Artist in Residence: Heiner Goebbels

Cornell’s Institute for German Cultural Studies was extraordinarily pleased to welcome Heiner Goebbels as artist-in-residence for ten exciting days in March 2010. His visit was graciously co-sponsored by the Departments of German Studies, Music, and Theatre, Film & Dance. Encompassing an interdisciplinary lecture on contemporary aesthetics from the artist’s perspective (“Aesthetics of Absence,” included in this issue of German Culture News), a special presentation to Cornell’s Composers Forum, a compact seminar on Heiner Müller and Gertrude Stein, and generous visits to several undergraduate classes in German Studies, Music, and Theatre, Film & Dance, this distinguished guest inspired diverse audiences across the disciplines and in the artistic community too.

As director of the Institute for German Cultural Studies, I was especially honored to introduce Heiner Goebbels on the occasion of his Cornell Lecture on Contemporary Aesthetics. His many talents made my task difficult, for he is a creative artist and vibrant thinker whose multifaceted accomplishments in music, theater, and word arts defy summation. This is only in part because his list of accomplishments is so very long, dating back to the 1970s when he combined music and sociology to compose “incidental” music for the Sog. Linksradikales Blasorchester—the So-Called Left-Radical Wind Orchestra—in a then still-divided Germany. More to the point, his musical compositions and music-theater productions of the intervening decades must be experienced to be known. If Heiner Goebbels “embodies the spirit of democracy in the form of an orchestra,” as one commentator put it when the artist was awarded Germany’s prestigious Binding Kulturpreis in 2008, then we might best understand his work in terms of a highly participatory democracy and not the representative kind.

Described by Sir Simon Rattle, the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic with whom he has collaborated on many concert productions, as “a...
Heiner Goebbels is unusually gifted in thinking outside the box and actively tickling his audience’s fancy to do the same. If audiences think they know what musical composition, theatrical performance, and even literary writing mean, works by this artist will make them think again and be very glad they did. Commentators most frequently reach for the German word Grenzgänger to characterize this musical composer and theater director, for his at once stunning and invigorating work in music-theater does not merely “cross” borders but perambulates with curiosity instead in the very field of boundaries otherwise thought to hold cultures, disciplines, and art forms apart.

Celebrated and sometimes criticized for opera with too little singing, theater that occasionally dispenses with actors (e.g., Stifters Dinge, a “no-man play” that had its U.S. premiere at the Lincoln Center in December 2009), or for art installations featuring live actors and dead texts dancing together in sound and shadow, Heiner Goebbels is indeed unique and yet manages to speak to and perhaps even move audiences around the world.

President of the Theatre Academy of Hesse since 2006 (an association of four universities and nine theaters promoting education in the performing arts in Germany) and Director of Germany’s influential Institute for Applied Theater Studies at the Justus-Liebig-University of Gießen since 1999, this featured guest works at the boundaries of many medial, social, and artistic cultures to ask after the possibilities of artistic experience today. Having composed music for theater, film, radio, ballet, and his own art-rock band Cassiber in the 1980s, he has composed for and worked closely with the Ensemble Modern for over twenty years. Since 1990 he has composed and directed his own “staged concerts” and music-theater plays, including The Liberation of Prometheus and Ou bien le débarquement désastreux (1993), The Repetition (1995), Black on White (1996), Max Black and Eisler-Material (1998), Hashirigaki (2000), Landscape with Distant Relatives (2002), Eraritjaritjaka (2004), Stifters Dinge and Songs of Wars I Have Seen (2007), and I went to the house but did not enter with the Hilliard Ensemble (2008). Many of these works engage not only musical and theatrical conventions and experimentation in surprising ways, but also the literary and philosophical writings of figures such as Maurice Blanchot, Samuel Beckett, Malcolm X, Franz Kafka, Gertrude Stein, Elias Canetti, T.S. Eliot, Adalbert Stifter, Edgar Allan Poe, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and others. With Hanns Eisler as a music-theoretical muse and Heiner Müller as a long-time interlocutor and theatrical collaborator in real-time, Heiner Goebbels has garnered international acclaim and many prizes for his inspired and inspiring creations throughout Europe, Asia, North America, Australia, and New Zealand.

Twice nominated for a Grammy—for Best Classical Contemporary Composition in 2001 and for Best Small Ensemble Performance in 2004, Heiner Goebbels received the European Theatre Prize for New Theatrical Realities in 2001, the International Theatre Institute’s Prize for World Theater in 2006, the Polish Theater Critics’ prize for the “Future of Theatre” in 2007, and many other awards far too numerous to list here. Many of his compositions have been recorded in ECM Records New Music series, and his book on Komposition als Inszenierung (Composition as Staged Performance) was published in 2002. His perambulations at the boundaries of artistic experience are frequently described as meditations on the familiar and the unfamiliar alike. A member of the Academy of the Arts in Berlin and the Academy of the Performing Arts in Frankfurt, he is also an Honorable Fellow of the Dartington College of Arts and the Central School of Speech and Drama in London. Asked about the meaning of his artistic creations, this uniquely accomplished speaker once replied that he hopes to provide “impulses” that will make “a shared pondering” possible. In this spirit the Institute for German Cultural Studies and the Departments of German Studies, Music, and Theatre, Film & Dance
remain grateful to Heiner Goebbels for his inspiring visit, and the IGCS is pleased to make the text of his aesthetics lecture available in this issue of German Culture News. Prior to the artist’s arrival, the IGCS was able to screen two films by or about Heiner Goebbels for a campus audience (Heiner Goebbels: Ein Komponist by Dagmar Birke and Schwarz auf Weiß/Black on White by Heiner Goebbels and Manfred Waffender with the Ensemble Modern). Because we were privileged to have Ryan Platt, an advanced doctoral candidate in the Dept. of Theatre, Film & Dance, introduce the artist’s music-theater and the film version of Schwarz auf Weiß in Cornell’s Film Forum on Feb. 23, the IGCS is pleased to include Ryan Platt’s substantive introduction, which Heiner Goebbels cited in his aesthetics lecture on March 9, in this newsletter issue too.

(Leile A. Adelson)

**Ryan Platt Introduces Schwarz auf Weiß and the Art of Heiner Goebbels**

**Cornell Film Forum, Feb. 23, 2010**

As an artist, Heiner Goebbels is the quintessential Grenzgänger, an exceptional individual who inhabits the worlds of both contemporary theatre and music. Although Goebbels has occasionally expressed concerns about the critical reception of his hybrid artistic identity, he moves among both disciplines’ most elite, international circles. For instance, he worked with the iconic German playwright Heiner Müller in the late eighties— incidentally, Goebbels credits these collaborations with Müller as his defining breakthrough— French choreographer Mathilde Monnier, and is a habitual headliner at festivals and theatres across the globe. He is also a professor and managing director of The Institute for Applied Theatre Studies at the Justus-Liebig-Universität in Giessen, where he has taught courses on Brecht, the aesthetics of the city, sound art, and a seminar on French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet.

Despite the fact that Goebbels considers himself to be “not in the center... of contemporary music... somebody who’s between the chairs”— he cites interests in heavy metal, Hanns Eisler, and the Beach Boys as evidence of this outsider status— his musical resume is equally impressive. Since the early nineties, his work has been recorded in ECM’s venerable New Music Series. He has collaborated with renowned musical groups, including the Ensemble Modern and The Hilliard Ensemble, and has become a regular guest at the Berlin Philharmonic, whose conductor, Sir Simon Rattle, describes him in rhapsodic terms as an irreproducible “one-off.”

Goebbels’ ability to negotiate the realms of theatre and music is more than a virtuosic feat— it has been integral to the development of his singular artistic idiom. However, his fluency in these two disciplines was not an innate ability. He struggled with his first position as the resident composer for a relatively traditional theatre in Frankfurt, where it was necessary to subordinate music to visual mise-en-scene. Dissatisfied with theatre, he preferred his purely musical pursuits in experimental bands, such as the So-Called Leftist Revolutionary Wind Orchestra and his art rock trio Cassiber. Of course, the excess of these raucous sonic displays bore little resemblance to the mysterious, muted melancholy that characterizes his musical theatre.

It is worth noting that even for an experienced spectator of contemporary performance, Goebbels’ work is remarkably odd. In part, its quietly quizzical character can be attributed to fundamental differences with traditional theatre: a Goebbels performance generally lacks spoken dialogue, character development, and plot. As in Black on White, little seems to happen. The stage is apparently uninhabited— and perhaps abandoned— by proper actors. Rather than actors, its occupants are the members of the Ensemble Modern. Having been driven from their seats, they aimlessly roam, unattended and idly entertaining themselves with the only language they know, music.

Even if their apparent lack of purpose seems strange, these musicians at least provide a familiar human presence. In other works, Goebbels aspires to a theatre devoid of human performers. For instance, his 2007 work, Stifter’s Things, replaces actors with mechanical substitutes: a robotic voice reads recorded text and an awkwardly constructed contraption of fragmented pianos serves as an eerily self-aware musical instrument and uncanny puppet assemblage.

Despite the exceptionally odd character of such devices, it would be erroneous not to consider Goebbels’ work as part of
a broader context of contemporary performance. Indeed, its opposition to dialogue, character, and plot are established conventions of experimental theatre. In such experimental theatre, instead of presenting coherent characters, performers embody nameless formal forces. In the absence of character-driven events, theatre’s formal framework becomes extrinsic content. In *Black on White*, a symmetrical grid of empty benches-- which reflects the audience’s immobile position and perspective-- depicts the stark structural limits of theatre’s literal and narrative space. Goebbels’ stage resembles the ruins of narrative itself, a proverbial prison house of meaning through which his ensemble wanders. However, whereas most theatre emphasizes the unassailable nature of this structure-- and its catastrophic force-- *Black on White* accepts these limits with enigmatic equanimity. Its inhabitants seem unpreoccupied, and even idle, as if indefinitely waiting for something definitive or meaningful to occur.

