott Moranda and Alla Bolotova offered fascinating insights into the way that discourses about nature in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) influenced government policies. According to Moranda, a campaign among East German workers to encourage development of the Greifenbach reservoir area for recreational camping, games, and education reflected a “strong sense of citizens’ and consumer rights in a social welfare state.” Tourists at Greifenbach in the 1950s and 1960s demanded their rights to access nature for recreation and higher living standards, benefits allegedly promised by the regime. Moranda’s study challenged the prevailing view that environmental awareness only emerged in the GDR after 1980. Alla Bolotova also examined attitudes toward nature in a Marxist state. Drawing upon literary sources such as poetry and newspapers, she demonstrated that Soviet authors—at the behest of the state—established a “hegemonic discourse on nature” that

emphasized the domination of nature as an all-important task. Soviet geologists were the heroic vanguard of this campaign, according to Bolotova. Influenced by this hegemonic ideology, they studied and exploited Russia's vast taiga in order to dominate nature and create wealth for the state.

The second day of the conference began with a panel exploring transnational aspects of environmental concern. Drawing upon theories of "policy transfer," Kai Hünemörder analyzed the diffusion of knowledge about pollution, energy, and solid waste disposal between the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany. Led by Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, an American team of scientific experts studied German campaigns to combat pollution and environmental devastation during the 1960s, and, in so doing, also shared American experience with these issues. Hünemörder focused especially on the transfer of knowledge about Super Sonic Transport (SST) aircraft, demonstrating that German politicians and scientists challenged the use of this highly advanced jet aircraft based upon the Udall team's research. The SST debate also demonstrated a new spirit of democratic participation in major policy debates about technologies with adverse environmental effects. Bernhard Gißibl's paper explored transnational concerns about wildlife preservation in colonial Africa. Gißibl argued that colonial officials in German East Africa encouraged British officials to emulate the German example and establish a number of large nature preserves in their own colonies. Such policies were perceived by colonial powers as part of Europe's "civilizing mission in Africa." Calling the establishment of these preserves a milestone in the history of international environmental cooperation, Gißibl also cautioned that Anglo-German conservation policies in East Africa superimposed European values on indigenous people.

Papers by Daniel Orenstein and Christina Gerhardt also examined the potentialities of discourses on nature and the environment. In his study of environmentalism in Israel, Orenstein noted that "Zionist ideology and religiosity, coupled with immediate security and social concerns," created a "sanctioned discourse" in that country, making discussion of the environmental consequences of population growth extremely difficult. Orenstein cited Israeli studies on pollution, noting that, while the authors recognized the negative consequences of a growing populace, they hesitated to recommend measures to limit that population. Orenstein saw little hope for an immediate change in this discourse, given the highly charged political atmosphere in Israel. Christina Gerhardt's examination of Theodore Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1966) was more hopeful. Gerhardt underscored Adorno's call for a reading of human history that embraces natural history, a process that "pinpoints the suppression of antagonisms, the sort of antagonisms on whose suppression

History is founded." While Gerhardt was most concerned with the philosophical and political implications of Adorno's work, her essay suggested intriguing questions about the role of nature as an actor in world and environmental history.

More so than other participants, Martin Knoll and George Vrtis considered the evolving relationships between natural resource exploitation and human settlement. Knoll drew upon a rich mixture of municipal archives and secondary works to argue that external factors like the development of wood transport on the river Regen were the most important factors shaping wood supply policies in mid-nineteenth-century Regensburg. According to Knoll, the history of timber supply in Regensburg also demonstrated the inability of "traditional communal politics to react . . . to changing environments in wood management." Finally, the example of Regensburg confirms recent scholarship characterizing the early nineteenth century as a "bridge period," an era setting the stage for Germany's rapid industrial takeoff later in the century. George Vrtis's paper on Colorado's gold rush in the 1860s examined similar connections. In a study of this relatively unexplored story, Vrtis traced the devastating effects of gold mining on local streams, forests, and wildlife. Moreover, he asserted, Colorado miners quickly freed themselves from local transportation arteries, connecting their operations to the nation's elaborate railroad networks, and engaging in a broad process that was "one of the hallmarks of America's nineteenth-century industrial transformation."

