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RETROSPECTIVE OF GERMAN COLLOQUIUM: E PLURIBUS UNUM

Jaimey Fisher

The Institute for German Cultural Studies' 1996 Spring Colloquium Series enjoyed the full diversity of our field - in fact, it made diversity, difference, and the ethical issues therein a consistently central topic of discussion. While the papers themselves demonstrated the wide-ranging interests and divergent methods now finding a home (but not a Heimat) within German Studies, they also returned time and time again to the question of how to best respect, maintain, and represent difference. Rahel Hahn, for instance, took up the ethical moment in close reading as parallel to the ethical moment in encountering the Other. Barbara Mennel showed how much of the ubiquitous celebration of Fassbinder ignores his deployment of exotic, eroticized, orientalist stereotypes of El Hedi ben Salem's black body, and argues that such stereotypes foreclose a differentiated treatment of his race or ethnicity. Pascal Grosse demonstrated how the German debates around the African Other destabilized existing belief systems. William Rasch celebrated the antagonistic difference between two dominant theories in our field, cultural studies and epistemological theory. Russell Berman argued that the nation is, against today's conventional universalist wisdom, the best collective category by which to acknowledge and maintain particular identity and historical experience. All the authors - via varied means - argued that their approaches were rich on preserving difference and poor on compressing it.

Rahel Hahn's "Encountering the Other:
(continued on page 12)



Biddy Martin

BIDDY MARTIN APPOINTED ASSOCIATE DEAN

Professor Biddy Martin, chair for two years of the Department of German Studies, has been appointed associate dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, effective July 1. The appointment is half time and Martin will continue to teach and research in German Studies, Women's Studies and Gay Studies. Her position as chair of the department will be taken over by interim chair, Professor Arthur Groos.

Martin, who completed a Ph.D in German literature from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1985, has been on the faculty at Cornell since 1984. She is associate professor with joint appointment in German Studies and Women's Studies. She has served on the steering committee of the Institute for German Cultural Studies and is a member of the steering committee for Women's Studies and is the director for graduate studies for Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Studies.

Martin's publications include Woman and Modernity: The (Life) Styles of Lou
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"LEGACIES OF FREUD : ACADEMIC THEORY AND THERAPEUTIC PRACTICE"

Christian Gundermann

The average academic conference tends to serve, to put it at once crudely and psychoanalytically, one main purpose: to shore up the speakers' phallic investiture, and to constitute an academic community via imaginary identification. (Voilà Freud's recipe for a totalitarian society.) The content of the speakers' presentations per se is of secondary importance; but perhaps more strikingly, this is setting which radically prevents dialogue. The usual five minutes of question-and-answer period after the presentations can rarely be put to use to engage in any sort of exchange with the speaker's argument, if there is one; and so those five minutes become the audience's opportunity at stardom. This leads to the kind of "question" we are all too familiar with from innumerable conferences: "What you said is all well and good, but here is what I work on..."

Little to none of the above was to be observed at this conference, indicatively labeled "Workshop" (some participants - disappointed not to find their usual format - probably thought of it as "labor camp"). The March 2-3 weekend program was the kick-off to a longer series of events to be continued next fall semester, leading up to a final crescendo in the form of a three-day conference with invited speakers from Europe and the U.S. in November 1996. The events are generously funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Institute for German Cultural Studies, the Society for the Humanities, and others.

The organizers (Biddy Martin and Suzanne Stewart) were obviously deter-
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FACULTY BOOK REVIEW



**The Powers of
Speech: Politics
of Culture in
the GDR**

by David Bathrick
(Lincoln, NE:
University of Nebraska
Press, 1995) 303 pages

Marc Silberman

North American Germanists began to notice GDR literature as an object of analysis only in the mid-seventies. A member of the editorial collective that founded the journal *New German Critique* in the early seventies, David Bathrick was instrumental from its onset in encouraging us to engage seriously issues raised by this object in the pages of the interdisciplinary journal while he himself made critical yet sympathetic contributions here and elsewhere. Some of these are collected now in this volume, reworked, extended, and flanked by an introduction and three original essays. Beyond the importance of the volume's central discussion about the development and function of oppositional or dissident culture in the GDR, it also cannot help but serve as a significant marker by a major GDR scholar for the way American Germanistik will be reorienting itself in response to the GDR's collapse and Germany's unification. Written in a lucid, accessible style, *The Powers of Speech* should be of interest to all those concerned with the role and constraints of intellectual discourse in postwar Germany.

Bathrick's study consists of eight chapters divided into three sections with an introduction and epilogue. Although broadly chronological in its conception, it is not shaped either as a history of dissidents or of the cultural policies that defined the parameters of oppositional discourse in the GDR. Rather, Bathrick aims at tracing the GDR's internal, contradictory dynamics of cultural modernization and national identity formation by focusing on individual dissidents as well as on controversial discussions about

pertinent cultural traditions in a socialist society. In both cases Bathrick excels at contextualizing his focus, bringing to bear on his material the larger political context of changing cold-war oppositions that determined institutional discourses.

A brief summary of the chapters will show how this argument proceeds. In the introduction Bathrick announces his intention of countering those voices that have attempted in the past five years to write off the GDR's dissident literature and oppositional intellectual elite as essential pillars of the corrupt, illegitimate authority of party rule. The frame for this critical, even polemical, approach draws on three tenants: the space for oppositional and alternative speech must be seen within the discursive context of GDR literary institutions or what Bathrick calls the socialist public sphere; this public sphere implicates as well the role of left-wing and anti-communist Western intellectuals within the logic of cold-war debates; and the GDR public sphere-drawing on specific German traditions-explains the unique trajectory of the opposition in contradistinction to dissidence in the Soviet Union or other East bloc countries. Part I, "The Politics of Culture", examines the contours of the evolving public sphere between party discourse, the role of Western media, and the counterofficial voices in the GDR. While the first chapter concentrates on the emergence of the literary public sphere and the crisis around the expulsion of poet Wolf Biermann in 1976, Chapter Two investigates the history of inner-party reform and self-transformation around revisionist Marxists like Robert Havemann and Rudolf Bahro.

Part II, "The politics of Modernism: A Theater of Revolution?", reflects on the power of avant-garde aesthetics as a force of opposition and renewal in the GDR. Each of the four chapters centers on an aspect of dramatist Heiner Müller's encounter with and redeployment of Brechtian aesthetics from the fifties through the eighties. At the same time this discussion provides Bathrick an opportunity to explore, on the one hand, the orthodox, dogmatic view of Marxism defended by the party hierarchy and on

the other, the impasse of modernist aesthetic strategies that are bound to models of productivism, binarism, and historical progressivism. In Bathrick's view Müller's theatrical texts proved to be the most consistent and prescient critique of the stultification that ultimately led to collapse in the GDR.

Part III, "The Politics of the Irrational", focuses on the historical contingencies that produced serious challenges in the cultural sphere to the dominant paradigm of materialist, rationalist philosophy. In Chapter Seven Bathrick reviews the status of folklore and popular culture in the Marxist tradition (overdetermined by its misuse in the Third Reich) and their intersection in the late sixties with utopian notions of fantasy. The emergence of uncanny tales, the rekindled interest in the Romantic heritage, and - particularly among women writers - the insistence on subjective experience, including dreams and the fantastical, enriched literary discourse in the seventies but also threw into question the Enlightenment framework called upon to legitimate real existing socialism in the GDR. Chapter Eight pursues this critical discourse in the context of Nietzsche's reception in the GDR, tracing once again the historical tension between Marxism and Nietzsche through Georg Lukács, the Frankfurt School, and Ernst Bloch. As a critique of all absolutes, Nietzsche's writing began in the eighties a process of articulation that in hindsight was symptomatic for a polarization among intellectuals around fundamental issues of social change and national identity in the GDR, concepts such as antifascism, working class solidarity, and the socialist telos of a collective subject.

Bathrick closes his study with an epilogue that qualifies his model of the socialist public sphere constituted largely

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CONFERENCE ON CRITICISM AND THEORY HELD IN APRIL

Kizer Walker

On April 26 and 27, Cornell's Society for the Humanities, in cooperation with the School for Criticism and Theory, sponsored a Conference on Criticism and Theory. Papers covered a range of topics and approaches in literary criticism and historiography; looming large, though, were questions of poetics and problems of loss and mourning - and these spheres frequently overlapped.

Elaine Showalter (Department of English, Princeton), who was scheduled to speak on "Hysterical Epidemics of the 1900s," was unfortunately unable to attend the conference. I am unhappy to report, too, that I was not able to hear the first of the conference papers, Stephen Nichols (Department of French, Johns Hopkins) speaking on "The 'Orgueil' of Medieval Manuscripts." Barbara Johnson (Department of English, Harvard) delivered the second, an inquiry into the relationships among ethics, subject-object relations, and textual-interpretive free play, drawing on the work of both Kant and child development theorist and psychiatrist D. W. Winnicott.

Taking Winnicott's notion of the "transitional object" as a point of departure, Johnson's paper reconsidered the fundamental ethical injunction against "using people." While such "use" is conventionally understood in the sense of economic exploitation, or in the sense of an objectification of the other for the narcissistic consolidation of the self, Johnson suggested ways in which "using people" might instead occasion an escape from the narcissistic subject.

Johnson explained that, in Winnicott, the transitional object (a teddy bear, a security blanket) exists prior to the child's distinction of subject and object, though the transitional object is also that which brings this dichotomy into being. The transitional object is subjected to the infant's loving as well as hating and aggression -- its status as transitional object

depends upon its survival of the infant's test of the destruction of the object. It is this proof of permanence that allows the child to learn he or she is not omnipotent, to tolerate this, and ultimately to separate from the object.

Johnson went on to discuss how in the relationship between psychoanalyst and analysand, Winnicott stressed that the latter must *use* the former in a manner analogous to the child's use of the transitional object. In Winnicott's terms, the patient who *relates* to the analyst rather than *using* him or her, Johnson said, has only constructed a "false self capable of finishing the analysis and expressing gratitude," but left the "real work" undone. Like the infant with a prematurely moral sense of restraint against destructiveness vis-à-vis the transitional object, such a patient is caught in a "narcissistic lock in which nothing but approval and validation or disapproval and invalidation is experienced." "Using the analyst," on the other hand, "means experiencing all the infantile feelings of omnipotence and dependency so as to learn to tolerate and integrate them rather than shut them out through a false system of premature respect and concern." Thus the lock is opened "to let in the world." This sense of *using people*, Johnson maintained, is relevant to the construction of ethical subjects.

