

GERMAN HISTORY IN A FRACTIOUS WORLD: SECOND ANNUAL WEST COAST GERMANISTS' WORKSHOP

Workshop at the University of Southern California, April 6-7, 2019. Co-sponsored by the Pacific Regional Office of the German Historical Institute Washington DC and the Max Kade Institute for Austrian-German-Swiss Studies at USC. Conveners: Paul Lerner (USC), Elizabeth Drummond (Loyola Marymount University), Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (UC Berkeley), Andrea Westermann, and Heike Friedman (Pacific Regional Office of GHI). Presenters: Jens Pohlmann (GHI Washington), Elena Kempf (UC Berkeley), Deborah Hertz (UC San Diego), Sheer Ganor (UC Berkeley), Sara Friedman (UC Berkeley), Sean Nye (USC), Isabel Richter (UC Berkeley); Jonathan Dentler (USC), Harold Marcuse (UC Santa Barbara), Sven Reichardt (University of Konstanz), Gloria Yu (UC Berkeley).

Like the inaugural meeting of the West Coast Germanists' Workshop in March 2018 at UC Davis, this year's meeting aimed to provide a forum for discussing key methodological and historiographic issues in the field for graduate students, recent Ph.D.s and faculty in German history, German studies and related fields. Our workshop series responds to the predicament of Germanists in the West, indeed our unique geographic challenges — our distance from Europe and from each other — and also the particular opportunities and possibilities for pursuing German history and German studies in places with abundant resources from mid-twentieth-century German émigrés and thriving German expat communities in the arts, business, and technology. The meetings are guided by the overarching inquiry into the potential benefits of our more distant gaze and the intellectual stimulation of seeing Germany and Europe from perhaps a more global or Pacific orientation.

The theme, "The Place of German History in a Fractious World," invited reflection on two growing trends in the world today, globalization and the rise of authoritarian and nationalist movements and regimes. How do these tendencies inspire and challenge us in our work as historians of Germany? Do historians of Germany and German studies scholars have a particular responsibility to engage with the return of racist and nationalist politics? What is the future of German history — indeed any national history — in an increasingly transnational profession?

We asked participants to engage with these and other questions from the perspective of their research. In other words, rather than discussing these issues generally, we wanted to see how these topics play out in specific research agendas and how they affect the framing and presentation of projects and the methodological choices we all make.

The participants discussed ten pre-circulated papers. Under the heading “Law and Rights,” Jens Pohlmann and Elena Kempf talked about their current projects situated in the present and around 1900 respectively. Pohlmann presented the setting and early stages of his study comparing the internet policy discourse in the U.S. and Germany. He had assembled digital text corpora from tech blog entries, traditional media coverage, and policy documents that should, ideally, represent different realms of the public sphere. For his analysis, Pohlmann set out to draw on digital humanities research methods such as close and distant reading and network analysis. Elena Kempf discussed the place of the international laws of war in German history using two case studies, Johann Kaspar Bluntschli’s *Kriegsrecht* of 1866 and the activities of the Militärische Untersuchungsstelle für Verletzungen des Kriegsrechts in World War I. Kempf aimed to go beyond discussing German adherence or non-adherence to these theoretically binding regulations and instead explored the interaction between the repeated applicability of the laws of war and the conflictual history of Germany from 1860 to 1918. She argued that legal scholars and state officials mobilized the laws of war in support of the German nation-state, legitimizing the formation and defense of the nation in war. In both papers, technology and law came to define and shape each other. Moreover, legal norms seemed to show a robustness that suggests some similarity with the robustness of technological infrastructure; once in place, they are meant to have staying power. The papers also showed how both infrastructure and cultural norms embedded in legal norms work to keep us from noticing their existence. Pohlmann and Kempf called for unearthing these *Selbstverständlichkeiten* and making visible the specific contexts and institutions standing behind them, such as search algorithms or political identity projects.

In a panel on “Intersected and Hyphenated Identities,” Deborah Hertz and Sheer Ganor gauged the methodological input German Jewish Studies can contribute to and take from the new emphasis on “intersectionality.” Hertz, in her “Using Intersectionality to Interpret Jewish and German History,” saw the idea of intersectionality at work

in historiography *tout court* and in Jewish-German history in particular. The notion seems to serve much the same function as historians' basic concept of contextuality does. By outlining her current research on the political affiliations of Jewish women, Hertz also highlighted what Jewish Studies has to offer for postcolonial and ethnic studies (in the U.S.). Sheer Ganor, in a complementary move, emphasized in her paper "On Either End of the Hyphen: The Entangled Belonging of German 'Others'" possible gains and new avenues for her own work by expanding the focus on Jewish diaspora studies to the broader field of migration history. In the absence of post-1960s Marxist approaches but in view of burgeoning histories of capitalism, both papers dealt with or investigated the status of economic history tools in the study of complex, multi-layered identities and the politics drawing on them.

