Visiting Author: Esther Dischereit

On October 28, 2010, the Institute for German Cultural Studies hosted a reading with author and multimedia artist Esther Dischereit entitled “Contemporary German-Jewish Literature and Soundmarks of Memory.” Dischereit, who spent the fall semester in the United States as the Max Kade German Writer-in-Residence at Oberlin College, presented to the audience her Eichengrün-Platz project in Dülmen, a German city in North Rhine-Westphalia.

In December 2008 the city of Dülmen named a square in honor of two Jewish brothers who had run a department store on the square until the Nazis drove them out in 1939. Dischereit conceived of a memorial involving two strategically placed speakers emitting fragments of spoken text over the course of the day. The first speaker is hidden behind a hedge near a bench; the second hangs from a streetlight. The person crossing the square, so Dischereit, is thus invited to stop, sit, and listen, or simply to pass by without necessarily registering the distinct sounds. Dischereit also created a book to accompany the project with the title, Vor den hohen Feiertagen gab es ein Flüstern und ein Rascheln im Haus (2009). The book contains what she called “soundmarks,” that is, utterances, words, numbers, and syllables that tell of “a Jewish family life that may have really happened, could have happened, or would have happened.”

After introducing the Eichengrün-Platz project, Dischereit read aloud several excerpts from the book to the audience, after which she took questions regarding her views on memory and artistic practice. Throughout the presentation she emphasized that her goal was neither to confront the audience with historical information about the Shoah, nor to tell stories that had not been told before. Rather, Dischereit’s artistic projects seek to reveal a sense of the absence that history inevitably leaves behind. (Alexander Phillips)
On September 14, 2010, under the auspices of an interdisciplinary colloquium organized by the Institute for German Cultural Studies, Grégory Salle (National Center for Scientific Research [CNRS], France) presented research from his current project on the historical sociology of “model prisons” in a paper entitled “The Architecture and Technology of Modern Prisons: Comparative Perspectives on Germany and France.” The paper was based on the findings of field research conducted from 2007 to 2009 in Lille (both at Loos, a traditional prison, and at Sequedin, a “modern prison” built to replace Loos) as well as on media and administrative publications on German prisons.

In his discussion of selected examples drawn from this research, Salle highlighted the paradoxes of prison modernization, drawing attention to the “effects of architectural constraints and technological equipment on the actor’s experience.” Salle identified a stark incongruity between public discourse on model prisons and experienced space. While public discourse portrays prisons such as Lyon-Corbas and Lille-Sequedin in France, and Hünfeld, Offenburg, and Burg-Madel in Germany as epitomes of progress in architectural and technological modernization leading to more humane detention conditions, these very same spaces are being described in the accounts of inmates and guards as “stressful and anxiety provoking.” In his analysis, Salle identifies several changes occurring in the historical move from traditional prisons to model prisons, for example, the technologization of surveillance based on the concept of “passive security,” the outsourcing of certain services to private companies, and the attempt to reduce costs and maximize efficiency. Based on these observations, Salle argued for understanding recent developments in the French and German prison system not as “modernization” or “humanization” but as a type of “utilitarian rationalization.”

(Andreea Mascan)

Possibilities of the New: The Subject of Truth in Psychoanalysis
Psychoanalysis Reading Group Conference
Keynote Speakers: Ed Pluth (California State University) and Charles Shepherdson (SUNY Albany)
April 22-23, 2011

One of Freud’s great discoveries was that the truth of the unconscious reveals itself through effects, through symptoms and through disruptions in speech, and thus resists the ego’s sense-making efforts. Jacques Lacan tells us that inasmuch as truth can be spoken it is always a mi-dire, a half saying, because language is structurally incapable of saying it all. Lacan himself signaled this problem through his turn to mathemes and other types of formal writing. At the same time, despite truth’s apparent elusiveness, Lacan places it at the center of psychoanalytic undertaking—both in its theory and its practice.