Given this uneventful quality, it may seem that Goebbels consciously avoids narrative. Nevertheless, Goebbels always embeds a story-- literally a literary text-- into his theatre. He is a passionate reader with consummate taste for high modernist authors, be it T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett, or Franz Kafka. *Black on White* stages texts by two such exemplary modernists, Edgar Allan Poe and Maurice Blanchot. However, Goebbels presents their writing in a way that fundamentally differs from the traditional dramatic exposition of a narrative and subsequent attempts to resist author and text. Although both stories are present in the first moments of the performance-- the scribbling hand you will see is transcribing Blanchot’s 1962 novella *Awaiting Oblivion* -- neither is ever manifest. On the contrary, the richly fantastic events they relate remain irretrievably occluded and foreclosed.

Not only are its events foreclosed, but narrative encloses the voice that enunciates them. This irremediable distance from the speaker is actually the subject of the Poe short story, “Shadow: A Parable.” Its first line addresses the reader from across the grave: “Ye who read are still among the living: but I who write shall have long since gone my way into the region of shadows.” In *Black on White*, this reference to the narrator’s death is literal: the speaking voice is a recording of Goebbels’ pivotal artistic partner, playwright Heiner Müller, who had recently succumbed to cancer.

Composed in 1996, a year after his death, *Black on White* was intended as a tribute-- and farewell-- to Müller. However, despite this very real loss, its tone is not necessarily mournful. Faithful to Müller’s own irrepressible humor, *Black on White* is surprisingly playful, perhaps because for Goebbels, the mortal division imposed by narrative form is not absolute. Albeit mysterious, Goebbels’ works are not mysteries, which like Poe’s detective stories, are meant to be deciphered and reconstructed. It is possible to appreciate his theatre’s humor and sonorous diversity for its own sake, without recourse to expertise, interpretation, or an introduction. Please enjoy.

(Ryan Platt)
into an inverted steel pyramid. Likewise, in Eraritjaritjaka, Wilms leaves the theater and travels by taxi to a local apartment, where he prepares breakfast and folds laundry via live video feed. This pattern of disappearance culminates with Stifters Dinge, in which Goebbels does away with actors altogether.

Goebbels also discussed his aversion to traditional hierarchies of presence in music. Above all, he questioned the role of the conductor, who was conspicuously missing from his theater. The conductor’s absence was particularly pronounced in Schwarz auf Weiss, in which the Ensemble Modern’s unattended members wander the stage, or in Eisler-material, whose musicians occupy the peripheries of an empty space. Without a conductor in either work, the orchestra struggled to navigate Goebbels’ complex score.

By replacing actor and conductor, such musical ensembles become part of a theatrical event in which, as Goebbels conceded, “little seems to happen.” Instead of dramatic action, Goebbels stated that he creates spaces that permit the audience to observe multiple relations between parts. In such spaces, Goebbels contends that absence enables a “fugue,” or “a polyphony of elements” whose relational possibilities exceed the limits of dramatic representation – an idea that might inspire further reflection upon the concepts of absence and presence alike.

(Ryan Platt)

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On the afternoon of Friday, March 12, composer and IGCS artist-in-residence Heiner Goebbels was the guest at a discussion of his work and his vision of music and theater at the Composer’s Forum. The discussion began with Goebbels speaking about his approach to “music theater.” When putting together a “stage concert,” Goebbels strives to expand the experience of the music into the visual realm as well. Goebbels described a production in Seattle where he incorporated contemporary and period instruments, then separated the performers on stage not by instrument but by gender. Goebbels, who frequently works with amplified music and recordings to create his soundscapes, also criticized what he views as an oversight among many classical orchestras and in the construction of concert halls, namely, that they overlook and undervalue electronic and amplified sound. Speaking of his own work, Goebbels denied having any particular style. He told the participants in the forum that he did not compose out of a desire for self-expression, and never wrote a piece not intended for performance. Instead, he views the diverse materials that comprise his works as found objects to be assembled into something new. In his composition Chaconne/Kantorloops, Goebbels incorporated historical recordings of Jewish cantors singing prayers. Goebbels, who rejects the view that the voice is simply an instrument, views the voice as a very personal thing and claims that, given all of the biographical matter that shapes an individual’s voice, he could only ever compose vocal music for one particular singer. In his work Goebbels treats literature not simply as yielding a particular text that can then have a musical structure imposed upon it, but rather as something that can lend its own structure to music. For Goebbels, music is not a starting point for his music theater; rather, he starts with the literature, the space, and a few ideas, out of which the piece is assembled as a collaborative effort.

(Alex Phillips)

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Cornell Cinema presents DDR/DDR (2008) with filmmaker Amie Siegel

This recent film by Amie Siegel is a multi-layered and disarmingly beautiful film essay on the German Democratic Republic and its dissolution, which left many of its former citizens adrift in their newfound freedom. Featured at the 2008 Whitney Biennial, the film collects unsettlingly mundane Stasi surveillance footage, interviews with psychoanalysts, East German “Indian hobbyists,” and lolling shots of derelict state radio stations into an extended and self-conscious assemblage that weaves together meditations on history, memory, and the shared technologies of state control and art. Siegel’s ‘ciné-constellation’ combines vérité interviews with staged dialogue to excavate East German traumas associated with both the Socialist state and reunification. Cosponsored with the Institute for German Cultural Studies and the Rose Goldsen Lecture Series.

Wednesday, October 13, at 7pm
Willard Straight Theatre
Admission: $7 general/$5.50 seniors/$4 students
I could easily show you a fifty-minute video of one of my recent works, a performative installation without any performer (“Stifters Dinge”), then go away, and the topic of absence would be well covered. But maybe we should reflect instead on how this topic has developed over the years in my works in order to understand better what happens and what I mean by “absence.”

How did it all start? Maybe with an accident in 1993 during rehearsals of a scene from a piece called “Ou bien le débarquement désastreux” (Or the hapless landing), one of my earliest music-theatre plays, with five musicians and one actor.

Magdalena Jetelova, a highly renowned artist from Prague, created the stage: a gigantic aluminum pyramid that hangs upside down, has sand running out of it, and can be completely inverted during the show, and a giant wall of silk hair, driven smoothly by fifty fans behind it (which also drove the actor crazy). In one scene the actor disappears behind the wall of hair, in another he is sucked in completely by the hanging pyramid and then comes back, minutes later, head first. After the rehearsal of these scenes Magdalena Jetelova went directly to the actor, André Wilms, and enthusiastically told him: “It is absolutely fantastic when you disappear.”

This is definitely something you should never say to an actor, and this one became so furious that I had to ask the set designer kindly not to visit any more rehearsals. But far more interesting is the intuitive grasp with which she was able to question in an instant—from her point of view as a visual artist—a very important condition in performing arts.

For despite some radical (and later ignored) experiments by the theatrical avant-garde at the beginning of the twentieth century (including plays by Gertrude Stein and approaches by Vsevolod Meyerhold, Adolphe Appia, and many other artists), and despite the intriguing experiments by American artists such as Bob Wilson, Richard Schechner, Richard Foreman, and others in the 1960s and 1970s who proposed a performance-oriented theatre against the intimidating authority and gravity of texts—despite all that: theatre and opera are still widely based on the classic concept of the artistic experience in terms of direct presence and personal intensity, a centralized focus on expressive protagonists (actors, singers, dancers, and instrumentalists): secure soloists—secure in their roles, figures, and bodies.

Among all performing arts contemporary dance alone has been raising questions of subject and identity, and translating them into a choreography of a fragmented, de-located, unfinished, deformed, or disappearing body since the 1980s. (See Gerald Siegmund’s Abwesenheit, a study of absence as a performative aesthetics of dance.) Theatre and opera refuse to consider their classic assumptions. Occasionally they will change the text of a play, sometimes they change the sound of an opera, but never more than this. And speaking as someone who knows the gravity of educational institutions for actors and directors, I can reassure you this will go on for a while….

What was just a short moment in “Ou bien le débarquement désastreux” and an anecdote from this production became a crucial aspect for my work.

In this piece the moment of presence is already divided. The actor has to share it and accept sharing it with all the elements involved and produced by the reality of the set (which is not illustrative decor but itself a piece of art): the confrontation between text and music, the separation between the voice and the body of the actor, the sudden clash between one music and another (music by two griots from Senegal and my own music performed by trombone, keyboards, and electric guitar), the clash between one scene and another. Between these “separate elements,” as Brecht put it, distances occur, blank spaces for the spectator’s imagination.

In his “Notes on the Antigone” Friedrich Hölderlin already stressed a “poetic logic” regarding theatre, a poetic logic that for him, unlike analytical or philosophical “logic,” lays claim to many of our perceptive abilities. He talks about “various successions in which idea and feeling and reflection develop, according to poetic logic,” which appeals to the most varied senses and modes of perception.
- and does not follow a linear narrative form. For Hölderlin, “poetry treats the different faculties ... so that the representation of these different faculties makes a whole,” and “the connection between the more independent parts of the different faculties” is something he calls “the rhythm” (p. 237).

“Ou bien le débarquement désastreux” offers neither a complete image, nor a musical chronology, nor a linear narration. Three texts allude to possible internal topics that arise personally and individually for the spectator as a result of the entire performance as such: Joseph Conrad’s “Congo Diary,” a prose text called “Herakles 2 or the Hydra” by Heiner Müller, and a poem on pine wood by Francis Ponge. Topics circulate around the fear of the stranger, violence and colonization, an insistence on acknowledgement and respect for ethnic differences rather than shared traits; or to put it with Maurice Blanchot: “the other is not your brother.”

By the way, all the voices in this piece were in French or Mandingo, languages that some people might not understand. I actually do not mind that a bit. One can “rest in it untroubled,” as Gertrude Stein says when she describes her first theatre experiences: “I must have been about sixteen years old and [Sarah] Bernhardt came to San Francisco and stayed two months. I knew a little french [sic] of course but really it did not matter, it was all so foreign and her voice being so varied and it all being so french I could rest in it untroubled. And I did. ... The manners and customs of the french theatre created a thing in itself and it existed in and for itself.... It was for me a very simple direct and moving pleasure” (pp. 258-59). And theatre as a “thing in itself,” not as a representation or a medium to make statements about reality, is exactly what I try to offer.

In such theatre the spectator is involved in a drama of experience rather than looking at drama in which psychologically motivated relationships are represented by figures on stage. This is a drama of perception, a drama of one’s senses, as in those quite powerful confrontations of all the elements — stage, light, music, words — in which the actor has to survive, not to act. So the drama of the “media” is actually a double drama here: a drama for the actor as well as a drama for the perception of the audience.

