

Fifth West Coast Germanists' Workshop, 2023

Workshop at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., April 29–30, 2023. Co-organized by the Pacific Office of the German Historical Institute Washington and the Department of History, University of British Columbia, Vancouver. Conveners: Heidi Tworek (University of British Columbia) and Richard F. Wetzell (German Historical Institute Washington). Participants: Krista Baillie (University of British Columbia), Kristine Bell (University of Colorado, Colorado Springs), Noah Bender (University of California, Berkeley), Benjamin Bryce (University of British Columbia), Elizabeth Drummond (Loyola Marymount University), Kyle Frackman (University of British Columbia), Annika Frieberg (San Diego State University), Heike Friedman (German Historical Institute Washington), David Gramling (University of British Columbia), Susanne Hillman (San Diego State University), Patrick Hohlweck (University of California Berkeley), Anna Holian (Arizona State University), Ilinca Iurascu (University of British Columbia), Philipp Lenhard (University of California, Berkeley), Alan Maričić (University of Saskatchewan), James McSpadden (University of Nevada, Reno), Patricia Milewski (University of British Columbia), Madeleine Miller (University of Texas, Arlington), Caitlin Murdock (California State University, Long Beach), Jörg Neuheiser (University of California, San Diego), Joseph Patrouch (University of Alberta), Thomas Pegelow Kaplan (University of Colorado, Boulder), H. Glenn Penny (University of California, Los Angeles), Sandra Rebok (University of California, San Diego), Preetham Sridharan (University of Oregon), Elizabeth Sun (University of California, Berkeley), Phillip Wagner (University of California, Berkeley/University of Halle), and Elissa Waters (University of Southern California).

The West Coast Germanist Workshop at the University of British Columbia on scholarship in progress in the field of German history and German studies was temporally and

spatially wide-ranging and featured a number of fascinating presentations and conversations around research. In the first panel, "History and Geography," chaired by David Gramling, H. Glenn Penny, Caitlin Murdock, and Noah Bender discussed alternative forms of belonging, non-belonging, and connectedness in the southern German borderlands. Penny focused on spatial belongings during two hundred years in an area ranging from Salzburg to Basel, and the role of water access as a mode of local interconnection as well as the importance of global connections, such as through museums and tourism to and away from the area. Caitlin Murdock meanwhile discussed a group of German-speaking migrants from Czechoslovakia, the so-called Joachimsthaler, and the way in which mysterious illnesses (forms of cancer) they acquired as a result of work in Czechoslovak uranium mines became integrated into a larger postwar discourse on public health in West Germany. She pointed to the shifting understanding of radiation as a public health safety hazard and resistance to this narrative. Finally, Noah Bender introduced an interesting alternative economic history of migration routes from Central Europe as shaped by steamboat shipping companies in multiple countries, their political engagement with each other, and with other business interests. All in all, German-speaking populations were connected and disconnected internally and internationally, here based on economic, spatial, and geographic factors, to reshape our understandings of national belongings and traditional borders.

Panel 2, "Germany, Empire, and the World," was moderated by Heidi Tworek and spanned from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Joseph Patrouch described the travels of the Habsburg imperial court in one particular year, 1570, and the political and cultural effects of its travels. Sandra Rebok turned her attention to German scientists and thinkers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and their conceptualization of the American West. Interestingly, German production of knowledge was integral and relevant to several

empires operating in western North America, including the Russian and Spanish empires. Finally, Alan Maričić's presentation concerned West German-Yugoslav relations in the era of the 1950s Hallstein Doctrine. He concluded that despite hostile official relations, cultural relations between the two states were unaffected and surprisingly lively. Maričić focused particularly on the efforts of the Goethe Institute to introduce German culture in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav interest in studying at the institute, but also examined the West German film industry's practice of filming its popular western movies, based on the books by Karl May, in Yugoslavia for cost-saving purposes.

On the second day of the workshop, the third panel, "Language and Religion," was chaired by Ilinca Iurascu and included papers by Elizabeth Drummond and Preetham Sri-dharam. Drummond focused on a relatively unknown nineteenth century artist, Max Thalmann, and how the spiritual philosophy of Theosophy influenced his artistic production. She based her presentation on a collection of art accessible at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, pointing to its spiritual and artistic connections and context. She argued that, despite his relatively limited influence and reach as an artist, Thalmann can be understood as a window into culture and art in the early to mid-twentieth century. Preetham Sri-dharan's research concerned how German Romantic thinkers and their religious thought intersected with the history of ideal language theories. His paper examined the language theories of philosophers such as Hamann, Herder, and Humboldt, including their beliefs that languages can aspire to perfection and in the potential of improving languages toward a utopian ideal.