Throughout her paper, Johnson emphasized Winnicott's rhetorical strategies, particularly the attempts in his writing to expand a space in which to theorize what he calls "the intermediate area between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived." Johnson noted Winnicott's insistence on maintaining a paradoxical understanding of the in-between nature of the transitional object, particularly as regards its origins: "The baby creates the object but the object was there waiting to be created and to become a cathected object." In Winnicott's writing, Johnson suggests, "[t]he paradox of the transitional object functions, like the transitional object itself, as domain of play and illusion that allows an interpreter, like an infant, to accept and tolerate

frustration and reality." Johnson suggests that such aspects as the Winnicott material resonate with poststructuralist reading strategies that would allow for a "free play of signifiers"; notions certainly and authority in interpretation on the other hand, might then represent a "premature respect" in the approach to texts.

The Friday session closed with Michael Riffaterre (Department of French, Columbia) speaking on "The Birth of a Text." The paper questioned the assumptions of hermeneutic approaches to texts that would find texts' significance "hidden elsewhere: in intention, in the unsaid, in the repressed, in the obscurely meant," approaches that ultimately test the validity of their own interpretation according to "a connection between the word and a nonverbal entity"; Riffaterre proposed a break with the "reliance on referentiality."

Riffaterre considered three cases to illustrate the approach to texts he has in mind. He began with a critique of Tzvetan Todorov's reading, in his *Genres du discours*, of Baudelaire's prose poem "La chambre double." The poem's narrator describes his room transformed in a dream into the perfumed boudoir of an unseen woman, then his waking in the solitary, shabby bedroom. Riffaterre's reading of the poem diverged from Todorov's in seeking a unity of the contradictory descriptions in a purely formal, textual element -- "the artefact, the clever conceit that gave the text its literary identity" -- that would serve as a "verbal hinge" between Baudelaire's two rooms.

Reflecting on the question of "what takes the place of reality when referentiality is suspended," Riffaterre went on to discuss the 1956 poem by Michel Leiris, "A Self-Portrait of the Poet as a Muslim Crier," and its intertextual relationship to an earlier essay, "Persephone," contained in Leiris's autobiographical writings. Through persistent contradiction, the poem undermines any attempt to read it referentially. The elements in the poem (a muazzin, a minaret, a snake), Riffaterre contended, are in fact generated in the

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STEVEN ASCHHEIM: "NEW DIRECTIONS AND ISSUES IN HOLOCAUST HISTORIOGRAPHY"

Suzanne Stewart

Historians are not theologians, and therefore it is the historian's task continually and responsibly to revise earlier models of historical explanation. So Steven Aschheim opened his talk "New Directions and Issues in Holocaust Historiography" on April 12, 1996 as part of a conference entitled "History and Memory," organized by the Cornell History Department graduate students. Steven Aschheim is Professor of History at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and author of *Brothers and Strangers, The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany: 1890-1990*, and the soon to appear *Culture and Catastrophe*. Aschheim insisted that the need for continuous revision be applied to the study of the Holocaust as well.

Speaking from what he described as a "post-Goldhagen" perspective, such revision is above all essential for an analysis of anti-semitism in Germany, and Aschheim proposed that historians engage in "local studies" of anti-semitism, emphasizing, however, the fundamental split between pre-1933 semitism and what followed. Aschheim demanded refinements of comparative models of analysis of anti-semitism, both temporal and geographic, as well as more sophisticated interrogations of how anti-semitism worked at different class levels in German society. In response to Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's recent and much debated book *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Aschheim insisted that knowledge of Jewish extermination was to a significant degree repressed, that part of the bureaucratic functioning of the machine of extermination depended on the choice of not knowing. The question Aschheim raised, therefore, was whether this can be considered anti-semitism as traditionally understood. Indeed, Aschheim proposed that anti-semitism may well have functioned as a retroac-

tive explanation of mass killing, that the thesis of anti-semitism can be used as a later rationalization of rather than as an impulsion for the extermination of European Jews.

Aschheim insisted on the continuing importance of the bureaucratic explanation of Nazi policy towards Jews, of the routinization of killing that generated its own momentum. On the other hand, he also criticized the functionalist model of explanation for its neglect of cultural factors, for its inability to explain how a previous social taboo can suddenly become thinkable. It is the explanation of such cultural factors, or what he called the reconstruction of a cultural context, that historians must now reconstruct. Aschheim enumerated a series of criteria important for such a reconstruction: the fact that the 20th century is a century of mass death based on the idea of purification and "ethnic cleansing"; the fact that the rise of Nazism depended on worldwide wars; the crisis of liberalism and the consequent rise of anti-democratic as well as anti-communist movements; and above all, the totally novel idea of a sustained vision of racial or biological politics, the use, that is, of modern discursive practices at the service of eugenic visions of the state.

What Aschheim proposed was a detailed analysis of this radically new vision of the modern state founded on the idea of race, a vision that depends on the notion of inclusion and exclusion. Anti-semitism must be understood within the context of this eugenic framework, of a state founded on a medicalized racial hygiene. Thus, for instance, historians need to study the role of doctors, nurses, geographers, sociologists and demographers in the construction of Nazi ideology. The role of "racial" experts such as doctors were from the very beginning very important: doctors, as Jay Lifton has shown, were both over-represented in the Nazi party and involved in the process of extermination at all levels. Historians need to study more carefully the connections between the euthanasia programs and the Nazi elaboration of the "Final Solution." Another factor also requires more analysis: the role of intoxication in

the killing machine, understood both as the *Rausch* that the killing generated, a crazed sacrificial outbreak amongst those that were engaged in the massive shootings amongst the *Einsatztruppen* as well as in the SS-manned concentration camps. More prosaically, however, historians should study more carefully the role alcohol played, especially amongst the "ordinary men" of the *Einsatztruppen* studied by Christopher Browning.

Aschheim concluded his talk by insisting on the need for more specific studies of Nazi ideology, studies that should, however, always be sensitive to the larger context. He demanded a contextualization that is always open to questioning this gesture of contextualization. Only in this way, he concluded, would it be possible to remain committed to open debate.

Suzanne Stewart is a lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages at Cornell

GERMAN COLLOQUIUM SERIES TO CONTINUE IN FALL 1996

The German Colloquium series, sponsored by the Institute for German Cultural Studies, will begin again in September with the usual format of outside professors and Cornell graduate students presenting papers. Among those who have accepted the invitation to attend are Rodolphe Gasché, Department of Comparative Literature at SUNY Buffalo; Patricia Herminghouse, Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics, University of Rochester; Sara Lennox, Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, University of Massachusetts; Christian Gundermann, graduate student, Department of German Studies, Cornell; Barbara Hahn, Berlin, presently Associate Professor, Princeton; and Arlene Teraoka, Associate Professor, University of Minnesota at Minneapolis.

WAGNER: OPERA AND CULTURAL PRACTICE

Jeffrey Schneider

During the weekend of April 5-6, 1996, the Institute for German Cultural Studies, in cooperation with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), sponsored a conference on Richard Wagner entitled "Wagner: Opera and Cultural Practice." Organized by Professor **Arthur Groos** (Cornell), the two-day conference focused on historical, theoretical, and interpretive issues surrounding Wagner's musical theater. The interdisciplinary aims of the conference brought together musicologists and literary scholars from England, Canada and the United States. In addition to analyzing a broad range of Wagner's operatic works, the papers also examined performance practices, Wagner's philosophical and autobiographical writings, texts by contemporaries of Wagner, and more recent literary and performance theory.

Nearly all the papers engaged with the interpretive problems posed by Wagner's own theoretical understanding of his project and his representation of interpretation in the operatic texts themselves. Two papers attended to the complexities of genre in Wagner's works, focusing in particular on Wagner's use of genre as part of an artistic development leading to *Tristan und Isolde* and the foundation of a German national theater of the future. In "Das Liebesverbot: Wagner's 'Italian' Opera?," **Emanuele Senici** (Cornell) argued that Wagner's characterization of this "failed" piece as Italian opera had less to do with the structure of the work than with Wagner's autobiographical narrative of becoming a German artist. In addition to contextualizing the discourse about the national character of music in the Young German movement, Senici also analyzed the opera's generic and musicological structures to dispute its relation to works like *La Sonnambula* and demonstrate its similarity to German operatic predecessors like Beethoven's *Fidelio* or Weber's *Der Freischütz*. **Art**

Groos also saw Wagner's teleological hand at work in *Der fliegende Holländer*. In "Back to the Future: Hermeneutic Fantasies in *Der fliegende Holländer*," Groos identified the operation of two genres, the *Schaueroper* and the rescue opera, whose interplay attempts to defer the fulfillment of the opera's meaning into the future, at which time the revolutionary theater would be realized. Groos pointed out that after completing *Tristan*, Wagner integrated chromatic music into the *Holländer's* conclusion in order to denote *Tristan* as its realization.

As might be expected at a conference on Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* also figured prominently in other papers. **Thomas Grey** (Stanford) explained that Isolde's aria at the beginning of Act I represented a "rage" aria that would have been diagnosed by Wagner's contemporaries as a sign of degeneracy. In "Wagner the Degenerate," Grey traced Wagner's place in the discourse of degeneracy in the 19th century. In "Walter Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* and Wagner's Musical Drama," **John Deathridge** (Cambridge) approached the opera through the terms of allegory and symbol. Deathridge suggested that operas like *Tristan* reveal Wagner's passion for allegory in both text and music. Drawing on Benjamin's analysis of Baroque tragedy as well as on a broad range of contemporary theorists, Deathridge outlined how Wagner used allegory to fuse myth and history together.