This divided experience probably explains why two years later — in the performance “Black on White” — I put the weight, not on the virtuosity of a brilliant actor but on the shoulders of eighteen musicians in the Ensemble Modern, a collective protagonist, so to speak. This was therefore also a statement against an art form that is often entirely hierarchical: in its organization and working process, in the use of theatrical elements, in its artistic result, up to the totalitarian character of its aesthetic and relationship towards the audience.

Black on White, Photo Credit: Wonge Bergmann

In this piece the musicians of the Ensemble Modern do not vanish in the pit for the benefit of soloists. They discover their own abilities in doing other things beyond their musical virtuosity: writing, singing, sorting things, playing badminton and all sorts of games, hitting the drums with tennis balls or failing to do so, and reading: “Ye who read are still among the living: but I who write shall have long since gone my way into the region of shadows” (Poe, p. 147).

This early anticipation of the “death of the author” in Edgar Allan Poe’s parable “Shadow” should not only be taken literally (in reference to Heiner Müller, the friend and German author who had recommended this text to me before he died while rehearsals for “Black on White” were under way). The absence here is to be found on other levels as well: as a refusal of any dramatic action, for example. I think “little seems to happen,” as Ryan Platt said in his introduction to a screening of the film version of “Black on White” at Cornell two weeks ago.

And “Black on White” is a piece on writing. “Writing, which has traditionally retired behind the apparent presence of performance, is openly declaring itself the environment in which dramatic structure is situated,” as the theatre scholar Elinor Fuchs wrote in 1985. “The price of this emergence, or perhaps its aim, is the undermining of theatrical Presence,” which also undermines the self-given presence of the actor (pp. 163–64). Presence is doubly reduced in “Black on White” by the rather amateurish ‘non-presence’ of the musicians, who never did anything similar before. You can observe the un-expressive, un-dramatic, but highly concentrated faces of the performers, who do not pretend to be anyone other than themselves as musicians in that very space and moment while we watch them. Often turning their backs towards the audience and dividing the attention of the audience across the landscape of eighteen simultaneously active persons. To cite Elinor Fuchs again: “A theatre of Absence … disperses the center, displaces the Subject, destabilizes meaning” (p. 165).

In this performance we as spectators have to focus ourselves (forget for a moment that it is done here for you by the camera...
and the editing of this film clip). This is similar to aspects of a later piece with the same musicians (“Eislermaterial”) where the centre stage is empty all the time.

The musicians all sit on the three sides of the stage during the performance, and “presence” happens on an acoustic level purely by close amplification. Structural hindrances / resistances / difficulties for the musicians (the distance between them, the separation of the strings, and so on) help to visualize for the audience the communicative process of an ensemble responsible for itself without a conductor. In the conductor’s place you find only a little statue of the composer Hanns Eisler, a close friend and collaborator of Bertolt Brecht.

Strangely enough – though I had been warned by serious professionals – the audience’s attention did not fade away with the absence of any spectacular visual distraction during the performance. “The experience of fabricated presence – self-produced in the act of perception – grows to the degree that the demonstrated presence disappears” – as my colleague Gerald Siegmund phrased it in his recently published study on “absence” (cited in my translation from Abwesenheit, p. 81).

Speaking about concerts, I would say that it is often the conductor in concerts who prevents the self-responsibility of the musicians, on the one hand, and a self-responsible perception of the audience, on the other. Elias Canetti tells us why:

“There is no more obvious expression of power than the performance of a conductor. … The immobility of the audience is as much part of the conductor’s design as the obedience of the orchestra. They are under a compulsion to keep still. Until he appears they move about and talk freely among themselves. … During a concert, and for the people gathered together in the hall, the conductor is a leader. … … He is the living embodiment of law, both positive and negative. His hands decree and prohibit. His ears search out profanation.

Thus for the orchestra the conductor literally embodies the work they are playing, the simultaneity of the sounds as well as their sequence; and since, during the performance, nothing is supposed to exist except this work, for so long is the conductor the ruler of the world.”
(Crowds and Power, pp. 394-96)

This text is presented as an impressive monologue by the actor André Wilms in the music-theatre piece “Eraritjaritjaka” before he leaves the stage, followed by a camera man, while his live video-image continues to be projected onto the backdrop of the stage, the white façade of a house. The audience sees how he leaves the foyer of the theatre, enters a car, drives through the city in which the piece is being performed, leaves the car after a few minutes of driving, and enters his apartment. The words we hear are taken from Canetti’s notebooks: “A country where anyone who says I is immediately swallowed up by the earth” (The Secret Heart of the Clock, p. 129).
It is obvious: the actor's absence is going to be a long one. The audience, released from the strong presence of the actor's earlier monologue, is irritated, confused, and relaxed at the same time. Audience members do not even know if the actor, whom they paid to see, will ever come back. The camera follows him to his apartment, where he does undramatic things: opening and reading letters, making notes that borrow from Canetti (such as "Explain nothing. Put it there. Say it. Leave." from The Secret Heart of the Clock, p. 106), sorting the laundry, watching television, reading the newspaper, living alone without being able to - thinking aloud: "You can't exist with human beings. You can't exist without human beings. How can you exist?" (in my translation from Canetti's Aufzeichnungen 1973-1984, p. 52). And he is preparing scrambled eggs.

The clock at the back of the kitchen shows the actual time, and the rhythm in which the actor cuts onions is in sync with a quartet on stage playing a string quartet by Maurice Ravel. Both prove the liveness of the mediated presence.

Eraritjaritjaka, Photo Credit: Krzysztof Bielinski

Let's recap the different concepts of a "theatre of absence" as they have been discussed so far. Absence can be understood:

• as the disappearance of the actor / performer from the center of attention (or even from the stage altogether)
• as a division of presence among all elements involved – you could also call it a polyphony of elements (in the actual sense of a sort of independent voice of the light, the space, the texts, the sounds (as in a fugue by J.S. Bach)
• as a division of the spectator's attention to a collective protagonist with performers who often hide their individual significance by turning their backs towards the audience
• as a separation of the actors' voices from their bodies and of the musicians' sounds from their instruments
• as a de-synchronization of listening and seeing, a separation or division between visual and acoustic stage
• as the creation of spaces in-between, spaces of discovery, spaces in which emotion, imagination, and reflection can actually take place
• as an abandonment of dramatic expression ("the drama doesn't happen on stage," says Heiner Müller)
• as an empty center: literally, as an empty center stage, meaning the absence of a visually centralized focus, but also as the absence of what we call a clear "theme" or message of a play; we could compare the empty center with the nouveau roman by French authors in the 1950s, such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, who surrounded his topics with irritating techniques, in novels in which core themes are not even explicitly mentioned but rather permanently provoked and obsessively produced for the reader (for example, jealousy in La Jalousie)
• as absence of a story, or to paraphrase Gertrude Stein: "anything that is not a story can be a play" (see her essay "Plays" from Lectures in America). "What is the use of telling a story since there are so many and everybody knows so many and tells so many ... so why tell another one" (p. 260)?
• And last but not least absence can be understood as avoiding the things we expect, the things we have seen, the things we have heard, the things that are usually done on stage. Or in the words of Elias Canetti again, which we hear when the actor in "Eraritjaritjaka" finally opens the window of his apartment:

"To spend the rest of one's life only in completely new places. To give up books. To burn everything one has begun. To go to countries whose languages one can never master. To guard against every explained word. To keep silent, silent and breathing, to breathe the incomprehensible.
I do not hate what I have learned; I hate living in it."
(The Human Province, p. 160)

In this moment the audience sees the actor live on stage opening one of the black windowpanes in the backdrop and slowly – seeing the camera man and the string quartet through those windows in the actor's living room – the audience understands that he might have never really left the stage.
This complex twist of inside and outside views, of music, text, perception, deception, the surprising sudden shock of an unforeseeable presence – this becomes one of the actual dramas in “Eraritjaritjaka” for the audience.

And we – my team and I – became interested in going further after this production. The experiment we tried with “Stifters Dinge” (a piece without a performer) was this: Will the spectator’s attention endure long enough if one of the essential assumptions of theatre is neglected: the presence of an actor? Even more recent definitions in performance theory still speak of the co-presence or common attendance of performers and spectators at the same time in the same space (see Erika Fischer-Lichte, Ästhetik des Performativen, on this critical point).

So “Stifters Dinge” became a “no-man show,” in which curtains, light, music, and space, all the elements that usually prepare, support, illustrate, and serve a theatrical performance and the actor’s dominance, become – in a kind of justice long deferred – the protagonists, together with five pianos, metal plates, stones, water, fog, rain, and ice.

When nobody is on stage to assume the responsibility of presenting and representing, when nothing is being shown, then the spectators must discover things themselves. The audience’s sense of discovery is finally enabled by the absence of the performers, who usually do the art of demonstrating and binding the audience’s vision to them by attracting total attention. Only their absence creates the void in which this freedom and pleasure are possible.

In “Stifters Dinge” the performers are replaced by non-anthropomorphic machines and objects, elements such as curtains, water, fog, rain, and ice – and by acousmatic voices. We hear bodyless voices, the voices of Claude Lévi-Strauss, William Burroughs, and Malcolm X, and we also hear early recordings of anonymous voices from South America, Greece, and from Papua New Guinea. During the incantations from Papua New Guinea we see reflections of water on a ballet of curtains slowly moving up and down.

The effect of such acousmatic voices is explained by my colleague Helga Finter: “… the recorded voice suggests to the spectator the construction of presence-effects, since he perceives the spoken words as addressed to him. This can be traced to the acousmatic status of such a voice, the source of which remains invisible. The spectator will thus connect what he hears with what he sees in order then to formulate hypotheses about motivation and causality. His scopic desire stages what his invocatory desire [invokatorisches Begehren] is able to hear. In this way the perceptive intelligence of the spectator’s own senses actively stages the performance when the spectator weaves and reads his own audiovisual text….”