Because language is the raw material of its enquiry and practice, psychoanalysis enjoyed a privileged position in theory’s linguistic turn, but now that theorists seek to go beyond the impasses that this turn occasioned, psychoanalysis has come under criticism for its apparent complicity in leading us to theoretical, aesthetic, and political dead-ends. Alain Badiou, for one, foregrounds the simultaneously central and marginal place Lacan’s (anti-philosophical) thought occupies in recent attempts to re-introduce the category of the subject and truth into the fields of social theory and post-foundational political ontology. So while he uses Lacan to articulate his theory of truth, he also argues that the stakes of psychoanalysis are ultimately bound up in demonstrating the limits of language itself. As such, the only truth that it can transmit is that signification fails. Theoretical interventions, like those of Badiou, thus ask us to reconsider the status of truth within psychoanalysis both for itself and as a touchstone for the diverse faces of theory after the linguistic turn.

For our 2011 conference, the Psychoanalysis Reading Group proposes to address the status and function of truth in psychoanalysis. We encourage submissions that engage with the question of truth in psychoanalysis from diverse perspectives. Possible questions may include: Is truth a horizon of psychoanalytic thought? With what truth does psychoanalysis deal? Does it reveal a truth? Does it produce a truth? How does psychoanalytic truth relate to other theories of truth? Does it interact with or contest these? What are its political and social implications? What is the truth of the subject? Is truth tied to a particular temporality? What kinds of distinctions and connections between speech and act may the truth draw? What is the relation between truth and sexual difference? Between truth and jouissance? What does psychoanalytic truth have to offer feminism and gender studies?
On Sunday, November 21, the new baroque organ installed in the Anabel Taylor Chapel at Cornell University was presented to the public and university community. The event included performances by university organists, Professors Annette Richards and David Yearsley, and renowned guest artist Jacques van Oortmerssen. The program consisted of Northern German works from the 17th to 19th centuries; each organist performed at least one piece by J.S. Bach, as well as selections by Buxtehude, Handel, Krebs, Kellner, and Mendelssohn.

The organ is an ongoing project involving collaboration ranging in scope from local to international. It is a recreation of the instrument built by Arp Schnitger in the Charlottenburg Schlosskapelle in Berlin in 1706 and destroyed during WWII. Original documentation, recordings, and studies of the instrument have been analyzed by means of contemporary research techniques from such diverse fields as acoustics, air flow dynamics, metallurgy, and material science. Historical construction techniques have been meticulously replicated at all levels of construction down to the hand-forged nails and hinges, bellows made of leather tanned with period techniques, and traditional joints for the woodwork, as well as pipes cast using 18th-century techniques and keys and stop action made following Schnitger’s methods.

Design of the new organ began at the University of Göteborg, Sweden, directed by master organ builder and guest professor at the Göteborg Organ Art Center (GOArt), Munetaka Yokota. Regional cooperation has included Parsons Pipe Organ Builders in Bristol, NY and Ithaca cabinet-maker Christopher Lowe, among numerous other participants in the project. It is hoped that the organ will serve as a locus for continuing interdisciplinary research, attracting composers, musicians, and researchers from a wide range of fields to Cornell for generations to come.

(Miyako Hayakawa)
On the evening of October 13, Cornell Cinema screened Amie Siegel’s recent feature-length film DDR/DDR (2008). An impressive repertoire of both raw and processed material, the visual essay (or “cine-constellation” in Siegel’s terms) reflects upon the former East German Republic, combining interviews, long steadicam shots, and raw footage from the archives of the East German secret police, or Stasi. A broad, associative montage, Siegel’s film discursively links the domains of psychoanalysis, modernist architecture, and surveillance under the premise that they all serve to dissolve a boundary: psychoanalysis between unconscious and conscious, modernist architecture between interior and exterior, and the panoptic culture of surveillance in the GDR between the private and public lives of its citizens.