Deathridge used the dialectic between allegory and symbol to understand Wagner's techniques for generating meaning. Other conference participants suggested similar oppositions in Wagner's operas. In "The Racist Politics of Hidden Meaning," **Marc Weiner** (Indiana) used the distinction between metaphor and literalism to clarify the debate around anti-Semitism in Wagner's operas. Reminding the audience that Wagner's dramas arose out of a Romantic tradition that privileges metaphorical meaning, Weiner argued that Wagner represented Jews metaphorically through their inability to correctly comprehend non-literal messages. Weiner demon-

strated that not only Mime's greed and treachery, but also his mimetic and non-metaphorical music from Act II of *Siegfried* code him as the (metaphorical) Jew in the text. **David Levin** (Columbia) also foregrounded the tension between metaphorical and literal levels in Wagner's work as part of his analysis of the debate over traditionalist and innovative stagings of Wagner's operas. In "Reading a Staging/Staging a Reading" Levin argued against conservative, mimetic, intentionalist performance practices that inevitably favor the music over the libretto, and called instead for productions that grapple to represent the interpretive dimensions of the texts. He used a videotaped Australian performance of *Die Meistersinger* to show one possibility of portraying Beckmesser's performance in the final act as a failure of reading.

The theme of death plays an important role in Wagner's work. John Deathridge suggested that death is at the heart of Wagner's use of allegories. In their highly performative paper in the emerging field of "death studies" -- "'Alles was ist, endet': Death, Dying and the *Ring*" - **Linda Hutcheon** (Toronto) and **Mark Hutcheon** offered a reading of the *Ring* as Wotan's confrontation with death. Recognizing that death's meaning is culturally circumscribed, the Hutcheons first contextualized Wotan's impending death as part of a philosophical tradition in the 19th century. Their reading also drew on more recent theorizations of death by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and Ernest Becker in an effort to understand the continued relevance of Wagner's opera tetralogy to audiences today.

Jeffrey Schneider is a graduate student in German Studies at Cornell

Contributions to German Culture News are welcome. If you would like an event listed or have an article to contribute, please contact Julia Stewart at 255-8408, e-mail: js75@cornell.edu.

FELSTINERS LECTURE ON PAUL CELAN AND CHARLOTTE SALOMON

John R. Crutchfield

The Cornell Society for the Humanities, in conjunction with the Departments of English and Modern Languages, the Program for Jewish Studies, and the Institute for German Cultural Studies, recently sponsored a pair of lectures by John and Mary Felstiner, both of whom have recently published significant studies of German Jewish artists. John Felstiner's well-attended lecture took place on Monday, April 1, 1996 in the A.D. White House, and took its title from his book, Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew, which received a favorable review from Gail Holst-Warhaft in the March issue of *The Bookpress*. Professor Felstiner's work is a remarkable conjunction of biography, criticism, and translator's notebook, with detailed discussions of the process by which individual poems were rendered into English. One is struck by the amount of care, perseverance, and sheer humility Celan's poems seem to demand of the translator. What was perhaps the most interesting aspect of Prof. Felstiner's presentation was the insight it afforded into the reasons he undertook so difficult a task. He began by noting Celan's importance, not only as "Europe's most significant post-war poet," but also as "the greatest translator of our time." (Celan translated over fifty poets from eight different languages.) The affinity with Celan, however, extended beyond the shared task of the translator, as well as a shared Jewishness. In a certain sense the poems themselves, difficult as they are, demand to be understood, to be felt like tremors through every other language, and according to Felstiner, they in fact address themselves to their future translators. This is because they are written out of an experience which both demands and continues to defy comprehension. If Celan's writing bears witness to the Holocaust, Prof. Felstiner sees his task as "witnessing for the witness." Yet this

task is immediately thrown into doubt for a number of reasons. Since Celan's mother-tongue was also the "murderer-tongue," what might it mean to render his poems in some other language? Wouldn't this obscure or obliterate the very existential urgency and historical irony which characterize Celan's poetic voice? What is probably the case with any poet is undoubtedly true of Celan: his relationship to the language of his own writing is unique and problematic. It would not be difficult to argue, in fact, that Celan could not have written poems in any other language, that the disarticulations his writing performs, the trembling and slippage it sets in motion are specific to German. Felstiner engages



Paul Celan

these problems in his translations in several ingenious ways - for example by retaining as much as possible the actual rhythm and sound of the German original, or by leaving certain words entirely untranslated, as in the poem "Deathfugue," which Prof. Felstiner described as "the Guernica of poetry." The effect is not a mere "carrying over" of meaning from one language to another, but rather an electrifying interaction between the syntactical, lexicographical, orthographical, and metaphorical characteristics of two different but related languages. Felstiner's English literally registers the trauma of Celan's German.

Prof. Felstiner's presentation followed Celan's life schematically from the latter's birth in 1920 in Czernowitz (then part of Rumania) to his death in 1970 in Paris. Several remarkable photographs of Celan were shown on the overhead-

projector, along with poems belonging to various periods of his career. Prof. Felstiner talked the audience through some of the poems' more interesting or difficult passages from the perspective of translation, noting the complexities of allusion, especially to the Old Testament. He also played a number of recordings of Celan reading his own poems, all of which were hauntingly musical, powerfully cadenced performances. The audience was further treated to an anecdote or two illustrating the bizarre lengths to which a careful translator must go to insure the propriety of his or her translation. (In doubt as to whether the word "Hellkieferrnduft" in the poem "Es Stand" could adequately be rendered by "bright pine scent," Prof. Felstiner did what any man of science would have done in his stead: he undertook an empirical investigation. This required that he journey several thousand miles to Jerusalem, where the poem takes place, to determine whether the scent in question did in fact originate from a bright pine. The needles he produced from an envelope attested to the correctness of his hypothesis.) Prof. Felstiner concluded his lecture with a brief account of Celan's death, presumed by many to have been a suicide. Although no note was discovered, it was found that Celan had been reading a biography of the poet Hölderlin, opened to a page on which the following sentence was underlined, "Sometimes this genius darkens and sinks down in the bitter well of his heart, but oftentimes his spirit glitters wonderfully."

The following afternoon, April 2, Prof. Felstiner gave a workshop on translation to a smaller group of faculty and students, entitled, "Translating Neruda and Celan: The Art of Loss." It will be recalled that Prof. Felstiner's previous book of translations bears the title, Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu, and Prof. Felstiner described the link between these two poets as that of a "kindred effort to re-voice an obliterated people." The workshop began with a discussion of different conceptions of what translation is or should be, and in particular what translations of poetry are commonly thought to be. The sugges-

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FACULTY PUBLICATIONS

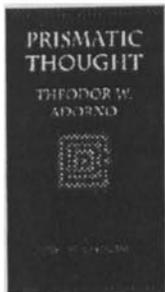
Recent publications of Cornell University faculty members include:

Michael Steinberg, editor: Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History, with essays by H.D. Kittsteiner, Jacques Ranciere, Irving Wohlfarth, Michael Loewy, Françoise Meltzer, Harry Harootunian, Max Pensky, Ackbar Abbas, and Michael Steinberg (July 1996) Cornell University Press.

Biddy Martin, Femininity Played Straight (September 1996) Routledge Press.



Nietzsche's Corps/e
by Geoffrey Waite
(Duke University Press, 1996)



Prismatic Thought: Theodor W. Adorno
by Peter U. Hohendahl
(Nebraska University Press, 1995)



Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700-1815
by Isabel V. Hull
(Cornell University Press, 1995)

FACULTY PROFILE



Bonnie Buettner

Bonnie Buettner, Senior Lecturer in the German Studies Department, received her doctoral degree in German from Cornell in 1984. She had started her graduate work at UCLA, where she received her master's degree and was awarded a UCLA Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching. At Cornell, she focused her studies on the medieval period and has published on both German and French medieval topics. Buettner has long been an adjunct member of the department and now returns to teaching full time after more than ten years in administrative positions. She served the university first as Dean for Seniors and Pre-Law Advisor in the College of Arts and Sciences and then as University Fellowship Coordinator, working with students applying for various prestigious awards, including the Rhodes and Marshall Scholarships.

This past semester, Buettner taught a section of the popular Freshman Writing Seminar on fairy tales, a subject on which she has also published, and a 200 level introductory German literature course. The main focus of her teaching will be on the intermediate level courses in German Studies. Buettner has already started to explore new ventures at that level by developing a new course - Wasistdeutsch? (German 220) - which examines questions of German identity and how Ger-

mans and others have defined "Germanness" through selections from film, essay, literature, art and music. Together with colleagues in the DML and the native German speaker in the Language House, she started what she hopes will be a successful series of social gatherings for students at all levels of German; the first "Spiel und Sprache" was held in April.

As Chair of the Goethe Prize Committee this spring, Buettner looked into the possibility of expanding the eligibility of the award beyond the competition currently open to juniors, seniors, and graduate students. Starting next spring, the new award will be given to a freshman or sophomore for the best essay on German literature. In addition to her teaching duties, Buettner will be working with Prof. Inta Ezergailis to help train TAs, for which they were successful in getting funding.

FREUD CONFERENCE TO CONTINUE IN FALL

The conference "Legacies of Freud: Academic Theories and Therapeutic Practices," after a very successful start in March, will continue into the new academic year. A course on Freud for advanced undergraduates and graduates will be offered for the Fall semester. Biddy Martin and Suzanne Stewart, organizers of the conference, will teach the course. Speakers from the Cornell community will also have opportunity to present their work to the students.

The conference will culminate in a three-day event on November 21, 22, and 23 in which invited speakers from the U. S. and Europe will participate. Michael

Parsons (England), Ruth Leys (John Hopkins), Judith Butler (UC/Berkeley), Mitchell Greenberg (Miami/Ohio), Dori Laub (New England Institute for Psychoanalysis, New Haven), Ilse Grubrich-Simitis (Analyst and editor of Freud's work for Fischer Verlag, Germany), Mark Driscoll (Cornell graduate student) are some of the names who have been invited to the conference.

The Freud conference is generously funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Institute for German Cuultural Studies, College of Arts & Sciences, Society for the Humanities, Gay Studies and others.

(Freud - continued from page 1) mined to facilitate dialogue, and for participants familiar with Martin's "radical" approach to pedagogy, it was no surprise for them to find themselves dispersed into small discussion groups after an exceptionally brief exposé (10-15 minutes) given by the presenter. The papers to be discussed were available previous to the event, so there was no need for lengthy and tiring performances. It became possible to stay focused and discuss very specific topics raised by the papers (there were only four all weekend), and there was ample time for issues to be really "worked-through" (there was at least one hour and a half of discussion for each paper). Thus the format of the event reflected some of the most central theoretical concerns of the writing under discussion. The deliciously catered lunches provided further opportunities for continued discussion.