In traditional theatre, which is based on literature, and in opera subjects in the audience recognize themselves in the actor or singer or dancer on stage; they identify themselves with the performers and mirror themselves in them. This obviously does not work in “Stifters Dinge,” and it rarely works in my earlier pieces. Instead of offering self-confirmation to both a performing and a perceiving subject, a “theatre of absence” might be able offer an artistic experience (and here I refer to a recent publication by André Eiermann titled Postspektakuläres Theater) that does not necessarily have to lie in a direct encounter (with the actor), but in an experience through alterity. Alterity is to be understood here, not as a direct relation to anything, but as an indirect and triangular relationship whereby theatrical identification is replaced by a rather insecure confrontation with a mediated third, something that we might term the other.

Absence as the presence of the other, as a confrontation with an unseen picture or an unheard word or sound, an encounter with forces that people cannot master, that are out of our reach.

What started as a rather formal experiment became – through the elements entering the stage themselves – a rather anthropological
and ecological topic for my team, the audience, and me.

Stifters Dinge, Photo Credit: Klaus Gruenberg

Over the course of ten minutes the audience sees a projection of a painting called “The Swamp” by the Dutch painter Jacob Isaackszoon van Ruisdael (1660). At the same time we hear on the acoustic stage the voice of a Scottish actor reading a winter story about an icefall in a forest. “We listened and stared; I don’t know whether it was amazement or fear of driving deeper into that thing” (Stifter, p. 304). This is from a story by the Austrian author Adalbert Stifter (in Miriam Heard’s translation for the 2007 program brochure for “Stifters Dinge” in Lausanne). This is the author who lent his name to my piece, which was inspired in part by Stifter’s careful insistence on the description of details in nature, of ecological disasters, unknown objects, strange habits, and remote cultures – all of which he always called “the thing” (das Ding).

After the reading of Stifter’s wintry tale five pianos, some metal plates, and a fog machine all together play a sort of concert, before it begins to rain.

Stifters Dinge, Photo Credit: Mario del Curto

Now, after more than 150 performances, it seems to me, the experiment works. Audience members react with puzzlement, irritation, and heightened attentiveness. They are intellectually and emotionally animated. And they often let me know with relief: ‘finally nobody on stage to tell me what to think.’ I am sorry I have to do the opposite here. Thank you for listening.

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On the weekend of March 12-14, Cornell’s Department of Music hosted a conference and concert festival celebrating the eighteenth-century English musician, historian, and travel writer Charles Burney. The event, called “Charles Burney, Musical Travel, and the Invention of Music History,” brought together scholars from the US and UK to examine Burney’s life and works, as well as the musical and cultural milieus in which his project was implicated. Below is a selection of the talks given.

In his talk, entitled “Burney’s footsteps: British organ tours to the continent”, David Yearsley (Cornell University) discussed English attitudes towards German organs and organ-playing during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, focusing particularly on the writings of Charles Burney.

Yearsley began by examining Burney’s account of his visit to Augsburg Cathedral, arguing that Burney constructed an opposition between English ‘simplicity’ and ‘familiarity’ and German ‘complexity,’ ‘artificiality,’ and ‘foreignness.’ The organ became a particular focus for such intercultural engagement, being firmly ‘anchored to its region’ both metaphorically and literally. Organs – notably those in Hamburg and Dresden – were a common feature of the Grand Tour, and organ-playing was a popular aural and visual spectacle for visitors. Unlike English examples, German organs almost always had pedals, and the German style of performance made extensive use of the feet, emphasizing physical display.

For Burney, the pedals were a curious, ‘acrobatic,’ yet inessential part of the organ, and his attitude was broadly representative of British public opinion. However, this gradually began to change – as witnessed by the writings of musicians such as Edward Holmes and Henry Chorley – and by the end of the nineteenth century nearly all organs in England had pedals.

Entitled “‘The silence was sound’: Burney and the 1784 Handel Commemorations,” Monica Eason Roundy’s (Cornell University) paper focused on Charles Burney’s account of the concerts and celebrations that commemorated the birth of the composer George Frideric Handel. She discussed the mixed feelings that Burney entertained towards this task, which was invested with particular importance by the sensitive political situation in England during this period.

The figure of Handel possessed great significance as a symbol of English national and cultural pride, and Burney complained that King George III wanted him to be exclusively praised. Roundy argued that Burney was essentially being asked to produce a work of eulogistic propaganda, despite the fact that his opinion of Handel’s musical genius was not unequivocal. He was also concerned that Handel had become associated with conservative tendencies, and that his music was being used to ‘drown out’ the work of other, living, composers. Roundy contended that the extravagance of Burney’s language in his account of the commemorations hinted that he wanted it to be perceived as hyperbolic.

She went on to discuss the monumentalisation of Handel, and its nationalistic associations, in more detail, making specific reference to the visual representations of Handel on the tickets to three commemoration concerts.

In her paper “‘Certain Science’: Burney, Haydn and Modern Music,” Emily Dolan (University of Pennsylvania) began...
by discussing Charles Burney’s encounter with the ‘echo wall’ at the Simonetto Palace in Italy, which he ‘tested’ in various ways, using it as an example of Burney’s more general preoccupation with science, experimentation, and empiricism. He wrote a number of scientific texts (for example the Essay towards a history of the principal comets of 1769), met several contemporary scientists, such as Laura Bassi and William Herschel, and was fascinated by scientific implements.

Dolan also compared excerpts from Burney’s ‘didactic poetry’ with contemporaneous Jesuit poems on scientific subjects, intended to enable the reader to participate in scientific discovery, partly through the act of reading the poem itself and accessing its meaning. She discussed the Enlightenment interest in scientific instruments and experimental procedures, and linked it with the increasing interest in using musical instruments in precise ways, which she interpreted as a feature of modernity. She associated this interest with the music of Joseph Haydn, particularly in his very specific use of instrumental timbre and effect. (Caroline Wright)

The second keynote of the conference was given by Vanessa Agnew (University of Michigan), and was entitled “The eye - or the ear? Eighteenth-century travel, music history, and the rhetoric of witnessing.” In this lecture, Agnew argued for a sympathetic appraisal of the shared musical-historical project of the music historian Charles Burney and the Scottish traveler James Bruce. Though they were often disparaged by their contemporaries as fantasists who excessively embellished their rhetorical flourishes in the manner of a Baron Münchhausen, Agnew argued that there is an ethical and epistemological potential in the imaginative historiography of ancient music that Burney assembled based on the travel writings of Bruce. Burney would have apparently sacrificed a desire for scientific rigor when he knowingly identified 18th century Abyssinian music, which Bruce experienced firsthand on his trip to Ethiopia, with ancient Egyptian music. As problematic as Bruce’s dream to reconstruct an Egyptian lyre (based on a contemporary Abyssinian one) may have been, Agnew argued that the “conjectural dimension” of Burney’s and Bruce’s thought would be misunderstood if it were held to a strict standard of objectivity or accuracy. The purpose of his conjecture and rhetorical embellishment was not access, but imaginative reenactment of the past, which does justice to its object insofar as it recognizes that ancient music, just like contemporary music, is embedded and exchanged in a living social context. Thus, Agnew suggested, Burney’s project cannot be reduced to mere exoticism, since it constitutes an imaginative exercise driven by an ethical impulse to understand the social situatedness of the practice of music. These two figures were locked into an enlightenment belief that “traveling across space means traveling across time,” but this should not cause us to discount their projects wholesale. Concluding her lecture, Agnew provided an account of her own journey to Egypt, where she had hoped to imaginatively reenact Bruce’s travels – and discovered an intricate web of living social practices, including on the site where history was imagined to have transpired. (Paul Buchholz)
Graduate Student Conference:
Within or Without:
Space in German Literature and Culture

(February 26-27, 2010)

The weekend of February 26-27 saw the annual graduate student conference organized by pandemonium germanicum, the organization of graduate students in Cornell’s Department of German Studies. This year’s conference, “Within or Without: Space in German Literature and Culture,” brought graduate students from the US and Europe together to discuss, in the long wake of the spatial turn, space as analytical, rhetorical, historical, cultural, philosophical, and literary category. In addition to providing an ample field for theoretical engagement, space also manifested itself acutely for the conference, as a record snowfall that weekend transformed Ithaca into a hibernial abyss and, for many conference participants, turned an otherwise glib spatial transit into insurmountable distance. Thanks to the cool agility of the organizers, however, not a single paper had to be dropped, as the snowbound half of the participants joined us at the A.D. White House via Skype and a projector. John Noyes (University of Toronto) gave the keynote talk, and Sabine Haenni (Cornell University) delivered the plenary address.

Carl Gelderloos (Cornell University) opened the first panel of the conference with an exploration of narrative performances of space in German realism in his paper, “Realism as Fantasy – Performing Space with Stifter and Keller.” Responding to Friedrich Theodor Vischer’s formulation of the poetic possibility of grüne Stellen, Gelderloos urged for an understanding of these spaces not as neutral grounds fertile for textual practice, but rather as constructed in the act of narration. Gelderloos began with descriptions of landscape in Adalbert Stifter’s Bergkristall, examining the drawing and effacing of a mountainous border that seems to divide villages. Stifter’s description of two children losing themselves between villages along a border with no outside collapses a clear delineation between inside and outside. Through a careful reading of such moments, Gelderloos demonstrated a textual performance of space that upsets a referential cartography composed of individual, bounded villages to replace it with a notion of circulation among multiple villages: a mythic geography of a local space with infinite extension. Gelderloos then suggested a reading of Gottfried Keller’s Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe based on that text’s performance of opposing movements in space that, unlike in Stifter’s text, cannot restore a challenged local space. He concluded by calling for a reworking of theorizations of realism in light of the performed-ness of its spaces.

Next, Marcus Lampert (University of Chicago) explored affinities between Walter Benjamin’s Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels and Einbahnstraße.
in his paper entitled “Theatrical and Historical Space in the Work of Walter Benjamin.” Lampert’s argument hinged on the influence of Benjamin’s theory of Baroque theater on the description of the 1923 hyperinflation in Germany as staged in the Kaiserpanorama: Reise durch die deutsche Inflation, a section of Einbahnstraße. The concept of history described in the Trauerspiel book takes the form of a panoramic theater in which historical events are not arranged chronologically or causally, but rather scattered amidst the landscape on a stage. Reading the scattering of economic language throughout the chapter on the Kaiserpanorama through this metaphor, Lampert demonstrated Benjamin’s representation of the 1923 economic crisis in Germany as a closed space of continuous catastrophe that does not resolve in the creation of a communist state. In conclusion, Lampert noted an important difference in the conceptions of history offered by both works. Whereas Benjamin’s conception of history in the Baroque offered no divine deliverance from the crises of history, the Kaiserpanorama, embedded in the larger linear progression of Einbahnstrasse, offers a hopeful metaphor for Weimar Germany as a one-way street progressing toward communist deliverance.