While interviews with psychoanalysts explore the psychological aspects of civil society in the GDR, recounting the idiosyncrasies of group therapy sessions and the psychoanalytically informed tactics of the Stasi in information gathering, the filmmaker’s presentation of meticulously chosen footage from the Stasi archives and interviews with former Stasi operatives aims to understand “ruptures or exaggerations” in subjectivity. Thus Siegel seeks to establish the filmmaker as psychoanalyst, at one point beckoning the psychoanalyst being interviewed to take a seat on the analyst’s own couch, at another interrupting a factual account of events by one interviewee to ask what he felt at the time. Throughout, the film indicts the ethics of the filmmaker by engaging with Stasi techniques of surveillance, even experimenting with the old analog technology of Stasi espionage equipment.

In its own right the film serves as an attempt at Vergangenheitsbewältigung by confronting the paradoxical existence of East Germany as historically defunct, yet still physically existent. Extensive interviews with East German American Indian hobbyists offer a curious, if kitschy, counterpart to the stifled panoptic world of the Stasi, demonstrating an innere Emigration that seeks a genuinely anti-materialist, communal existence. In the post-reunification present the hobbyists, like others in the film, experience a certain loss of identity, rendering their “appropriated identity” an expression of countercultural freedom. In the film’s most pedagogically motivated moment, a staged inter-cultural debate among the film’s producers and crew about how to translate the term Wende for the English subtitles seeks to capture the socio-historic significance of Germany’s reunification; to go beyond an understanding of the Wende as merely the fall of the Berlin Wall, which – as one interviewer points out elsewhere in the film – acted not merely as a physical barrier but also as an ideological projection screen for both East and West Germany.

Amie Siegel was unfortunately unable to attend the screening as originally planned, but was able to provide a sheet of answers to the most frequently asked questions about her film. She addresses the difficulties in convincing former Stasi operatives to participate in the film; her experience of sorting through footage in the Stasi archive; attempts at performing the past, as exemplified by a group of hipsters who roam through an old East German radio station building; and the genre of her film.

(Nathan Taylor)
Multidirectional Memory and the Implicated Subject: On Sebald and Kentridge
to be presented by Michael Rothberg

April 28, 2011
4:30pm Guerlac Room, A. D. White House

Co-Sponsored with the Program for Jewish Studies

Michael Rothberg is Professor of English and Conrad Humanities Scholar at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he is also Director of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies Initiative. Affiliated with the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory, the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, and the Programs in Comparative Literature and Jewish Culture and Society, Rothberg works in the fields of critical theory and cultural studies, Holocaust studies, postcolonial studies, and contemporary literatures. His work has been published in such journals as American Literary History, Critical Inquiry, Cultural Critique, History and Memory, New German Critique, and PMLA, and has been translated into French, German, and Hungarian. His latest book is Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization (2009), published by Stanford University Press in their “Cultural Memory in the Present” series. He is also the author of Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation (2000), and has co-edited The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings (2003) and Cary Nelson and the Struggle for the University: Poetry, Politics, and the Profession (2009). Three co-edited special issues are appearing in 2010-2011: Noeuds de Mémoire: Multidirectional Memory in Postwar French and Francophone Culture (Yale French Studies, co-edited with Debarati Sanyal and Max Silverman); Between Subalternity and Indigeneity: Critical Categories for Postcolonial Studies (Interventions, co-edited with Jodi A. Byrd); and States of Welfare (Occasion, co-edited with Lauren M.E. Goodlad and Bruce Robbins).