The first presenter, notoriously engaged with ethical questions concerning academic discourse, was **Dominick LaCapra**, who offered a paper titled: "Lanzmann's *Shoah*: Here There is No Why." In this paper, LaCapra criticizes certain aspects of Claude Lanzmann's epochal "chef-d'oeuvre," most notably its tendency to "confine performativity to acting-out and even to give way to displaced, secular religiosity." (18) The concerns raised in this paper, and in the fifteen-minute plot summary allotted to the speaker, were to dominate the entire weekend, so broad and important was their scope with respect to the discursive practices we all are engaged in. To paraphrase LaCapra's observations as briefly as possible, the critique of Lanzmann's preference for a mode of unmediated acting-out or unmediated identification with victims of the Holocaust over a more conscious and mediated mode of

working-through which engages "the social and political problems and provide[s] a measure of responsible control in action" is linked with a more general predilection in recent academic discourses for anti-rational unmediatedness. LaCapra stated that these current discourses (which he broadly labeled deconstructionist, or postmodernist, and whose theoretical lineage he traced to such writers as Paul de Man, Julia Kristeva or Georges Bataille) - in their valorization of melancholia (and therefore dis-

miss the ability to mourn, and therefore leave the past behind, as simply naive or insensitive) in a field which, in his mind, has been dominated by displaced religiosity, where the Holocaust has become the ritual space for acting-out, for "near-death experiences without dying."

The concept of trauma was to dominate much of the weekend's discussions. In the discussion that followed LaCapra's presentation, participants criticized his stark distinction between acting-out and working-through, which, in Freud's conception, are not as clearly separate from each other as LaCapra would like them to be. It was argued that working-out was receiving too uncritical a valorization in LaCapra's account, and that Lanzmann's film and writing presented a necessary critique of mourning as a regulatory and domesticating process whose ethical status is more than dubious precisely because it allows to "leave behind," and whose harmonizing tendency cannot do justice to historical trauma. Working-through, moreover, must always rely on acting-out, a certain dose of which will never be sublated. Someone suggested that *Shoah*, as well as a lot of the current critical writing on the Holocaust, could be regarded as a ritualized form of working-through trauma. There was, however, little disagreement over LaCapra's concern that the passage from "radical art" to politics in such writers as Lyotard, Kristeva or Bataille was much too immediate, and that critical categories like obligation, guilt and responsibility had to be made not just relevant but also applicable. There was also little dissent from LaCapra's call for greater historical specificity in dealing with trauma than is to be found in the writers whom LaCapra criticized.

The second paper discussed on Saturday was **Mary Jacobus's** "Incest, Trauma and Literary Transmission: Mary



Panelists Joan Copjec, Suzanne Stewart and Bidy Martin with participants

Photo: Caroline Eio

avowal of mourning or working-through); of excess and radical expenditure; of ecstasy and self-immolation; of moving away from specificity; of blocking understanding; in relation to writing itself, of unreadability produced by a style which privileges erratic abstraction; of a "politique du pire" - tend to inscribe the Holocaust as a trope for the structural trauma inherent in practices of representation and signification. The Holocaust thus comes to stand in for meaninglessness and trauma *tout court*, which means that important historical distinctions are being erased. LaCapra called for the reintroduction of these critical tools (e.g. the distinction between different forms of historical trauma; or the distinction between a kind of muted trauma as the outcome of identification with a victim and actual victimhood) and for the revalorization of a positively oriented mode of working-through (which doesn't dis-

Shelley's Unreadability." The discussion of this paper allowed us to focus on the more specifically psychoanalytical implications of the concept of trauma as it oscillates between (internal) fantasy and (external) event. The (slippery) distinction so fiercely debated earlier between mourning and melancholia or working-through and acting-out as it relates to the question of readability was also addressed again and from different angles. Jacobus' paper presents a (beautifully complex, and is it fair to say: less easily readable?) reading of trauma (more specifically the trauma of incest) in Mary Shelley's novella *Matilda* that repositions some of LaCapra's questions as far as identification, and the status of the externally impinging, "real event" versus its internal representation are concerned. Jacobus is interested in "sketch[ing] the link between trauma and the death-drive." Trauma, in this understanding, not only becomes trauma because it is repeated, but, moreover, is bound to fantasmatic identification all along: "Matilda's tragedy is not just her father's guilty passion for her [...] It is the fact that her father's story becomes hers." In essence, however, Jacobus' point was not so much to contradict LaCapra's valorization of the "real," the historical, the readable, and processes of mourning or working-through over against the fantasmatic, the structural, the unreadable, and melancholia or acting-out by privileging the latter; rather, she questioned the validity and helpfulness of the binary altogether by elaborating the notion of an "internal event." This means that it is precisely the internalization of the external impingement that makes the incestuous event traumatic: "Incest impinges from outside, yet the 'event' is internal." (16) Trauma is thus a matter of representation, and, furthermore in the case of seduction, as Freud insists, the coinciding or collapse of internal desire and external event. Freud's notorious turn from his seduction theory to the notion that the memory of a sexual event in the childhood of his hysterical patients was actually about an internal, "fantasized" trauma is often interpreted as politically reactionary with respect to the politics of women's emancipation. Jacobus' read-

ing of Shelley's *Matilda* resists such a judgment and tries to point toward a kind of politics that would complicate the either/or scenario, a notion of fantasy which does not question the fact that there must be an event for there to be trauma, yet that alters the status of this event as something one could ever objectively access. The discussion of Jacobus' paper also picked up on the distinction between trauma and event. All trauma, one participant pointed out, was necessarily constituted retroactively and "internally," and that there was no direct link between an "external" event and trauma, which accounted for the fact that certain events were traumatic for some people while they were not for others. To this the contention was made that there should be a way of conceiving of a more objective notion of what a traumatizing event is.

Another point of contention centered around the status of history versus literature. While investigating the question of trauma in Shelley's text may well focus on its unreadability or undecidability, one participant argued, the question of trauma in a historical event such as the Holocaust, for example, needed to be addressed in more "readable" ways. Saturday's discussions ended in a rather controversial, unresolved, acted-out, as it were, kind of mode. Jacobus' challenge to LaCapra's call for readability from a psychoanalytical perspective which takes radical negativity into account, and her insistence on a feminist politics beyond the easy binary of mourning vs. melancholia, opened up a theoretical can of worms which was all but sealed when the session ended.

How to conceive of ethical action without repeating the pitfalls of humanism (or at least without appearing to be humanist, to put it more sarcastically) has been an intense preoccupation in the humanities most recently; simply to be anti-humanist seems to have led us into a theoretical and practical deadlock. Perhaps it is for this reason that we witness a renewed attention to Kant in many scholars' work. The first paper discussed on Sunday, Joan Copjec's "Evil in the Time of the Finite World," is precisely such a turn to Kant in an attempt to refute

both what Copjec calls the "historicists" (a relativist position) and a tradition of reading Kant as the inventor of a super-egoic morality. She argues that, in order to avoid the relativist deadend of a situation in which any particular position is equally valid, but practically, sheer force ultimately decides which one wins out; in order to avoid, furthermore, the deadlock of the false belief in the additive structure of a universal conceived as a sum of positive attributes (the list of groups to be included in the struggle for rights - women, blacks, gays, handicapped people, ... - is ever growing but fails to get less exclusive), a purely formal, universal law "is indispensable to the grounding of reason in the world." (25)

On the other hand, and to counter the reading of Kant as the proponent of a super-egoic logic, Copjec repeats the argument she makes in her *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists*: she argues that Lacan, in his ethics seminar, elaborates a notion of ethics which - in opposition to the notion Kant develops in the *Critique of Practical Reason* - consists precisely in resisting the demands of the "obscene and cruel" super-ego to cede one's pleasure. In the paper presented here, Copjec grounds this Lacanian argument in Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, where she finds the same "warning" against what Lacan calls the "dark God" of sacrifice of pleasure: "The greatest post-Enlightenment danger has turned out to be ... reason's capacity to make instruments of us." (26) The Holocaust is then, once more, enlisted as the historical "coming true" of "the subreption that has placed us in the thrall of our internal judge." (22) Copjec quoted Adolf Eichmann's confession that, in fulfilling his murderous duty in the death camps, he strove to satisfy Kant's ethical imperative to the letter.

Copjec's call for an "ethics of inclusion," the very last sentence of *Read My Desire*, and the fact that both her book and the paper discussed here merely end in such a call, make it clear that her work is characterized by yet another one - if coming from a different angle than, say, Judith Butler - of those "ground-clearing" gestures of which the academic market has seen so many. A certain

discontent with the “grand theoretical scheme” was, consequently, one of the main points of contention in the discussion.

It was argued that between the formal, universal Law and concrete historical laws a lot of ground had to be covered with political urgency, and that this ground was a theoretically messy ground for which Copjec’s work was not of much help. In fact, Copjec seemed too dismissive of work that tried to make the link between a foundational universal and concrete historical reality. Since will can only realize itself in a determinate way, why hold on to an indeterminate law? Furthermore, one participant argued, the Kantian insistence on a purely formal Law, which dismisses every phenomenalization of this Law as a subreption, does not

allow us to distinguish between different forms of subreption, a distinction which seemed to be of eminent historical importance.

Another participant argued that Copjec’s gesture of emptying out, or formalizing, the Law in the context of the Lacanian system bespoke the fact that, in Lacan, the Law was in fact not empty at all with respect to its genderedness. When Copjec denied such a gendered bias in Lacan’s work, the question was raised how one could possibly establish a purely formal Law without falling into the subreption-logic oneself. It was argued that, within the binary opposition between purity and impurity, purity or universality itself could never escape gendering, notably male-gendering: Freud’s community of brothers, established via identification with the dead father or a universal Law, was necessarily a community of men, and as many feminists have shown, this community is established over a dead female body which

is, furthermore, a body under erasure. One participant in particular challenged Copjec’s dismissal and misrepresentation of the work of other feminists (e.g. Judith Butler) on the grounds of a universality which so clearly erased female difference.

After lunch break, the group, exhausted from long, intense debates in the morning and on the previous day, reconvened



Freud conference participants

Photo: Caroline Elo

in the Guerlac Room to discuss Eric Santner’s chapter “The Father Who Knew Too Much” from his recently published book *My Own Private Germany*. The author was unable to be present, and thus, in addition to the general exhaustion, the debate took a slightly less controversial shape. This was, however, also due to the fact that Santner’s paper formulated a lot of the critical angles from which Copjec’s paper had been challenged, whilst dealing with similar themes - namely questions concerning “that most problematic of Freudian agencies, the *superego* ..., the ego drives of the “big Other.” (Santner 96) Santner’s historicizing re-evaluation of perhaps the most famous case of psychosis in the history of psychoanalysis and modernity - Daniel Paul Schreber - through a Foucaultian/Butlerian reading deals with precisely that obscene and cruel “dark God of sacrifice” whose logic Copjec’s reading of Lacan and Kant seeks to oppose. Santner’s writing, however, for-

mulates Kant’s Enlightenment paradox - the fact that the free, juridical Enlightenment subject, subjected to nothing but his own conscience, becomes increasingly enslaved to disciplinary power - as a radically historical ambiguity. In fact, Santner’s reading demonstrates that the universal Law of moral conscience, formulated by Kant, must always be subrepted historically, and Santner proceeds to understand

Schreber ambiguously, following Butler’s adaptation of deconstruction, as causing “gender trouble” both by falling victim to; and by subverting the symbolic order because he represented “a certain (normally repressed, normally secret) *rottenness* internal to every symbolic identity.” (Santner 96) Santner does caution us against Butler’s earlier optimism (*Gender Trouble*) concerning the sym-

bolic position of such “trouble makers” when he alludes to the “enormous pain and psychic disequilibrium that can follow when one finds oneself at the place of the law’s ‘perverse’ productivity;” when he alludes to the “link between ‘gender trouble’ and trauma.” (95) Yet some participants were concerned that Santner’s cautiousness was insufficient, and that Schreber - the *Luder* of the system - emerged, in this reading, as a kind of “hero of modernity” reminiscent in many ways of certain feminist readings of Freud’s Dora case. Santner’s treatment of psychosis, it was argued, somewhat resembled the glorification of hysteria as the ultimate subversion of the symbolic order in, for example, Hélène Cixous’ early writing. Santner’s tone was too celebratory and not attentive enough to the traumatic aspects of psychosis.

Somewhat differently, but also concerning the status of psychosis, someone argued that homosexuality occupied a curiously avoided non-role in Santner’s

text. While trying not to repeat Freud's homophobic link of homosexual desire to psychosis, Santner does not address this link explicitly, but rather "de-psychoticized" Schreber altogether, thus leaving the link itself untouched. As a result, Schreber's pathology is attributed the kind of subversiveness that, in a lot of current queer theory, is associated with perversion rather than psychosis. The theme of Schreber as the "hero of modernity" surfaces most tangibly when Santner formulates Schreber's special kind of perversion as "precisely his way of refusing the 'normal' path of the fetish, the 'normal' process of disavowing a master's lack." (99) Santner calls this refusal an "eminently democratic gesture." (99) Questions of agency and suffering are, in the case of psychosis, much more jarred, it would seem, but a 'de-psychotization' allows for the over-all effect, despite Santner's warnings, of a happily subversive Schreber in the limbo of his gender-ambiguous 'Ludertum,' reminiscent perhaps of Foucault's reading of Herculeine Barbin. Furthermore, a necessary distinction between feminization and homosexual desire is not to be found in Santner's reading; in fact, he conflates the terms even more univocally than Freud himself.

Also addressing the way Santner positions himself between Freud and Foucault, someone argued that Santner's text came down as an anti-psychoanalytical reading against Freud - whose interpretation of the Schreber case was, after all, a contestation of neurology from a psychoanalytical perspective. Santner, it was argued, understands the mind-body relation as a literal one, doing away with the symbolic gap, or the Real, and therefore with the Unconscious. In this context, someone threw up the question whether Santner's text was, in fact, psychotic as it purports to comprehend the whole system.

One of the reasons Foucault remained highly ambivalent with respect to psychoanalysis is, according to Santner, its "fundamental blindness ... to the crucial features of its historical moment," (93) i.e. a thorough racialization of society and an upsurge of racism, most notably

in the form of modern anti-semitism. One participant questioned the usefulness of such a distinction, or, in other words, doubted whether psychoanalysis could not be put to use for an understanding of race as well.

This was precisely the central concern of Hortense Spillers' paper "'All the Things You Could Be By Now, if Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother': Psychoanalysis and Race." The discussion of Spillers' paper on March 26 was the first post-conference event of a series of Legacy-of-Freud colloquia to be continued in the fall. This paper, ninety pages long and written and re-written over a substantially long period of Spillers' academic and private life, is, I should note before delving into any detail, of such conceptual and poetic intensity, or, to borrow Biddy Martin's word, "simply so gorgeous," that I cannot purport to cover it in any adequate way, nor did the discussion come close to doing so. I will try to recall what were for me the most inspiring moments both in the paper and its discussion. Spillers' writing as well as her short exposé, enriched with personal anecdotes, conveyed some of her tantalizing (and, is it fair to call it magical) conception of "talking," borrowed from the "talking cure" that is psychoanalysis, as a liberatory practice of opening-up (of paradox), of an interrogatory practice (against the orthodox), much like Frantz Fanon's famous "Make of me a questioning man" ("Black Skin/White Masks"). Spillers formulates this borrowing thus: "my interest in this ethical self-knowing [the talking cure] wants to unhook the psychoanalytic hermeneutic from its rigorous framework and try to recover it in a free-floating realm of self-didactic possibility that might decentralize and disperse the knowing one." (73)

One participant in particular was concerned about the dangers of wanting to do away with the formal, institutionalized setting of psychoanalysis in which the play of transference and counter-transference can be controlled. "Communities are terrible," the person argued. To disperse the knowing one is to risk psychotic splitting, the formation of "gangs of knowers," group hysteria. Spillers ad-

mitted that what she proposed was risky, but the alternative, and the underside of analysis as it were, was social death. Someone else intervened in defense of Spillers' conception of "free talking" by affirming that Spillers was not advocating any idealized community which would be prone to the hysterical effects of idealization Freud describes in "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego." On the contrary, Spillers' notion displayed an extraordinary attention to disparate temporalities, to the fact that the subject was not ultimately graspable, to the subject as subject-of-the-unconscious. Her notion of "talking" was therefore much more akin to LaCapra's notion of working-through - albeit less optimistic - than to the idealized and naive notions of community prevalent in 1960/70 ideologies which were obviously hovering in the back of the participant's mind who opposed Spillers' de-institutionalization of psychoanalysis.

Another major point of contention in the discussion of Spillers' paper was the status of the Real in her theorizing of race, a point which betrayed a fundamental ambivalence with respect to psychoanalysis perhaps not unlike Foucault's. In U.S. culture, race functions as that signifier which "makes the difference." (13) Spillers is concerned with the "blankness of 'race' where something else ought to be, that emptying out..." (14), that traumatic kernel perhaps around which this culture elaborates its symbolic order. Spillers links this to the inception of psychoanalysis itself: "Freud could not 'see' his own connection to 'race' ... because the place of the elision marked the vantage point from which he spoke." (14) So if "race" functions as a subreption of the Real, or of difference *tout court*, in Western culture, and if this subreption is the vantage point from which psychoanalysis casts its field of vision, how is one to put to use such a discourse, such a way of "talking"? Is it possible to use psychoanalytical tools to analyze psychoanalysis' own blind-spot? How can the black body be removed from that position in which it functions as white culture's "phobogenic object"? Spillers' answers to these questions are given by

way of a demystification of Frantz Fanon's young-negro-comes-to-Europe-and-falls-victim-to-white-man's-fetishism narrative. Spillers calls this narrative a straw-man fiction. She affirms that black people have other cultural resources to draw on. "Why is there no encounter happening? Why isn't Fanon curious about those funny-looking whites?" she asks via an anecdote from her childhood in Memphis, Tennessee.

Spillers is interested in using psychoanalysis' interrogatory qualities to try articulating a culturally dispersed kind of "talking" which would not follow the scheme of a teleological cure, which would not be result-oriented, but rather focus on "talking" as process, as a kind of cultural praxis which would enable us to stop being obsessed with "making things like racism and sexism and homophobia go away" through censorship campaigns, and which would hence allow us to be less painfully mired in fixed positions.

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(colloquium - continued from page 1)

On Reading Genesis 32:4-33:17" offers a close reading of a Biblical text that also serves Hahn as a deliberate rumination on the ethics of reading and/or encountering the Other. Many scholars call Yaakov's wrestling match by the Yabbok river one of the most puzzling in the Torah. Those same scholars, however, tend to take the episode in isolation, so Hahn suggests reading the Yabbok episode within the larger context of Yaakov's return to his homeland and to Esav, the brother from whom he had stolen their father's blessing years before. Hahn uses the Yabbok and Yaakov/Esav narratives to explore the question of what constitutes the ethical moment in encountering the Other: she takes Yaakov's return to face Esav as well as Yaakov's wrestling by the Yabbok as parallel metaphors for the act of encountering the Other as well as for the act of reading. This reading or encountering becomes ethical insofar as the subject faces the Other and must respond to it — for Hahn, the ethical moment is precisely that in which the

subject "owns" that response, i.e., takes responsibility for it.

Hahn takes issue therein with some postmodern literary criticism that celebrates the "undecidability" of texts marked by gaps, contradictions, etc. Hahn defines readability in general (even in the Bible) as the duality between gaps, the "to-be-read," and the reader, the "can read." Inherent to all reading, then, are gaps: in the text as well as between those "to-be-read" gaps in the text and the reader's responses. One always responds to textual gaps, but responds unreciprocally and asymmetrically - the only issue is whether one takes responsibility for the response, whether one owns the response. In postmodern literary criticism, according to Hahn, critics disavow that one's position as a reader is constituted relationally, in relation to the Other, and that one cannot step outside that relationship. That relationship is always marked by asymmetry and unreciprocity, marked by a gap between the text and reader's response or between the Other and the subject: difference always persists, and there is no single reading anyway that would undo that asymmetry, unreciprocity, difference.