At first glance, the last two papers seemed to address quite different topics: the role of domestic animals in nineteenth-century cities, and farmers' perception and use of agricultural chemistry in the twentieth century. Yet both papers shared a concern with the production of knowledge, both scientific and non-scientific in nature. In her essay on slaughterhouses in Paris and Berlin, Dorothee Brantz asserted that attempts to reform animal slaughter were "linked to the emergence of a new urban consciousness linked to a growing awareness of urban pollution." Moreover, she argued, the removal of slaughterhouses from the cities "went hand in hand with the emergence of specialized discourses about the health and welfare of livestock." For his part, Frank Uekoetter maintained that twentieth-century agricultural scientists privileged their own field of knowledge, virtually shutting out any discussion of concepts like organic farming. One important result has been an unfortunate perception that agricultural productivity—emphasized by experts in agricultural chemistry—must always come at the expense of the environment. According to Uekoetter, a better appreciation for the structural factors behind privileged forms of agricultural science can help us challenge the supremacy of that knowledge, enabling us to develop methods of farming that are both productive and less harmful to the environment.

The forum concluded on Sunday with a stimulating roundtable discussion by mentors and participants. Although it is difficult to summarize all of the issues raised, several themes emerged as important concerns. These included the recognition that early forms of environmental protest revealed competing paths to modernity. Challenging the belief that turn-of-the-century conservationists were reactionary, several papers showed that activists often succeeded when their rhetoric embraced concepts like economic progress, social justice, and national integration.

The papers also explored the various ways in which people have thought about nature in a variety of political settings. As represented in literature, scientific treatises, and philosophy, discourses about nature reveal much about human society, its ideologies, and its different national styles of environmental protection. Other works shed new light on the urban environment, and the way that people in Paris, Berlin, Regensburg, and other cities experienced and ordered their surroundings. Discussants drew special attention to the relationship of cities, energy flows, transportation arteries, and the hinterlands.

Pointing to the future of this burgeoning field, the mentors also called for more comparative studies, for work that “stays close to the sources,” and for more emphasis on quantitative indices of pollution and other forms of environmental degradation. All in all, the roundtable left no doubt that environmental history should position itself at the center of historical inquiry, a task that thoughtful young scholars at this conference should achieve with little difficulty. In the words of John McNeill, “environmental history is in good hands.”

Charles Closmann

Participants and Their Topics

ALLA BOLOTOVA (Centre for Independent Social Research, St. Petersburg), *Colonization of Nature in the Soviet Union: State Ideology, Public Discourse, and Experience of Geologists*

DOROTHEE BRANTZ (Free University of Berlin), *Animals, The City, and Comparative Environmental History: The Example of Slaughterhouses in Nineteenth-Century Berlin and Paris*

LAURENCE CHRISTIAN (University of California, Santa Barbara), *Beneath the Soil: Rooting Out Late Nineteenth-Century Environmental Differences in England and Germany*

CHRISTINA GERHARDT (University of California at Berkeley), *A Rose is a Rose is a Rose: Natural History in Hegel and in Adorno's Negative Dialectics*

BERNARD GISSIBL (International University Bremen), *German Colonialism and the Beginnings of International Wildlife Conservation*

RICHARD HÖLZL (University of Regensburg), *Nature Conservation in the Age of Classical Modernity: The Landesausschuß für Naturpflege and the Bund Naturschutz in Bavaria, 1905–1933*

KAI F. HÜNEMÖRDER (University of Kiel), *The Udall-Program and the Diffusion of Environmental Concerns and Policies Between the United States and Germany in the late 1960s: The Supersonic Transport Case*

MARTIN KNOLL (University of Regensburg), *Urban Needs and Changing Environments: Regensburg's Supply of Wood and Timber Between the Early Modern Period and Industrialization (Eighteenth/Nineteenth Century)*

SCOTT MORANDA (University of Wisconsin-Madison), *Greifenbach Reservoir: Toward a Popular Environmentalism in the German Democratic Republic*

DANIEL ORENSTEIN (Brown University), *Population Growth and Environmental Impact: Ideology and Academic Discourse in Israel*

ANSELM TIGGEMANN (Landtag, Nordrhein Westfalen), *A Story with an Open End: The Controversy over Nuclear Waste Disposal in West Germany from its Beginnings to Gorleben, 1955–1985*

FRANK UEKOETTER (University of Bielefeld), *Did They Know What They Were Doing? An Argument for A Knowledge-Based Approach to an Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Agriculture*

GEORGE H. VRTIS (Georgetown University), *Changing the Face of the Mountains: The Colorado Gold Rush, Industrialization, and the Environmental Transformation of the Front Range of the Rockies*

JEFFREY WILSON (University of New Orleans), *Environmental Protest in Wilhelmine Berlin: The Campaign to Save the Grunewald*