Panel 4, "German-ness: Race, Work, and Citizenship," was chaired by Richard Wetzell and featured papers by Kristine Bell, Jörg Neuheiser, and Philipp Wagner. Kristine Bell's paper discussed the Aryan myth, including the origins of the term "Aryan" and its initial usage. She then traced it into the

Enlightenment period and showed its contextualization by histories of language and etymology which drew connections and parallels between Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Celtic, and Gothic, not all of them factually based. Finally, she covered its usage in Theosophy from the nineteenth century into the 1930s. Jörg Neuheiser was concerned with the notion of “German work” and how that concept engaged with the democratization of postwar West Germany. Using union and company papers and magazines from, among other groups of sources, Maschinenfabrik Augsburg Nürnberg AG (MAN), he illustrated the complexities, continuities, and discontinuities of ideas around the concept of a specifically German work ethic in the aftermath of the Nazi era and how these contributed to the shaping of fluid concepts of democracy. Philipp Wagner, like Neuheiser, complicated scholarly approaches to the implementation of democracy in postwar West Germany but did so in the context of education. While educational reformers agreed that the schools should be engaged in stabilizing society and securing democracy, there is little agreement on how this should happen. Models of creating a “democratic elite” through meritocratic training for particularly talented students competed with more egalitarian models of broader educational ideals. He showed that in the actual implementation of educational models, students were treated differently and thus differentiated from each other based on class and gender.

Panel 5, “Weimar and Nazi Germany,” was chaired by Benjamin Bryce and included papers by James McSpadden and Elissa Waters. McSpadden reconceptualized Weimar politics on three levels through the lens of the political couple Katharina and Siegfried von Kardorff. First, he challenged the notions of Weimar politics as a chaotic and violent scene, instead pointing to the collegiality and civility of networking in Weimar political circles. Secondly, he used Siegfried von Kardorff’s activities to discuss the continuities in networks even when there were political breaks on an official,

outward-facing level. Finally, McSpadden emphasized the inclusiveness and gendered dimension of the behind-the-scenes networking in politics through his attention to Katharina von Kardorff. Elissa Waters presented a close reading of the artistic and cultural-political position of artist Renate Geisberg. While Geisberg's work has often been interpreted in the postwar era as anti-Nazi, Waters pointed out that in reality, she was politically neutral, and her work was sometimes officially sponsored by the National Socialists. Overall, Waters argued that Geisberg's position and art pointed to the open-ended nature of the 1930s art scene, and to the balancing act vis-à-vis politics that was typical of many artists at the time.

The sixth and final panel, "Postwar Germany," was chaired by Kyle Frackman and included papers by Anna Hollian, Thomas Pegelow Kaplan, and Elizabeth Sun. Anna Hollian's research concerned East European Jewish business owners and businesses in postwar West Germany. She discussed this community's existence, its relationship to West Germany, and the varying approaches and strategies which the business owners used to negotiate the relationship with the Germans, past and present, as historical agents or as customers necessary for their businesses' survival. Thomas Pegelow Kaplan discussed how, in the 1960s, leftwing activists, including the West German SDS and the Black Panther Party, formed transnational networks which sought to expand and reconceptualize definitions of genocide. By connecting police violence in the United States and the Vietnam War to the German historical memory of moral injustice and antisemitism during the Holocaust, this generation of activists sought to alter the valence of genocide and thereby mobilize it for present and more wide-ranging activism. Finally, Elizabeth Sun introduced an approach based on digital humanities and public history through her work on digitalized migrant narratives in the twenty-first century while also referring back to historical refugee writings, such

as those of Anna Seghers. Her presentation introduced the project “Weiter Schreiben” (<https://weilerschreiben.jetzt>), a digital space for refugee authors to resume writing and find a platform for their work even after displacement.

The final conversation of the workshop included questions of future financing, whether the format should be changed or remain as it currently is, whether to open parts of it to larger audiences, and whether a keynote speaker should be invited. The participants also discussed whether future workshops should continue to be open-ended or have more specific themes.

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