Peter Erickson (University of Chicago) delivered the final paper on the panel, “Hegel and the Origin of Architecture.” Erickson framed his discussion with one of the most famous and influential early attempts to articulate architectural laws by Marc-Antoine Laugier. Laugier’s 1753 essay on architecture posited the essence of architecture as the primitive hut, from which he deduced the basic three elements that constitute a building – post, beam, and roof. For Hegel, however, the essence of architecture was not to be found in the functional status of a particular human construction, but rather in a non-functional, symbolic origin. Whereas Laugier’s account depended on a set of rational laws according to which all buildings could be seen as the citation of a regulative ideal, Hegel described the conditions of success of a work of architecture through its status as great art. Hegel posits the origin of art in the origin of architecture as the first way that man shaped his environment to give it meaning. As such, this origin is to be found before the articulation of form and function, and its development, as that of the relation of man and nature, is the very constitution of the human. In conclusion, Erickson suggested the possibilities of extrapolating Hegel’s conception of the origin of architecture for understanding the arbitrary and impulsive conventions marking the extreme self-reflectiveness of modern artists.

(Katrina Nousek)

Leif Weatherby (University of Pennsylvania) opened the second panel with his essay entitled “The Space of Reasons, the Metaphysics of Reason: Goethe as Idealist.” Weatherby advocated the thesis that Goethe should be understood as an idealist thinker, and through an examination of the novel Die Wahlverwandtschaften, he illustrated the fruitfulness of his interpretation of Goethean metaphysics in approaching Goethe’s literary production.

He argued that Goethe’s brand of idealism is closest to Hegel’s. He further compared the traditional, “ultra-metaphysical,” understanding of Hegel with the “non-metaphysical” reading proposed by contemporary analytic philosophy, his chief goal being to steer a middle course between them. From the analytic camp currently engaged in a revival of Hegel, Weatherby focused mostly on John McDowell. He examined in some detail McDowell’s interpretation of Kant expounded in Mind and World (1994), and, in particular, McDowell’s treatment of the distinction between a logical space of reasons and a logical space of nature. Weatherby also highlighted key aspects of McDowell’s Hegelian interpretation of Kant from various subsequent essays, and went on to articulate the sense in which
Visiting Scholar (Sept. 1-Oct. 15, 2010)

The IGCS looks forward to welcoming Dr. Grégory Salle as a Visiting Scholar from Sept. 1 through Oct. 15 this fall. A tenured researcher at the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) in France, he specializes in the social sciences and humanities with particular attention to the sociology of prisons in Germany and France. He received his Ph.D. in political sociology from Sciences Po Paris in 2006, where he has also taught, as well as at several other institutions including the University of Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne and the University Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis. Most of his research focuses on a comparative historical sociology of imprisonment in Germany and France and an analysis of related concerns in both countries since the 1960s. His interests also include the sociology of deviance, criminology, and political theory, especially theories of the state. Dr. Salle is currently preparing a critical comparative genealogy of the Rechtsstaat in Germany and the État de droit in France. He spent a year as a DAAD doctoral fellow at the Humboldt University and the Center Marc Bloch of Berlin (2001-2002). Since then he has been a member of the French-German European Associated Laboratory, a joint initiative between the Max Planck Society and the CNRS regarding law and order, security, and the politics of crime prevention in Europe. Dr. Salle is the author of La part d’ombre de l’État de droit? La question carcériale en République fédérale d’Allemagne et en France depuis 1968 (Paris, éditions de l’EHESS, 2009) and several articles in French refereed journals in the humanities and social sciences. He is currently a member of the Directorial Board of the Maison Européenne des Sciences de l’Homme et de la Société (MESHS) in Lille. On Sept. 14 he will present comparative perspectives on modern and especially recent prisons in Germany and France to an interdisciplinary audience at Cornell. An advance copy of the colloquium paper can be obtained from Olga Petrova at <ogp2>.
worlds). By coining a new verb (i.e., ‘welten’), Heidegger sought to emphasize that the world’s distinctive mode of being should not be conflated either with that of an object or with the manner of being of Dasein. Gasperi’s guiding thought in interpreting Büchner’s text was that in Lenz, by contrast, world unworlds. It was from this perspective that he closely read a number of prominent passages in the novella which foreground the main character’s distorted perception of spatial relationships, as well as of the very distinction between self and world. (Ana-Maria Andrei)

John Noyes (University of Toronto) presented the keynote address, “Space, Time, and the Production of the Human.” Claiming that one of the difficulties in talking about space lay in the fact that space, while always there in the order of things, had to be both presented and represented by literature and philosophy, Noyes asked what the temporal cost of spatial production might be, that is, how should we conceptualize time to make space present, and what happens to time and space in representation?

After casting a look back upon the “spatial turn” that has been underway in the humanities in recent decades, Noyes argued that the problems of space can also be viewed as problems of time. For space becomes a matter of analysis in that it suspends and presents time. Noyes invoked Derrida’s suspicion of metaphysics. Derrida argued that, starting with Aristotle, thinking space requires an understanding of time that itself is based on space, a circularity that is the history of metaphysics. Derrida, in observing how Hegel resolves contradictions in his conception of space through his conception of time, concluded that metaphysics equates the being of time and the being of space. One is defined in terms of a negativity of the other, a definition that Derrida finds untenable.

Noyes then introduced his concept of space-time conversion and the role of technology in that process. Noyes argues that the conversion of time into space and space into time is an integral facet of subjectivity, and that this process lends our actions meaning, giving us a place in the world of signs. According to Noyes, communications technology has caused late capitalist production to enter a phase in which productivity is no longer confined spatially, say, to a factory or an office, but temporally. Likewise, the value of work is measured spatially: “are you somewhere where you can do this task?”

For its part, art allows us to stand outside of the universe and observe its stasis. Reading literature in terms of its spatiality is to pursue its strategies of time-space conversion. Citing Ernst Jünger and Alfred Döblin, Noyes argued that narrative both supports and resists the technological production of the human. Noyes then offered a reading of Hölderlin’s poem “An die Stille,” in which he paid particular attention to the tenses employed in the poem in order to see how space-time conversion worked in this particular text. (Alex Phillips)

The second day of the conference opened under
Nina Jebsen

Cormick provided a reading of Robert Musil’s 1911 novella Die Vollendung der Liebe focusing on the interplay of imagery and what he called the “spatialized conception of the body.” Drawing a parallel between the stylistics of the text and its thematic structure, McCormick argued that the body of Claudine, the main character of the novella, is a site of confinement from which her psyche is able to escape. Following this parallel between stylistics and thematics to its final consequences, McCormick concludes that while the psyche seems to have freed itself from the “spatialized body” through an act of adultery, this does not produce an exit point from the “imagistic logic” of the story.

Nina Jebsen (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel) presented a paper titled “Putting Things in Order: On the Significance of Urban and Domestic Space in Post War Germany.” In her analysis of postwar reconstruction of urban and domestic space in Western Germany, Hartmann equated the normative processes of rearranging and reordering cityscapes with similar processes in the social. Ruins and rubble were for the city planners of postwar Berlin not so much a sign of destruction but an immense opportunity to start anew. In the aftermath of the war, city planners directed their attention towards changing the face of the city, while aiming at the reconstruction of a “morally improved weather. Mareike Layer and Nina Jebsen were able to join us in Ithaca, while James McCormick and Johanna Hartman joined us via skype.

The first panelist, Mareike Layer (Humboldt Universität) discussed her research on garden projects in Germany in a paper titled “Hospitality as Zwischenraum. The intercultural garden project and its interactive space of hospitality.” She began her talk with a brief history of the German Intercultural Garden projects. The first such project started out two decades ago in Göttingen as an initiative for Bosnian refugees. As the project expanded, gardeners with different ethnic backgrounds joined. Similar initiatives were implemented in Berlin. The gardens became a shared space of interaction. Based on empirical research conducted on these sites, Layer analyzed the space of the community garden from the perspective of five categories: factual space, frontier space, a space of action, a space of community, and finally the space of the garden as a whole. In the final step of her analysis, Layer identified “hospitality” and other rituals of encounter as the elements that allow a transgression between an individual and communal space, while the controlled communities of the gardens become “a threshold on the way to an intercultural society”.

James McCormick (University of Chicago) presented a paper titled “The Spatialized Body: Narrative Style and Corporeality in Robert Musil.” McCormick provided a reading of Robert Musil’s 1911 novella Die Vollendung der Liebe focusing on the interplay of imagery and what he called the “spatialized conception of the body.” Drawing a parallel between the stylistics of the text and its thematic structure, McCormick argued that the body of Claudine, the main character of the novella, is a site of confinement from which her psyche is able to escape. Following this parallel between stylistics and thematics to its final consequences, McCormick concludes that while the psyche seems to have freed itself from the “spatialized body” through an act of adultery, this does not produce an exit point from the “imagistic logic” of the story.

Nina Jebsen (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel) presented a paper titled “Negotiating space in the German-Danish border region in the 1920s and 1930s.” She attempted to foreground and analyze processes of cultural, political, and social negotiations of space in the region of Nordschleswig, a territory that Germany ceded to Denmark in the aftermath of WWII. In her analysis, Jebsen drew on Martina Löw’s understanding of “relational space,” that is, a space generated through connections between social elements. Jebsen applied this to her reading of a historical phenomenon, the fabrication of a “German cultural space” in Nordschleswig in the decade following the cession. She based her research on two newspapers of the time. “Der Schleswig-Holsteinер” and “Die Heimat.” In analyzing the rhetoric used in these newspapers, Jebsen highlighted the use of the language of folklore in the construction of a sense of national belonging. She argued that through the rhetorical instrumentalization of tradition, language, and practices, Germany reclaimed Nordschleswig not as a geographic but as a cultural space defined in ethnic terms.

Johanna Hartmann (Universität Bremen) concluded the panel with a paper titled “Putting Things in Order: On the Significance of Urban and Domestic Space in Post War Germany.” In her analysis of postwar reconstruction of urban and domestic space in Western Germany, Hartmann equated the normative processes of rearranging and reordering cityscapes with similar processes in the social. Ruins and rubble were for the city planners of postwar Berlin not so much a sign of destruction but an immense opportunity to start anew. In the aftermath of the war, city planners directed their attention towards changing the face of the city, while aiming at the reconstruction of a “morally
healthy” society. Hartmann argued that while an urban tabula rasa was increasingly improbable, in the early 50s the normative attention of the state shifted from the cityscape towards the domestic space. The home became a formative space for the new individual and a place in and through which gender roles could be reinforced. In this space, the individual could learn the desirable ways of living one’s domestic life by visiting exhibitions. Education in schools had also played an important role in propagating the new norms. Democratization, the reordering of society, and the integration of the individual into the new social order were topics embedded in the discursive and spatial restoration of the home. 

**Tyler Whitney** (Columbia University) started his paper “Spaces of the Ear: Binaural Hearing and Musil’s Active Listener” by pointing out a revolutionary moment in the development of spatial perception. Erich Moritz von Hornbostel’s 1923 study on “Monaural and Binaural Hearing” refocused attention on the importance of sound for an individual’s relationship with space. While praising the advent of the so-called “auditory space,” von Hornbostel distinguished between the purported objectivity of visual senses as opposed to the subjectivity of auditory ones. Whitney took up von Hornbostel’s suggestion and proposed a genealogy between his theories and Robert Musil’s story *The Believer*, a story about the spaces of the ear and the multiple venues of perception. As Whitney remarked, the two authors shared similar preoccupations, derived from their membership in the Berlin Institute for Experimental Psychology and their concern with poetic mysticism and scientific rationality. Whitney’s objective was to revise basic assumptions about modernism at the turn of the century and to draw attention to acoustic space and a listener situated within this space, through close readings of both Musil’s text and von Hornbostel’s theories, which developed as alternatives to the conventional relations of space and vision in modernist aesthetics. Whitney concluded his exciting talk with suggestions for the impact of binaural sound and hearing on the development of radio, art, and technology.

**Vincenzo Martella**’s (Universität Gießen) paper, “The ‘space’ of Heimat in Adorno’s theory of civilization,” engaged what the author considered Adorno’s main theoretical contribution to the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, namely his ‘excursus’ on the Odyssey. In Martella’s view, Adorno’s little-known original version of “Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment” is to be regarded as a continued confrontation with the conservative and reactionary cultural philosophy of the Wilhelmine and Weimar epochs. Through this polemic, the philosopher tried to achieve, according to Martella, a subtle deconstruction of the ideological premises that led to the opposition between the German notion of “Kultur” and the Anglo-French “Zivilisation.” To this purpose, Adorno focuses on the dismantling of the notion of *Heimat*, viewed by his predecessors and contemporaries either in connection with the Blut und Boden ideology or as transfiguration of nature into mythical belonging. Adorno defines *Heimat* instead as the reconciliation of narration with its humanized aspect or nature, rather than its assignment to the brutal nature shaped by the theories of cultural reactionaries. Thus Adorno symbolically restores *Heimat* to civilization and spares it from its connotations as brute, uncontaminated force. By focusing on the progressive interpretation of Adorno’s notion of *Heimat*, Martella equally tried to make his audience aware of Adorno’s role as a progressive cultural theorist and philosopher of civilization.

**Malika Maskarinec**’s (University of Chicago) paper had at its center the notion of empathy, a term
of importance for 19th and early 20th century German aesthetics. She suggested that the school of *Einfühlungsästhetik* is at the origin of theories on space, spatial experience, and the spatial arts in the history of German aesthetics. Maskarinec’s paper reviewed important theoretical contributions to the concept of empathy, starting with Robert Vischer’s *Über das optische Formgefühl*. She argued that, despite a plethora of 19th century writings on empathy, the origin of the term dates back to Lessing’s *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und der Poesie*. Although Lessing uses the term *Mitlaid*, through the emphasis on a “means to feel in another,” he situates the notion in the vicinity of *Einfühlung*. Maskarinec persuasively argued that it is this connection between Lessing’s theories of space and their reappraisal by the school of German aesthetes in the 19th century that generated the early 20th century’s experiments with surface, ornament, and color. (Arina Rotaru)

In his paper “Poetics of the Outline: On the conjunction of space, vision, and time in Peter Weiss’s *The Shadow of the Body of the Coachman and The Aesthetics of Resistance*” Christian Jany (Princeton University) challenged representational approaches to Weiss’ rendering of images. According to Jany, Weiss’ literary practice should be understood less as a translation of images into text via a mediating system of signs than as a transposition of images into a “spatial grid” of graphic elements, materially tracing the outlines of the text seen on the page. This iconographic practice aims, according to Jany, at the anaesthetic benumbing of an imagination that might impede the grasp of relations of oppression underlying images of suffering.

In his paper entitled “A Socialist Flâneur? East-West Exchanges in Franz Fühmann’s ‘Die Straße der Perversionen,’” Todd Cesaratto (Indiana University) invited the audience to continuously shift between the positions of Luhmann’s first- and second-order observers – to both observe the fictional world of Fühmann’s science-fiction short story through the eyes of the protagonist Jirro, and to observe Jirro observing. Cesaratto reflected on the ways in which Jirro, a scientist from Uniterr (the cipher for a future socialist society), probes the streets of Libroterr (its capitalist equivalent) in an attempt to solidify his commitment to socialism. Although it remains ambiguous whether the narrative ultimately confirms Jirro’s commitment, it demonstrates, according to Cesaratto, the function of strong hetero-references: it is by vilifying the capitalist other that Jirro ultimately solidifies the distinction between “us” and “them” as the basis for a clear-cut understanding of the world. (Johannes Wankhammer)

The plenary speaker, Sabine Haenni (Cornell University) posited disciplinary stakes for her presentation, titled “Transit,” addressing multiple media and genres as well as challenging traditional delimitations of German Studies. Haenni presented the port city of Marseille as a locus of transit for German authors and thinkers during WWII and as both a real and imagined space, formed by and actively forming transient individuals. The city of Marseille thus bears not only actual but analytical importance for the field of German Studies as a locus of transit.

To begin her presentation, Professor Haenni played short clips from three films portraying the city of Marseille. László Moholy-Nagy’s *Impressionen vom alten Marseiller Hafen (Vieux Port)* (1929) exploits crowded shots in order to present a labyrinthine space of cohabitation. Hugo Fregonese’s 1957 *Seven Thunders* employs static framing to depict the regimented formality of occupying Nazi officials, which contrasts later in the film with elaborate scenes of destruction of the old port. Lastly, Jean-Pierre Melville’s *L’Armée des Ombres* (1969) coldly depicts the underground resistance movement in Marseille during WWII. Haenni proceeded with an
analysis of the novel *Transit* by Anna Seghers from 1944, set in Marseille, where the author was exiled in 1940. In her close reading, Haenni argued that the unreliable spaces constructed by the narrative of the novel produce, in turn, unreliable characters and an unreliable narrator. This destabilizes the analytic vector of influence between subject and space.

In the third part of her presentation, Haenni interpreted Siegfried Kracauer’s *Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality* against the historical background of the theorist’s exile in Marseille. Rather than naïve realism, for this seminal work is sometimes criticized, Haenni emphasized the radical materialism promoted by the text. She further hypothesized that Kracauer’s experience of writing in Marseille during WWII under great mental strain relates to his theory, particularly his thesis on the representation of violence.

Professor Haenni promoted methodological flexibility as complementary to interdisciplinarity, acknowledging some polarities while suggesting the innovative negotiation of conceptual boundaries.

(Miyako Hayakawa)

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**Visiting Scholar from Berlin (Sept. 1-Oct. 3, 2010)**

The Institute for German Cultural Studies looks forward to hosting Juniorprofessor Sabine Berthold from the Humboldt University of Berlin as a Visiting Scholar from Sept. 1 through Oct. 3 in 2010. A specialist in modern German literature, she focuses on intersections between literature and consumer culture, literary and cultural theory, and the aesthetic and economic dimensions of literature, particularly in relation to children’s literature and film. Before joining the faculty of the Institut für Neuere Deutsche Literatur at the Humboldt University, she conducted scholarly research in literary studies at the Goethe University in Frankfurt and in martyrology at the Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung in Berlin. Published in 2008, her book *Doppelbelichtung. Die 50er Jahre in Jugendromanen der Weimarer Jugendgeneration und der 68er-Generation* (2008) analyzes the constellation of generational patterns and social changes in the immediate postwar period. The IGCS will be pleased to have her present her current project on Oct. 1 in a colloquium on “Coolhunters and Shopaholics: Advertising, Branding, and the Staging of Emotions in Children’s Literature and Media.”
Laura Heins (University of Virginia) gave the first colloquium paper of the season, “‘The Experiential Community’: Early German Television and Media Theory.” Early discourse on television in the late Weimar republic and throughout the Nazi period yielded predictions for this new, live medium ranging from the utopian, which saw in television’s instant mediation a way to create harmony, connection, and understanding between peoples, to the dystopian, which foresaw a future of increasing atomization and control.

While some early commentators were quick to deny that television would offer competition to other media, seeing it instead as supplementary to these, others embraced television as heralding a “wireless future” predicated on fascist enthusiasm for transgressive speed and technology. The live image of the Führer and thus the radical medial extension of the Führerprinzip would bring recognition of the necessity of submitting to a global hierarchy under Germany’s rule. Furthermore, in discussions of television’s arteigene characteristics, it was the live mediation and heightened sense of reality that drew special attention – for early commentators, it was television’s mediation of “direct experience” that held the most promise (or threat), far in advance of the actual state of television practice, which was still rudimentary. In this way, the simultaneity of transmission and reception, whether the viewing context was communal, as with viewing rooms set up in Berlin, or private, as in the darkened living rooms of familial interiors, paradoxically enabled the ideological construction of a collective audience – the Erlebnisgemeinschaft – without a shared collectivity, addressing each viewer as a private individual from above, compensating for the absence of a meaningful political collectivity. Heins concluded her paper with the open question of whether today’s Erlebnisgemeinschaft might in any way resemble the earlier one.

(Carl Gelderloos)
In his paper “The Perfect Story: Anecdote and Exemplarity in Linnaeus and Blumenberg,” Paul Fleming (New York University) laid the groundwork for an extended project on the potential “evidentiary force” of the anecdote within philosophical discourse. In response to allegations that it is a manifestation of “kitsch” within serious thought, Fleming argued that the anecdote has emerged, in the writings of significant thinkers, as a means for the inclusion, integration, and management of contingency within philosophical discourse. The anecdote provides an illustrative example of a group of phenomena, yet it is also singular in its exemplarity, as the anecdote simultaneously “constitutes and belongs to the group it represents.” For Hans Blumenberg, Fleming’s point of departure, the anecdote serves the articulation of a theory of “non-conceptuality.” Such a theory of the anecdote as a genre that can elude assimilation to concepts is not explicitly developed by Blumenberg, but his writings imply a conception of the anecdote similar to the one recently advanced by Joel Fineman and explicated by Fleming: “the anecdote creates a space, a time for something truly new to emerge, i.e. something utterly unexpected, something re-organizing any sense of beginning, middle, and end.” Fleming then outlined Carl Linnaeus’ use of the anecdote in attempting to give examples of divine justice. In closely reading Linnaeus’ (often amusing) anecdotes, Fleming noted that it was often unclear what principle of fate was at work in each miniature narrative; with the inclusion of each additional anecdote, it becomes less clear what the determining principle of historical unfolding is, even though it was Linnaeus’ intention to give contingency “the force of necessity.” In Blumenberg’s writings, however, the anecdote shines forth as a moment of contingency as contingency, “holding fast to particularity.” Blumenberg’s anecdotes assert no necessity other than that of acknowledging contingency as the constitutive dimension of experience, something that continually resists identity with any concept.

(Paul Buchholz)
Kai Marcel Sicks (Universität Gießen) presented his colloquium paper “Das punctum der Literatur. Medienkritik und Medienutopie in Rolf Dieter Brinkmanns Rom, Blicke,” in which he investigated tensions between literary and photographic representations of the Other in Brinkmann’s collage-like travel report.

Sicks pointed out that Brinkmann develops strategies that obstruct and invert the traditional discourse on Rome as Arcadia; Brinkmann’s Rome is not a paradise, but rather a limbo. Brinkmann spotlights the ugly, marginal, and banal aspects of life in Rome, normally excluded from the tourist view. Mistrusting the abilities of language to depict the unmediated experience of everyday life in Rome, Brinkmann’s travel report can instead be seen as a “Suche nach Gegenwärtigkeit in Wahrnehmung und Kommunikation.” Brinkmann experiments with text-image relations and new forms of intermedial writing that create the effects of presence. Drawing on Barthes’ concept of the punctum, Sicks argued that Brinkmann paradoxically wants to overcome the problem of mediated experience via the photographic medium. According to Sicks, photography creates the effect of a “punktuelle Erfahrung von Gegenwärtigkeit” which Brinkmann tries to imitate in his writing. Sicks identified two ways photography plays an important role in Rome, Blicke: as photographic forms of writing on the one hand and as direct text-image-relations on the other. That is, Brinkmann’s non-linear style of narration can be considered photographic, while the tension between text and image involves, for example, the text denying the beauty of the image or complicating the problem of photographic framing.

Sicks came to the conclusion that Brinkmann made use of photography to both picture and alienate everyday experience. Photography opens up new possibilities for depicting experience and in this way, Rom, Blicke can be understood as a medial utopia, or Medienutopie.

(Tim Sparenberg)
Hartz Stories: Speaking of the German Welfare State

April 16, 2010

In his paper, alternatively titled “A Gangster is a Versager,” Timothy Haupt (Cornell University) drew on Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic categories as well as on the theoretical insights of Max Weber and Karl Marx in order to develop a detailed analysis of the lyrics of a number of hip-hop songs from American and German contexts.

Born in the 70s, hip-hop encompasses an entire family of cultural phenomena, such as graffiti, DJing, MCing, and b-boying, also known as breakdancing. Haupt first examined, drawing on Lacan, the way in which the subversive discourse of the gangster is constructed within the “gangsta rap” genre by looking at songs from such artists as Ice T and N.W.A. He then turned to Nas to compare gangsta rap to the art of the MC, underscoring the affinities between these two seemingly incompatible discursive stances. With regard to German-language hip hop, Schönheitsfehler’s “Immer schön langsam” was interpreted as thematizing an aesthetically tinged variety of oppositional knowledge. Haupt also investigated themes foregrounded in the subgenre of battle rap, which typically stages aggressive exchanges between MCs, as well as the development of the Versager topos in the albums of Kamp & Whizz Vienna and K.I.Z.

The speaker concluded by exploring the implications of the Versager figure as portrayed in German-language hip-hop for the notion of the welfare state, especially in its so-called “post-Hartz” version. Of the four “Hartz laws” introduced between 2003 and 2005, the last one stipulated that a person’s receipt of benefits is conditional upon her “making every attempt to reduce or terminate her dependence on the state,” and thus marked a shift to a significantly different type of welfare state.

(Ana-Maria Andrei)
In her paper “Focus on Autonomy: (Re-)Mapping the Terrain for Foreign Language Study in University Education,” **Barbara Schmenk** (University of Waterloo) offered a glimpse into her extensive research on learner autonomy. The speaker discussed the term’s popularity in language education, while extending an invitation to look beyond this, into its problematic theoretical conceptualization and use by language educators. Schmenk argued that, while theoretical approaches (Henri Holec and David Little) have attempted to assign the term a certain conceptual import, in the larger community of language education, the term “autonomy” continues to lack conceptual clarity. This has led to what Schmenk identified as the trivialization of learner autonomy. Schmenk saw the discursive economization of the learning subject as an aspect of this trivialization. These discourses posit the “autonomous” learner as managing the learning process with the aim of accumulating linguistic capital. By appropriating the concept in terms of a “neoliberal governmentality,” they construct a version of autonomy that promotes forms of self-discipline rather than critical attitudes. Schmenk also referenced a historical perspective on the concept of autonomy, focusing on the social aspect ingrained in the legal term derived from Greek, on autonomy as a *Bildungsideal* in the context of the German Enlightenment, as well as on the Adornian understanding of the Kantian concept as the power of reflection, self-determination and of not cooperating. Schmenk drew on these historical conceptualizations in order to advocate for a more nuanced understanding of autonomy in language education. In the course of the discussion Schmenk defined autonomy in dialectical terms as closely linked to the notion of heteronomy.

(Andreea Mascan)
In “Rules without Rule: Verfahren in Heinrich von Kleist’s On the Gradual Production of Thoughts Whilst Speaking,” Rüdiger Campe (Yale University) introduced a project exploring the history of Verfahren, translated as “procedures” or “devices.” Emerging from an interest in Evidenz in the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as from questions concerning rhetorical actuality in Kleist’s writing, Campe’s analysis of the term Verfahren brings together myriad discourses at a historical moment around 1800.

In a discussion of Victor Shklovsky’s 1917 essay, translated into German as Kunst als Verfahren, and Niklas Luhmann’s Legitimation durch Verfahren, Campe noted that both scholars employ the term Verfahren, but while Shklovsky’s interest focuses on the interruption of procedure, Luhmann examines procedures that bridge differences between self and other. Thus, Campe observed the dual function of Verfahren to undermine and to stabilize, articulating the deployments of Verfahren as “the implementing mode of that sphere in which they operate.”

Pointing to a temporal lapse between action and reflection in Kleist’s Von der Überlegung: Eine Paradoxe, Campe then noted that Kleist’s Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden not only further explores the temporal complexity structuring procedures, but also performs a Verfahren through its narrative and thematic emphasis on continuation and turning points. An analysis of Mirabeau’s improvisational rhetoric, employing a spur-of-the-moment substitution of terms of power, demonstrates the production of Verfahren in a revolutionary context. Continuation and reversal are effected by a rhetoric that does not seek to convince within existing spheres of discourse, but constitutes new spheres and new modes of communication in its use. La Fontaine’s fable Les Animaux malades de la peste illustrates a use of rhetoric for personal preservation that ultimately ensures the survival of an existing regime. Disruption for the sake of continuity and the necessity for autonomous production of Verfahren are crucial for both examples used in the essay, but Kleist also employs narrative fluctuations between a historical present tense and past tense so that his essay itself can be read as a production of Verfahren. The procedures developed in Kleist’s texts incorporate aesthetic, political or administrative, and scientific realms of thought into the process of writing, and contextualize this sphere of procedure in the “everyday,” positing language and thinking as crucial for negotiating between systems of organization. (Miyako Hayakawa)
The biannual graduate student conference of the Department of Comparative Literature, “Comparatively Speaking: Conversations, Contexts, Convergences” took place at the A.D. White House on the 12th-13th of March. Organized by the Cornell Comparative Cultures and Literature Forum, the conference convened graduate students from across North America to reflect on comparison as methodology, disciplinary nexus, and literary, philosophical, and theoretical category, with a keynote talk by Roland Greene (Stanford University) and plenary address by Natalie Melas (Cornell University). Below is a selection of the talks.

Márton Farkas (New York University), in his paper “Yes and No (What Else?): Allegory, Gesture and the Plot Lines of Comparative Literature,” offered a comparative reading of Kleist’s *Michael Kohlhaas* and Hungarian writer Péter Hajnóczy’s *A főtő* [The Stoker], a communist-era rewriting of Kleist’s text, in order to examine allegory and gesture as competing modes of signification and thereby suggest a new model of comparativity. Against the background of various attempts to define the field of comparative literature Farkas proposed, in opposition to an allegorical mode that would condense the texts compared to a common thing, a reading of gesture that would see the person comparing as that which connects the terms. By reading the two texts with an eye for the instability between words and gestures instead of assuming their parallelism, he argued that, rather than simply presenting allegorizations of power and righteousness, as is commonly assumed, these two narratives present an identificatory gesture towards persons, including the reader, and so open a utopian moment.