The Yabbok episode foregrounds the gaps of reading/encountering the Other in a variety of ways: first, by obscuring the identity of the radical Other (we do not know who wrestles Yaakov); second, by blurring the two wrestlers in the recounting of the match; third, by clouding the nature - perhaps aggressive, perhaps acquiescent - of the famous touching of Yaakov's thigh; and finally and most importantly, by failing to name the winner of the confrontation. Whether Yaakov wins or not is never made clear, and the passage seems to suggest that the ethical moment of encountering the Other concerns not victors and vanquished, rather the persistence of asymmetries and difference.

Pascal Grosse's "Between Privacy and Publicness: Africans from the Colonies in Germany, 1885-1940" is not so much concerned with the experience of individual Africans in Germany or African-Germans as with the strategies of the German state toward the migrants. In the

debates around what he terms racial politics, Grosse aims to show how colonial migrants created a tension within German society because authorities had to maintain racial inequality in a liberal society with, on the one hand, clear claims to equality, and, on the other, social hierarchy and gender asymmetry.

Of the many destabilizations of bourgeois society, Grosse focuses above all on the public and private spheres, central ideal-types of German society. He investigates three debates on racial politics between 1885 and 1940 that destabilized this public/private distinction and ultimately redefined its terms. Grosse first examines the discourse around the "Völkerschauen," public exhibitions of the Africans in Germany. Around 1900, a series of tensions arose between those presenting the shows and the colonial administration: the colonialists, for example, claimed that if Africans observed inequalities among Germans, they might start to contest racial hierarchies.

After 1900, another debate arose concerning racial politics, this time around a topic formerly kept private: sexual behavior became a public issue because of German men's marrying or sexual relations with Africans. Because citizenship laws would have permitted the progeny of such unions to become Germans, a massive debate ensued about the status of the "Mischling." The public debate made German women, not men responsible: it made them the "defenders of German culture" and called upon them to control men's sexual behavior - they were assigned a specific (private) task in the service of preserving the (public) nation. In both these cases, the debates around racial politics led to compromises between bourgeois society and colonial policy that shifted the traditional boundaries between public and private spheres.

Between 1935 and 1940, National Socialism fundamentally reworked (some would say erased) the bourgeois public-private distinction. In this era, those Africans living in Germany from the colonial period constituted a kind of liminal racial category, between "real blacks" and Germans. For example, they personified the goal of regaining the colo-

nies lost at Versailles, a memento of Germany at its greatest. To exploit such nostalgia, the propaganda ministry itself oversaw "German Africa Shows," in which "productive" Africans were shown contributing to the German Reich. The prevalence of such shows demonstrated the racial politics' taking precedence over the colonial policy, over the old concerns about the detrimental consequences of such public exhibitions - now their main function was to recall nostalgically the colonial days. Of course such shows had nothing to do with the everyday lives of the African-Germans, who had been living in Germany for decades, had been born and educated there. The spectacle of their different skin color was deployed to fascinate an audience, to found a public sphere built on racial difference.

William Rasch's "The Latest Contest of the Faculties: On the Necessary Antagonism between Theory and Culture" suggests a specific model for the contests and antagonisms within a discipline and then maps the current debates in German studies onto it. In his rather systems-theoretical treatment, Rasch derives the model from Ian Hacking's theory of laboratory science, in which subsystems of theories, apparatus, and the methods enter into a circular, self-vindicating relationships that permit no absolute outside, no external observer-position from which to judge the "truth." Because there is no outside and no truth, there is also no invalidation: experiments can contradict theories by exposing their presuppositions, but cannot invalidate theories because they too are inside the larger system built on just such presuppositions. Contradicting subsystems proliferate into multiple, self-contained worlds, but no single picture of the world.

Such antagonism, however, is certainly not a bad thing, because competing theories or subsystems are locked into such contests, constantly exposing each others' presuppositions and shortcomings without invalidating one another. Rasch sees just such a context in contemporary German Studies, where culture studies is the overarching, closed system and "epistemological theory" (theories concerned with the presuppositions of any culture

theory) is constantly questioning culture studies' operations.

Rasch legitimates such a model for the productive antagonism between culture studies and epistemological theory not only via Hacking's depiction of the operation of laboratory science, but also by sketching a history of theoretical antagonisms within the field. He starts with Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, imagined literally like laboratory science's experiments, that questioned the presuppositions of bourgeois society. Brecht brought to the fore the proletariat, whose existence - like experiments - exposes bourgeois society as constructed and artificial, as its own system. Following 1933, though, Rasch says that Brecht and other Marxists lost the proletariat as the means by which to question bourgeois society. In their method of "immanent critique," the Frankfurt School turned away from the proletariat to philosophy as the vehicle for autonomy and critique, as the means by which to question such presuppositions. The proletariat in Brecht's model and the immanent critique in the Frankfurt School constitute a certain functional equivalent, because both question the basis of the hegemonic systems of which they are part.

In the mid-1980s academics in Germany turned away from orthodox marxist or neomarxist theories and toward systems theory or poststructuralist theories, a trajectory symptomatic of a turn to epistemological theory. Meanwhile, in the mid-1980s in the U.S., literary culture turned from poststructuralism - which had been popular since the mid-1970s - to neomarxism and culture studies, which affirmed a certain socio-historical commitment. Today's debate between culture studies and epistemological theory arises out of this dual movement, the parallel historicity of

which demonstrates that neither is definitively right. While culture studies has become quite hegemonic in our own field, epistemological theory has lodged

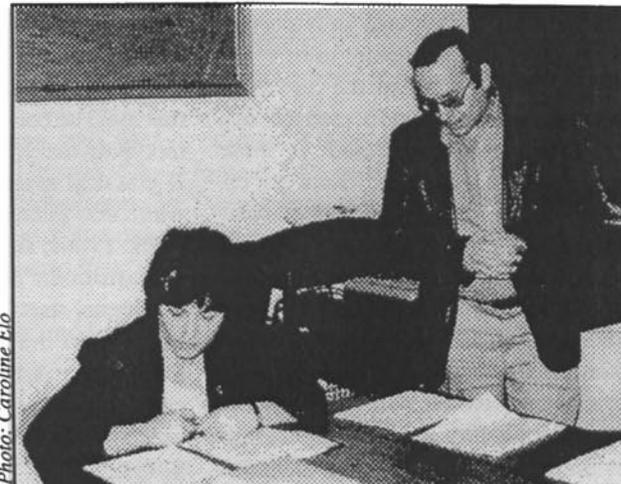


Photo: Caroline Eilo

German colloquium: Rahel Hahn and Art Groos

itself parasitically in the body of culture studies and keeps challenging it. Culture studies, meanwhile, constantly tries to delegitimize epistemological theory by appeals to the socio-historical matrix it holds dear. Thus, these two very different positions on the legitimate use of philosophical reflection co-exist today in a very healthy, mutually questioning, self-legitimizing antagonism.

In his paper "In Defense of the Nation: Nationhood, Localism, Universalism," Russell A. Berman assumes a provocatively unpopular position in today's academy - a position in defense of the nation. While careful to distinguish the nation he was defending from nationalism and the nation state, Berman asks whether there is anything left to the nation if one subtracts the imagined or invented aspects to national identity - a question he answers in the affirmative, primarily with the historical "sedimentation" of a nation. In order to support the nation as the best collective vehicle for such historical experiences, Berman lodges a "dialectical critique" against universalism as well as against localism: the university's standard-issue universalism homogenizes historical difference and invalidates particular experience, while localism, although better than universalism, also ends up anti-historical, "presentist" in his parlance, as well as simply unrealis-

tic. In his presentation at the colloquium, Berman confessed that he was also directing this critique against cultural studies' belief in the nation as a constructed aesthetic category; he wanted to ask whether it could still have an important ethical and political content to it.

Berman suggests that the pervasive rejection of all (national) essence is a purely intellectual move made by those afraid of real experience. There are essences - life, death, generations, personal memory - and the nation may well be, in this historical moment, the best collective level at which to live these inescapable realities. People live together in time and space in involuntary associations, and the nation is probably the best way to organize these inevitabilities into productive collective identities that credit particularity while prodding toward altruism and culture. Nationhood, as well as race, class, and gender, must become positive categories, not spawning nationalism, racism, classism or sexism, but rather acknowledging cross-generational obligation and inheritance of historical consciousnesses or traditions.

In the last section of the paper, he considers Americans' perceptions of German "neonationalism," in which Berman sees a hostility to German nationhood. This animosity — while due in part, he admits, to the experience of two world wars — also expresses Americans' distrust of romanticism, historicism, and traditionalism, those things that the universalist as well as cultural studies perspective would attribute to the nation. Of course America has a vested national interest in subverting other countries' nationhood, which might challenge U.S. global interests. America's tendency to criticize Germany, as well as cultural studies' tendency to steamroll national literature departments, reflects the ideological juggernaut of universalism as it rolls over and crushes any particular or regional identity or experience.

Barbara Mennel's "All the Turks are Named Ali: Tracing the Black Male Body in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's Films" suggests that the extensive theoretical discourse around Fassbinder's

films lacks any substantial discussion of race and ethnicity, and proposes to remedy the situation by highlighting the recurrence of the black male body of Salem in Fassbinder's films. Mennel asks whether there is still something remnant beyond Fassbinder's celebrated subversion of cinematic genres and tropes that must be considered a persisting stereotype of the eroticized black male body. If classical masculinity is western and white, don't stereotypical representations of the exotic, suffering orientalist body still affirm the dominant masculinity?

Mennel starts out by tracing two trajectories in the American reception of Fassbinder: on the one hand, the general emphasis of Fassbinder's exploration of victimhood, often masochistic (cf. Silverman and Elsaesser), and, on the other, the recent valorization of his gay sexual politics (cf. von Moltke and LaValley). While the former readings tend to celebrate marginalization as feminization, and the latter gay sexualization as empowering and subversive, both fail to see that the hypermasculinity and simultaneous feminization present in the person of Salem is part and parcel of the stereotype of both the black and the colonized male. Both of these subversive readings emerge via an exclusion of racial stereotypes, so bringing race and ethnicity back in complicates these laudatory readings of Fassbinder's subversiveness.

The second part of Mennel's paper foregrounds the acting career of El Hedi ben Salem, Fassbinder's Moroccan lover, through his appearances in various Fassbinder films. Most attention paid to Salem, according to Mennel, has symptomatically tended to ignore his autonomous performances as an actor. By reading key appearances of Salem in *The American Soldier*, *Ali Fear Eats the Soul*, and *Fox and his Friends*, Mennel suggests that even if Salem functions in a subversive mode, images of him are also complicit with fetishized orientalist spectacles, with stereotypes of the black male body. Mennel's reading of Ali aims at explaining why western viewers could have their oriental cake and masochistically eat it too: she suggests, on the one

hand, the film's complicity in the fetishization of Salem's body in the role of Ali as well as, on the other, the voyeuristic pleasure it offers through participation in Ali victimization. One gets to take part in Emmi's tolerant, humanist position against racist Germany while still enjoying the orientalist fetishization of the stereotypical - many muscles, big penis - black male body.

The methodologies exhibited in the Spring 1996 Colloquium reflected the current diversity of our field. From Hahn's and Mennel's close readings to Grosse's historical examination, from Rasch's systems theory model for German Studies to Berman's analysis of collective political identity, the papers demonstrate the broad canvas, the big tent, that is our field. They also, however, all orbit around similar issues of the ethics of diversity and the preservation of difference, and leave us plenty to mull over during the Other to the school year, the summer.

Jaimey Fisher is a graduate student in the Department of German Studies at Cornell.

(Martin - continued from page 1)

Andreas-Salome, Cornell University Press 1991 and Femininity Played Straight, Routledge Press, due September 1996.

During Martin's tenure as chair of German Studies, Leslie Adelson, associate professor of German, Ohio State University, was appointed full professor of German at Cornell. She will assume her duties here Fall semester 1996. Other changes in the structure in the German Studies Department include Professor Peter Hohendahl as director of graduate studies, Inta Ezergailis as director of undergraduate studies, and Bonnie Buettner as fulltime appointment.

(criticism - continued from page 3)

essay in a free associative practice of "semiotic rhyming." Here these elements occur as "images bunched together and rearranged against all logic, against the implications of objects normally represented by such words, in order to erect a phonetic monument to music of poetry." The "Persephone" of the title is not only the goddess of the underworld, but a false compound word comprised of the French *percée*, "an opening drilled through" and the Greek *phone*, "voice": the piercing voice, for instance that of the muezzin of the later poem. Also in the production of Leiris's metaphors, phonetic "similarity and repetition come to displace description and definition."

In his final example, Riffaterre considered the intertextual relations between a poem by the Romantic Alphonse de Lamartine, his second "Harmony," and Lamartine's own commentary on it. The commentary relates the story, apparently fabricated, of how Lamartine wrote the poem in nature and of the manuscript's recovery from the sea after it was blown away in the wind. It is only the relationship of "symbiosis" between the text of the poem and the intertext of the commentary, for Riffaterre, that "creates the actual poetry, not conventional poetry dictated by the catalog of Romantic scenes." The story of the poem's loss and restoration, resonating with sibyllic prophecy, presents an "allegory of the poem, a manner of reading nature through a book and a word on how to broadcast poetry."

Helen Vendler (Department of English, Harvard) began the Saturday session with a paper on Yeats and the sonnet. Vendler proposed reading several of Yeats's poems as sonnets that do not fit a strict definition of the form (some having 12 or 13, rather than 14 lines, for instance) and which depart from the traditional sonnet in tone and theme. "Yeats sets up conventional sonnet expectations in his reader, and then plays havoc with them," she maintained. Vendler insisted that "choices of interior and external form always carry import of various sorts -- historical, political, moral, ideological" and that to bear in mind role

of the sonnet form, however altered, in Yeats's work was to bring important implications to the foreground.

For Yeats, for whom style was "nation-bound," use of the sonnet was bound up with his ambivalent relationship to English literary tradition. The sonnet belongs to a tradition of European court poetry which in Yeats's Ireland had primarily English associations and thus "compelled both [Yeats's] literary allegiance and his nationalist disobedience." This ambivalence was also a thematic concern in several of the poems Vendler discussed.

Yeats wrote both sonnets and ballads throughout his life and though the latter form has associations with an oral tradition of folk poetry, Vendler cautioned against the common claim that "the ballad symbolizes Yeats's 'Irish' side and the sonnet his 'English' or 'European' side"; instead Yeats subverted these categories. Vendler's interest in Yeats's use of the sonnet focused on both "how he modernized it, and how he made it Irish."

Yeats's allegiance to the sonnet was won in part precisely because of the self-conscious artifice of a court tradition of "verse consciously knowing itself to be written, not oral." The sonnet was a form that admitted commentary on its own aesthetic, and one which was structurally suited to carrying out in verse "that quarrel with ourselves out of which we make poetry" (as Vendler paraphrased Yeats). Vendler drew attention to one such quarrel that ran through Yeats's *oeuvre*, that "between the pastoral and the apocalyptic."

Vendler offered close readings of several poems spanning Yeats's career, including "In the Seven Woods" (1902), "The Second Coming" (1919), "Leda and the Swan" (1923), "Meru" (1934), "High Talk" (1938). She insisted on Yeats's status as modernist "in his sonnet practice," and stressed the centrality of the question of 'Irishness' in his sonnets.

In a paper titled "Ghostly Supplications," Stephen Greenblatt (Department of English, UC Berkeley) situated Shakespeare's depiction of the ghost in *Hamlet* in relation to sixteenth-century

English debates about the existence of Purgatory. This allows him to delineate a radical shift in attitude about the dead and their remembrance that accompanied the Protestant Reformation in England: from "an institutional process governed by the Church to a poetic process governed by guilt, projection, and imagination."

Greenblatt described the career of a radical 1528 anti-clerical pamphlet, *The Supplication of Beggars*, by the Lutheran Simon Fish. Written in the voice of England's indigent, Fish's tract called for the seizure of the Catholic Church's holdings by the Crown and its distribution to the poor. The attack on the Church's wealth and the greed of priests centered on a critique of the doctrine of Purgatory, which Fish dismissed as a ruse designed to bring in alms, with no scriptural basis.

Fish's text was influential enough to elicit a counter-polemical from Thomas More. More's *Supplication of Souls* is written as a lament in the voice of souls in Purgatory who despair of being forgotten by their living loved ones. The living, corrupted by the heresy of the *Beggars* pamphlet, have begun to doubt the existence of Purgatory and to neglect the rites of memory -- private prayers and alms -- that give the souls comfort and hasten their entry into heaven.

The souls' defense of Purgatory appeals to the belief of the living in ghosts, and they describe their own ghostly visits to living wives and children and pain at family-members' forgetfulness. The ghost in *Hamlet* is likewise afraid of Hamlet's oblivion, and commands him to "Remember me"; Greenblatt's close reading of the ghost passages in Shakespeare show up striking parallels to the concerns of More's polemic. Though he notes that Shakespeare may well have been familiar with the two *Supplication* texts, Greenblatt understands these to be "sources" for Shakespeare in the different sense that "they stage an ontological argument about spectrality and remembrance, a momentous public debate, that unsettled the institutional moorings of a crucial body of imaginative material and there-

fore made them available for theatrical appropriation." Greenblatt went on to discuss other sixteenth-century cases in which the theatrical and the theological overlapped around questions of ghosts and memory. Ultimately, he said, the Protestant eradication of Purgatory "did not destroy the longings and fears that Catholic doctrine had focused and exploited. Instead . . . the space of Purgatory becomes the space of the stage. . . ."

During discussion of his paper with conference participants, Greenblatt conceded there was truth to the charge that he tends to hold his theoretical cards close to the chest, but acknowledged the significance of Freudian notions of mourning, melancholia, and the uncanny for his study; and he made mention of Derrida's *Specters of Marx* and the condition of "living in the shadow of an old system."

Richard Rorty (Department of Philosophy, University of Virginia) introduced his paper, "Intellectuals and the Poor," as a "literature department bashing paper" (but hastened to add it would not amount to a whole account of his views on such departments). In fact, Rorty aimed his self-consciously polemical critique at the post-1970s "academic Left" (or the academicization of the Left) more broadly where, he maintained, the "culture wars" have preempted attention from economic problems and a radical posture has isolated intellectuals from practical politics.

Rorty referred to William James's 1907 discussion of university education, intellectuals, and political life. James's view of U.S. democracy was optimistic, his image of the role for the "university educated" in it one of engagement, though of an elitist sort: these were "the kind of men from whom our majority shall take its cue." But James warned intellectuals against intellectualism, against cynicism, "sterilized conceit," and the failure to "capture the robust tone." It is to failings of this sort, Rorty claims, that the present academic Left has succumbed: a politics of "suspicious resentment" has replaced "reformist fervor."

One part of the problem, Rorty contended, was a turn by the remnants of the

New Left in the 1970s from a focus on the victimization of the poor ("selfishness") to a preoccupation with victimization as a result of race and gender ("sadism"). And though he argued for a primacy of economic activism, Rorty made clear that what he has in mind is a renewal of American liberalism: "the old-fashioned, un-philosophical liberalism of Eugene Debs . . . Eleanor Roosevelt, Michael Harrington, Cesar Chavez." Blocking such a renewal, in Rorty's view, is another part of the problem: the attitude of radicalism inherited from the anti-Vietnam War movement. Radicals "talk about the postmodern situation or the contradictions of late capitalism . . . rather than speaking as members of a particular political community, a particular nation-state, with specific responsibilities toward their fellow citizens." Rorty's vision is of a *patriotic* activism, and he called for the Left to "purge ourselves of a disastrous anti-Americanism." A "radical" position that refuses to take seriously "the political process" (that invokes "Freud, Nietzsche, Lacan, and Foucault to mock the American civic religion"), and a preoccupation with the politics of culture, according to Rorty, allow conservatives ("Will, Bennett, and Cheney") to engage the academic Left in "sham battles" over cultural issues that distract from the widening gulf between rich and poor.