The third panel "Art and Opposition" was on the Los Angeles (Hollywood and Compton) reception of, on the one hand, bodily if recordable art performances by German actor Conrad Veidt in the 1930s and, on the other hand, the band Kraftwerk in the 1980s' hip hop music scene. Sara Friedman explored the US audience's in Veidt; it depended as much on the universal language of silent movies as on his individual "type" as an actor — one that was easily generalized as "German." Sean Nye explained that Kraftwerk's success among the Los Angeles hip hop and gangsta rap community relied on its "sampleability" and on its drive and rhythm that made people dance. Both presenters had source materials begging for, perhaps, alternative, more-than-textual ways of writing German-American histories of popular culture. Nye invited the audience to listen to and watch song material as he developed his arguments. Friedman enhanced her narrative by intersecting larger context and complementary sources with one document of her choice: Veidt's diary of an early journey to Hollywood. Given that the diary itself was often jotted down in a dialogue-driven, film-like way, the suggestion of producing a graphic novel as an appropriate publication format seemed especially insightful.

The papers on the panel "Images, Information, Myth" also dealt with popular media. Jonathan Dentler presented research on the often paradoxical circumstances under which the necessarily international business model of the Weltbild Photo Agency achieved its aim of delivering Germans a National Socialist Weltbild or "world picture." He argued that from the perspective of world-ordering efforts such as the international regulation of telecommunications, national

aggrandizement and aggression were fractious forces. At the same time, from the perspective of national and racist attempts at ordering the world according to civilizational or racial hierarchies, cosmopolitanism and the need for international order were themselves fractious and disruptive. Harold Marcuse presented his teaching format “Researching the Provenance of Mythic History.” Today, members of an interested public can access historical information, both primary materials and the results of scholarly research, with unprecedented ease online. At the same time, they are exposed to a large number of questionable assertions and interpretations. In his teaching assignment, Marcuse has students trace historical myths and misinformation back to their origins and then retrace the paths they have taken as they are discoverable in popular conceptions about historical events today. It is noteworthy, in our context, that his sources stem primarily from the GHDI website (for the best of these student papers, see: <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/projects/germanhistory/essays/>). With his contribution, Marcuse approached the workshop theme not only from the perspective of source critique and pedagogy, but also from the field of public history and its strengths.

In the last slot of the day, Gloria Yu inquired into the status of thinking since the nineteenth century as a reflection on what German intellectual history and the history of science could offer to an understanding of the “contemporary moment” — a much-used periodization in this workshop. In her paper, “Thinking in a Fractious World: German Intellectuals, Failures of Thought, and the Physiological Origins of a New Moral Framework,” Yu combined European intellectual history with material culture approaches of science studies in order to, for instance, reconstruct the rise of the “measurable” intelligence as a condition of thinking. As yet another example of how scholars historicized the thinking of thinkers and other citizens, she reminded the audience that just when German intellectuals like Max Horkheimer (*Eclipse of Reason*) and Hannah Arendt (*The Life of the Mind*) were questioning and reclaiming the faculty of thinking, conceptual historians started to historicize their semantic tools of critique.

What is the future of German history — indeed any national history — in an increasingly transnational profession?, the workshop organizers had asked in their call for papers. In a concluding session, participants brought forward ideas and concerns — from strengthening their “hyphenated” professional identities of being Germanists *and*

scholars of migration studies, sciences studies, or legal historians; to continuing the work of decolonizing German history; or emphasizing the instructiveness of Germany's past as a starting point for studying history.

On the second day, the group visited the recently re-opened Wende-Museum in Los Angeles. The museum has established itself as yet another important venue for West Coast Germanists. It is dedicated to East German and Eastern European history with collections preserving Cold War artifacts.

Save the date: The next West Coast Germanists' meeting will be held in April 2020 at UC Berkeley.

Andrea Westermann, Paul Lerner, Elizabeth Drummond, and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann

