INAUGURAL WEST COAST GERMANISTS' WORKSHOP

Workshop at UC Davis, March 17-18, 2018. Co-sponsored by the new Pacific Regional Office of the German Historical Institute Washington DC (GHI West), the Department of German Studies and the Davis Humanities Institute, the Institute for Social Sciences at UC Davis, and the Max Kade Center for Austrian-German-Swiss Studies at USC. Conveners: Frank Biess (UC San Diego), Edward Ross Dickinson (UC Davis), Paul Lerner (University of Southern California) and Ulrike Strasser (UC San Diego). Participants: Andreas Agocs (University of San Diego) Colleen Anderson (Stanford University), Roii Ball (UCLA), Ian Beacock (Stanford University), Volker Benkart (Arizona State University), Jonathan Dentler (USC), Elizabeth Drummond (University of Munich), Johannes Endres (UC Riverside), Ann Goldberg (UC Riverside), Benjamin Hein (Stanford University), Anna Holian (Arizona State University), Manuela Homberg (UC Berkeley), Michael Homberg (UC Berkeley), Sky Michael Johnston (UC San Diego), John McColle (Oregon State University), Jörg Neuheiser (UC San Diego), Christiane Reves (Arizona State University), Isabel Richter (UC Berkeley), Sven-Erik Rose (UC Davis), Chenxi Tang (UC Berkeley), Karl Toepfer (San Jose State), Andrea Westermann (GHI West).

Scholars of German history and culture working on the West Coast face geographic challenges that those further east usually do not: they are far from Central Europe, and they are farther from each other than, for example, those in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, or even Midwest of the United States. This has tended to limit opportunities for intellectual exchange, collaboration, and networking — at least without time-consuming and expensive travel. In order to start improving this situation, the group of conveners initiated the first West Coast Germanists’ Workshop.

For the inaugural workshop, the organizers chose an open topic paper format. Rather than focus on a particular theme or themes or adopt the usual conference panel format, they opted for a more free-form discussion. Contributors were asked for short, informal pieces and pre-circulated a “thought piece” addressing how their current research project speaks to issues of historiographical or methodological concern in German/European history and studies. Be it a comment on broad trends in our disciplines, a summary of the implications of findings in an ongoing research project, the discussion of a particular problem of translation or method, or an
interpretive comment on a particular source — participants came up with many useful contributions.

The outcome was impressive: The conference had three sessions with a total of 23 papers on a wide range of topics. Conveners Edward Ross Dickinson and Frank Biess served as commentators for the sessions, during which some shared concerns clearly emerged. One major question was how our professional identity as Germanists keeps being relevant to our work, which has recently been inspired by the transnational and global turns in the humanities and social sciences. Edward Ross Dickinson swiftly reviewed our program and pointed to his new book, *The World in the Long Twentieth Century*, to highlight this development. The scholarly rewards yielded by engaging with larger scales are concurrent though with the relative decline in interest for German or Central European topics in the History and Literary Studies Departments and student bodies at universities in the Western U.S., as many participants argued. Frank Biess suggested that whether we interpret this decline as a mistaken shift of intellectual and political focus or as an overdue correction to how history, its epochs, geographies, and methods are represented on a departmental level, we must find intellectual rather than strategic answers to these challenges.

Yet another trend emerging from the collection of papers might be one such answer: Germanists, too, find themselves re-embracing economic questions, sometimes rather surprisingly or reluctantly so. Other participants suggested that German culture has been both embedded in and a critically important element of cultural globalization in the modern era. In both respects, at least some participants felt that a focus on Central European topics and a focus on global matters are complementary, rather than mutually exclusive. There was a strong sense, too, among some participants that German studies can only benefit from a less Eurocentric perspective.

Finally, participants expressed their interest in holding this workshop annually as a regular opportunity to discuss research, historiographical trends, professional developments, and German history and culture generally. The climate of collective excitement and collegiality that animated the workshop reflected this interest as well. The GHI West is happy to support that scholarly exchange, and the next workshop will be held on April 6–7, 2019 at USC’s Max Kade Center for Austrian-German-Swiss Studies. A combination of large group and breakout sessions might be a good mix catering to
our many needs and wishes when coming together as West Coast Germanists.

Andrea Westermann (GHI West) and Edward Ross Dickinson (UC Davis)

The full conference program is available online at https://www.ghidc.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GHI_Washington/Events___Conferences/2018/2018_West_Coast_Conference_program_web.pdf