Martin Revermann (University of Toronto), in his paper “Brecht and Greek Tragedy,” sought to recover Brecht’s debt to Greek tragedy through a reading of Brecht’s use of the mask. Revermann proposed a continuum between functional equivalences and genealogical ones, placing the connection of Brecht to Greek tragedy somewhere in the middle. Functional equivalences between the two would include the use of songs and the chorus, representation of gender and gender transformation, the idea of didactic theater, scenes of recognition, trial, and justice, modes of non-verbal communication, and, especially, the use of masks; Revermann located the genealogical connection primarily in Brecht’s discussion of “Aristotelian theater” contained in *Kleines Organon für Theater* and his adaptation of *Antigone*. In an extended discussion of Brecht’s use of masks, Revermann argued that the mask, as the marker of a dissolution into a collectivity, of gender and moral transfiguration, and of the defamiliarizingly barbaric, both ties Brecht to Greek theater and provides a suggestive surface on which to test a comparative methodology.

Opening a panel devoted to “Locating Translations,” Sarah Pickle (Cornell University) explored Peter Hacks’ theory of socialist classicism in her paper, “Classicism, Utopia and the Socialist Exception: Peter Hack’s Theory of Drama.” A West German emigrant to the DDR in 1955, Hacks demonstrated his commitment to the socialist project in literary and theoretical works that professed a socialist aesthetic program. Pickle focused on his theoretical output to trace a move away from his initial dual debt to socialist realism and Brechtian theory towards what he would term “socialist classicism,” a non-historicist aesthetics. Noting Hacks’ increasing attention to form and abstraction from his 1956-7 theory of dialectical theater to his 1960 theory of socialist classicism, Pickle foregrounded the then controversial position of utopia with respect to society.
in Hacks’ writing. For Hacks, the capacity to imagine the unrealizable utopia was only possible because the current reality of the socialist state had sufficiently liberated the imagination. Aristotelian drama and classical figures such as Goethe, Schiller, and Shakespeare could be reconnected with the revolutionary tradition through sublation. The “young art” negotiating between utopia and reality was thus a non-idealist notion because the idea of utopia depended on the currently existing socialist state. Aesthetic forms allowed for an intellectual identification that would provide the viewer with an aesthetic consciousness of the possible (and the possibility of imagining utopia) to further the viewer’s development toward utopia. Hacks’ theories, Pickle concluded, demonstrate a primacy of the poetic over the historical unparalleled in the socialist realism of the writer’s contemporaries.

(Katrina Nousek)

Thomas Cannavino (University of Minnesota) organized his paper, “Comparative Relics and the Search for Form in Language, Literature, and Life: Understanding Literary Comparison in the Shadow of Some Outmoded Comparative Sciences,” around Franco Moretti’s exhortation in Graphs, Maps, Trees that comparative literature should understand itself as “world literature” on the one hand and as “comparative morphology” on the other, asking what it would mean to take Moretti’s call for a “comparative morphology” seriously. Tracing the genealogy of the concept, Cannavino explored comparative practices of nineteenth-century organismal and evolutionary biology with a special emphasis on Goethe as both a central figure in early writing about Weltliteratur and a practitioner of comparative life science in search of idealized archetypes or Urtypen. Cannavino then returned to his central question and concluded that Moretti’s reliance on a Goethean paradigm causes him to assume a primary commensurability among literary forms that does not allow for radical difference and instead tends to emphasize “divergence” and “convergence” as ways of comprehending the change of particular literary forms and genres. Moretti’s approach, he concluded critically, thus tends to subsume difference under identity and heavily relies on universalizing trends.

(Johannes Wankhammer)
INSTITUTE FOR GERMAN CULTURAL STUDIES
FALL 2010 COLLOQUIUM SERIES

101 Goldwin Smith

September 3
Paul Flaig
Comparative Literature, Cornell University
THE UNCANNY ANIMATION OF WEIMAR CINEMA

October 1
Sabine Berthold
Neuere Deutsche Literatur, Humboldt-Universität Berlin
COOLHUNTERS AND SHOPAHOLICS: ADVERTISING, BRANDING, AND THE STAGING OF EMOTIONS IN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE AND MEDIA

October 22
Brian Tucker
German Literature & Modern Languages, Wabash College
REBUKE: FROM TROPE TO EVENT IN THE POETRY OF PAUL CELAN

November 5
Catriona MacLeod
Germanic Languages & Literatures, University of Pennsylvania
DISLODGED STATUES: THE VANISHING ACT OF GERMAN ROMANTIC SCULPTURE

November 19
Devin Fore
Germanic & Slavic Literatures & Languages, Princeton University
EIN TOTENBUCH DES ICH: CARL EINSTEIN AND THE MNEMOTECHNICS OF REALISM

December 3
Anna Glazova
Society for the Humanities & German Studies, Cornell University
APOSTATIC EXPIRATION IN PAUL CELAN’S ATEMWENDE

Advance copies of each paper will be available at the Dept. of German Studies, 183 Goldwin Smith Hall.

For more information, please contact Olga Petrova at ogp2@cornell.edu
The Theory Reading Group Conference on “Form and Genesis” took place from April 22 to 24 at Cornell University’s A.D. White House. The conference brought together graduate students and faculty from North American and European universities to discuss the epistemological consequences and potential integration of formal and genetic methods in contemporary thought. Broadly understood, the formal approach tends to seek logical explanations, while the genetic approach looks to materialist or genealogical accounts. The relation between these two orders of explanation has wide implications. Speakers were invited to consider connections between logical or normative forms and their temporal, material, or historical geneses; analyses of the structure of genealogy and critique; the relation of form, history, and materiality in literary and aesthetic theory; and the status of literary and logical-mathematical formalism in contemporary theory. The conference included keynote speeches from Adrian Johnston (University of New Mexico) and Robert Kaufman (University of California at Berkeley).

As part of the conference’s first panel, “Novel Formations I,” Andrew Lison (Brown University) presented his paper, “‘The Very Idea of Place’: Chance, Contingency, and Adornian Volition in The Man in the High Castle.” Lison offered a reading of the element of chance in Philip K. Dick’s 1962 novel - exemplified by the multilayered use of the I Ching - within the context of Adorno’s theory of autonomous art, focusing on the relationship between autonomy and the aleatory. Lison drew on Adorno’s ideas about the paradoxical persistence of art in an age whose social and political conditions render it impossible; for Adorno, the barbarity of art’s survival can only be redeemed through a recognition of the primacy of the autonomous artwork’s form, which becomes its political meaning, with hopelessness the sole condition for hope upon which the autonomous artwork is predicated. Yet Lison noted that another way of conceiving of autonomy is through the aleatory, citing Adorno’s mention of composer John Cage. Against this theoretical background Lison read The Man in the High Castle, a contrafactual account of a post-WWII world in which Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany are the victors, an account in which history is shown to be contingent and formally incoherent. The limit of the I Ching’s oracular power, its aleatorily generated meaninglessness, turns into a meaning predicated on negativity, as in Adorno’s reading of Beckett, and the negativity generated by the multifarious use of the oracle opens a space for the missing content - a radically egalitarian society.

Ben Woodard’s provocatively titled paper “The Awful Absolute: Schellingian Unthinkability between Formalism and Geneticism” took issue with Quentin Meillassoux’s recent After Finitude and its proposed notion of contingency. Woodard, a student at the European Graduate School, criticized the indebtedness of Meillassoux to Hegel’s objective idealism and Deleuze’s transcendentalist empiricism, two models that presuppose the notion of a “pre-thinkable” nature. The outcome of such models would be, in Meillassoux’s view, an idealized materialism emerging as an unformalized system. By contrast, Woodard proposed Schelling’s notion of the “un-ground” as a possibility to solve the “hyper-chaotic” contingency that informs Meillassoux’s argument and its philosophies of reference. In articulating his critique, Woodard assigned to Schelling’s absolute “un-pre-thinkable” qualities, which go back to a peculiar “realism.” Thus Woodard’s critique both rehabilitates Schelling from the grip of current interpretations that regard Schelling mostly as a postmodern or a naïve idealist romantic, and offers an alternative way to understand contingency via Schelling’s model rather than the Deleuzian-Hegelian nexus.

In his paper “The Transcendental and the Natural: In Defense of a Schellingian Dualism,” Raoni Padui (Villanova University) elaborated further on Schelling’s work. Padui commented on Schelling’s break with Fichte, which is normally analyzed as an expression of Schelling’s clash with subjective and transcendental idealism in the name of a natural philosophy. Padui emphasized that the novelty of Schelling’s position resides in his understanding of natural philosophy as source for the material conditions of ideality. This position would also go against Kant’s empiricism by highlighting the value of the experiential in natural philosophy. In Padui’s view, by going against transcendental idealism and empiricism, Schelling offers a conciliatory point on the position of natural/social science and its elimination of the transcendental or the division of spirit and nature.
Sep. 14  
**The Architecture and Technology of Modern Prisons: Comparative Perspectives on Germany and France**  
presented by Visiting Scholar Grégory Salle  
4:30pm 258 Goldwin Smith Hall

Oct. 13  
**Cornell Cinema presents DDR/DDR (2008)**  
*With filmmaker Amie Siegel*  
7pm Willard Straight Theatre

Oct. 28  
**Vor den Hohen Feiertagen gab es ein Flüstern und ein Rascheln im Haus / Before the High Holy Days the House was Full of Whisperings and Rustlings**  
Contemporary German-Jewish Literature and Soundmarks of Memory bilingual readings and interventions by Esther Dischereit  
4:30pm 142 Goldwin Smith Hall

Nov. 21 - 22  
**Unveiling of the New Baroque Organ and First Concerts**  
Jacques van Oortmerssen, Annette Richards, and David Yearsley  
Anabel Taylor Chapel  
Nov. 21 -- 3pm  
Nov. 22 -- 8pm

Additional information about all events listed is available on our website: www.arts.cornell.edu/igcs. Event listings will be updated throughout the semester. If you would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact Olga Petrova (ogp2@cornell.edu).

Archived copies of past newsletters are available electronically at [http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/10777](http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/10777).

Contributions to German Culture News are welcome. If you would like an event listed or have a brief review or article to submit, please contact Olga Petrova (ogp2@cornell.edu).