In discussion, Rorty stressed that it would be unacceptable to give up ground gained since 1970 in the empowerment of women, African-Americans, gays, and lesbians on the Left (he insisted, too, that questions of "status and respect" were not unknown on the "pre-60s Left"). Still, for Rorty, significant ground has been lost: "The Left that takes its center not as the unions and not around proposals for economic legislation, but around status and respect for the previously victimized is, if you like, just half a Left."

Sandra Gilbert (Department of English, UC Davis) addressed what she called a marginalization and repression of death and dying in contemporary Western societies. She considered particularly the implications of such

marginalization for the process of mourning, and for mourning's poetic expression, the elegy.

Gilbert described how the medicalization and privatization of death and dying is accompanied by the near total elimination of ritualized mourning, as well as a "pathologizing" even of private bereavement, which becomes a social embarrassment. Gilbert conceded the current situation is part of a larger historical trajectory of death's secularization, but she suggested that the transition from death as "expiration" (which implies the release of a spirit) and death as "termination" was consolidated when the "various holocausts of the mid-twentieth century" penetrated "the West's cultural unconscious." She noted the appearance, beginning in the 1950s, of several critical studies of the American culture of death and dying, and went on to discuss how they were often complicit in the very problems they were describing.

Repeatedly to bear witness that the dead one no longer exists was, for Freud, a requirement of the survivor's work of mourning; but precisely this task becomes problematic in a society where the physical reality of death is pushed to the margins of experience and public space for bereavement is eroded. It is further complicated, Gilbert emphasized, by the technologies of film and video that allow the moving image to outlive the body.

Gilbert sees the role of modern (by extension, perhaps postmodern) elegy as that of resistance to the "repression of death" in the form of bearing witness. Beginning with William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens, moving to elegies from the late 1950s and early 60s by Allen Ginsburg, Robert Lowell, and Sylvia Plath, and on to more recent work by poets such as Thom Gunn, Sharon Olds, Ruth Stone, and Tess Gallagher, Gilbert delineates four strategies of resistance pursued by the elegists. She notes in the elegies the recurrence of an often brutally frank "meditation on the actual scene of death"; a "preoccupation with the literal body of the dead one," often emphasizing its sudden inertness

and detailing its decay; a "retelling of the details of the past" as if in order to "guarantee its reality"; and a "resignation to loss." The poets may resist death's repression but, Gilbert concluded, the mourning of the modern elegy necessarily amounts to a "ritualized acknowledgement of termination" marked by "uncertainty and dismay."

Dominick LaCapra (Department of History, Cornell) addressed problems surrounding the historiography of the Holocaust which has been central to discussions in recent years of relations between history and memory.

LaCapra cautioned against what he insisted are complementary positions within debates over history and memory: one that would see "history" and "memory" in binary opposition and the other that would conflate the two terms. At issue for LaCapra, in terms of the Holocaust in historiography, is the prospect of articulating "theory" in history while attending to the specificity of the Shoah; the ability on one hand to make use of certain insights of poststructuralism without getting caught in a loop of "acting-out" generalized trauma, and on the other to avoid the repressive practices of a historicist insistence on "objective" history.

LaCapra discussed Saul Friedländer's recent Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe. He noted ways in which several terms in Friedländer's writing - his discussion of the Shoah in terms of excess, of radical transgression; his notion of the endlessness of commentary and necessity of preventing closure in Holocaust historiography - approximate moments in deconstruction. LaCapra detailed Friedländer's endeavor, which draws in particular on the language of Himmler's 1943 "Posen Speech" to SS officers, to interpret the experience of Nazi perpetrators in terms of a theory of the sublime (which is, of course, a central category in much postmodern theory). LaCapra proposed viewing the sublime as a "transvaluation of trauma," though he warned against an indiscriminate application of the category of "trauma" to victims and perpetrators.

LaCapra noted the recurrence, most recently surrounding the publication of Goldhagen's Hitler's Willing Executioners of debates over the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust, over the thesis of "banality of evil," and notions of a German *Sonderweg*. He maintained there are no "linear developmental stages" in the memory or repression of the Holocaust as historical trauma; the difficulty of retaining the events in consciousness means that they need to be constantly and self-consciously recalled.

LaCapra concluded by sketching a grid: perpetrator--victim--bystander--resister upon which the historian who would write on the Holocaust might position herself or himself. Identification with any one of the four positions is problematic for different reasons and in different degrees, but it is imperative that the historian explicitly thematize the positioning.

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(Bathrick - continued from page 2)

by negotiations between the party apparatus, the "loyal" dissidents, and, increasingly, the Western media and intellectuals who interacted with the GDR. Now two other forces entered the picture, the younger generation of "radical dropouts", who theorized their presence in the GDR precisely as an absence within the decay of Marxist discourse even among the opposition, and the Stasi or security police who attempted to substitute for the absence of mechanisms of civil society an absolute system of repressive surveillance. Bathrick's achievement, here as in the entirety of this volume, is to read these developments politically, that is, to elicit from symptomatic literary texts, cultural traditions, and intellectual controversies the disruptive, contradictory moments inherent in discursive practices.

The Powers of Speech is indeed a major contribution to the rehistoricization of the GDR. Most intriguing for me is Bathrick's concept of the socialist public sphere, a concept derived from Habermas's view of the emergence of

civil society in modern history. In the seventies the concept was fruitfully complicated and expanded to include a counter public sphere as well as a proletarian public sphere, and now Bathrick goes one step further in postulating an additional, socialist public sphere, one beyond the bounds of (bourgeois) civil society with its tenant of free space in which values are negotiated. I am not entirely convinced of the analytical force of this concept, especially when coupled with Foucauldian perspective on the workings of discursive power in the modern order (alluded to in the book's title and elaborated in the introduction and epilogue) that allows for no free space as such in a public sphere. Yet this conceptualization suggests innovative, compelling insights into the forty-year history of the GDR which will mold our ongoing discussion.

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(Felstiner - continued from page 6)

tions ranged from Robert Frost's rather disheartening assertion that poetry is precisely that which is lost in translation, to Gayatri Spivak's characterization of translation as "the most intimate kind of reading," to the Yiddish figure of "kissing the bride through the veil," to James Thurber's jocular remark, "You know, I think I lose something in the original." The workshop proceeded to a careful working-through of several translations from Neruda and Celan.

Later that same afternoon, Professor Mary Felstiner gave a lecture based upon her recent book, To Paint Her Life: Charlotte Salomon in the Nazi Era. The book is, as far as I know, the first major biography of Salomon to appear in English, and probably the most extensive and significant of any to date. Salomon, born in Berlin in 1917 to well-to-do Jewish parents, produced a visual memoir of over 700 paintings between February of 1941, and her murder within an hour of arriving at Auschwitz in 1942. The paintings represent personal and family history, and often include dia-

logues, narratives, and soliloquies either written on transparent sheets which were then draped over the canvas, or inscribed directly onto the painted canvas itself. Salomon occasionally stipulated that certain music was required for the proper reception of her works, and she called such multi-media performances "operettas." Apart from their value as art, Professor Felstiner emphasized the paintings' interest as an attempt to "look back on a life from within the Nazi Holocaust." Yet memory, on both the personal and the cultural level, is precisely what genocide seeks to eradicate. Hence Salomon's artistic production could be seen as an example of what Walter Benjamin might have called "true history flashing up in a moment of crisis." As Professor Felstiner went on to relate and to illustrate with slides of Salomon's work, there seems to have been a legacy of suicide among the female members of Salomon's family, a legacy of which she herself was for many years kept ignorant, even after her own mother's death. According to Professor Felstiner, suicide was not much short of epidemic proportions among highly educated, urban, professional, German, Jewish women in the early part of this century. Professor Felstiner suggests that it was a confluence of Salomon's discovery of this "family secret," her own coming to terms with the sense of her being "next in line," and the context of Nazi persecution which prompted her to begin the project she would entitle, "Leben? oder Theater?" In Professor Felstiner's words, the fundamental question for Charlotte Salomon, then, "was whether to take her life or to paint it."

The presentation followed a roughly chronological progression through Salomon's life, but also provided some interesting glimpses of the trials and tribulations of Professor Felstiner's research. The greatest difficulties arose simply as a result of the relative thoroughness of Nazi genocide: it was extremely difficult to find extant documents of Charlotte Salomon's life in Berlin, and few of the people most likely to remember her would themselves have survived the death-camps. Yet Professor

Felstiner's successes seem to have been considerable: she located Salomon's step-mother and several grade-school classmates who remembered her distinctly. Curiously, the image that arose of Charlotte was rather unremarkable. In fact, Professor Felstiner described Charlotte as more or less a "non-person," an excruciatingly shy, withdrawn, immanently "forgettable" girl. Yet the stories that Professor Felstiner eventually uncovered, and which she briefly related in the presentation, begin to suggest the rich inner life and acute observation of family members and friends one sees represented in the paintings. Many of them revolve around the figure of Charlotte's step-mother Paula, whom Professor Felstiner met and who, along with Mr. Salomon, were the first to discover the large body of work their daughter had left behind.

It was apparent by the end of the lecture, that Professor Felstiner, like her husband, undertook the task of her research for reasons which go far beyond intellectual curiosity, and perhaps touch upon a deeper responsibility of the scholar. One might call this responsibility an historical one: to witness for the witnesses, to seize what is in danger of sinking into forgetfulness. Ultimately, the Felstiners have reminded us, through their writings and their presence here, of the imperative of remembrance.

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BÄRBEL BOHLEY AT CORNELL

Gesa M. Valk

On April 11 Bärbel Bohley gave a talk at Cornell entitled "Aufarbeitung von Diktaturen" (Coming to Terms with Dictatorships). Since she was in "on the ground floor" of bringing down the politbureau in East Germany, her accounts of those days and weeks were extremely moving. She did not deliver a prepared speech but gave some examples of the repressive measures which were dealt her by a corrupt socialist regime, whose economy had collapsed,

whose ideology had nothing more to it than a hollow ring.



Photo: Caroline Eto

Bärbel Bohley

She considers her most important contribution to this "revolution" the willingness and courage to question/challenge existing structures, to break them open and expose the emptiness behind the seemingly powerful facade.

Most of her audience were students who knew enough German to appreciate Bärbel Bohley's very personal account of an event which changed the world.

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