This talk builds on Rothberg’s recent book Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, which sought to construct a comparative archive of transnational militant and minority articulations of Holocaust memory. Not all forms of multidirectional Holocaust memory are militant or emerge from minoritized locations, however. This talk thus explores how multidirectional memory works in cases where the subjects of remembrance are ethically implicated in the realms of a perpetrator culture, without themselves being perpetrators. Rothberg looks closely at the way one knot of multidirectional memory—the South African mine—has circulated in the work of two prominent contemporary figures, the late Britain-based German writer W.G. Sebald and the still active Jewish South African visual artist William Kentridge. Starting from the figure of the mine, Rothberg pursues a constellation of histories and memories including apartheid, the Holocaust, slavery, and colonialism in order to arrive, ultimately, at some thoughts about multidirectional memory and implicated subjectivity.
Nilüfer Göle to Present Distinguished University Lecture, May 5
“Islamic Visibility in European Publics: Secularism, Culture, and the Sacred”

The IGCS is especially pleased to host Nilüfer Göle, Professor of Sociology at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris and former Professor of Sociology at the Bosphorus University in Istanbul, for a visit to Cornell in May. Known for her work on transnational imaginaries and new critical perspectives on gender, religion, secularism, and changing forms of public life in Europe and the Middle East today, she will address an interdisciplinary audience on 21st-century transformations in European public spheres from both ethnographic and conceptual perspectives. Generously sponsored by the University Lectures Committee, her comparative lecture will pivot on two main questions. How do recent debates and conflicts over Islamic veiling in Europe relate to changing visual codes of public life in contemporary Europe more generally? And how do proliferating conflicts and dialogues about gender and Islam in European publics today alter our understanding of the role that culture plays in participatory democracies? Both of these theoretical perspectives promise to shed new light on the heightened visibility of Muslim participants in European public spheres and politics. Free and open to the public, this University Lecture will take place in the Schwartz Center Film Forum and is additionally co-sponsored by the Institute for Comparative Modernities and the Cornell Institute for European Studies.

Originally published in Turkish in 1991 and subsequently translated into German, Spanish, and English before being expanded for a French edition in 1993 and again in 2003, Nilüfer Göle’s first book marked an early intervention in topics that now play an even larger role in social life and political debate. As one scholarly review noted, The Forbidden Modern “illustrates the power of gender studies to illuminate large social and political realities” (Emelie Olson in The Middle East Journal). Specifically, Göle’s study of concepts of civilization and practices of veiling in the development of modern Turkey used ethnographic field work on Muslim women’s movements there to argue both for the comparability of veiling to other modern social movements and against a strictly Eurocentric concept of modernity. Nilüfer Göle’s books and articles on gender, religion, Europe, and Turkish modernity have also influenced international scholarship on conceptual approaches to key terms such as the public sphere, “the social imaginary” (Charles Taylor), and alternative modernities. Recent publications focus on Islam in European public life changing under the pressures of globalization and terrorism. Major work available in English includes The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling (1996), Islam in Public: Turkey, Iran, and Europe (2006), and Islam in Europe: The Lure of Fundamentalism and the Allure of Cosmopolitanism (2010).

University and community members interested in the University Lecture may also be interested in two new plays on gender and religion (in the United States and Turkey, respectively), which Prof. Melanie Dreyer-Lude from Cornell’s Department of Theatre, Film & Dance will direct for an Ithaca premiere at the Kitchen Theatre in early May. See <http://www.kitchentheatre.org> under S/he for details.
The Institute for German Cultural Studies owes its existence to the intellectual vision of its founding director, Peter Uwe Hohendahl, Cornell University’s Jacob Gould Schurman Professor of German and Comparative Literature. Under his dynamic leadership, the Institute made its mark as a premier venue, both within Cornell University and in the interdisciplinary field of German Studies more generally, for the critical study of German-speaking cultures from the medieval period to the present. Thanks to the founding director’s foresight and dedication, what began in 1992 as an innovative attempt to overcome traditional disciplinary divisions within our home institution has become a vibrant site of rigorous inter- and trans-disciplinary inquiry in the College of Arts and Sciences and beyond. An extraordinary record of individual scholarship has likewise accompanied this colleague’s countless accomplishments on behalf of the Institute for German Cultural Studies, his home departments, the college, and the university at large. For this distinguished record—which includes expertise in 18th- to 20th-century German literature, intellectual history, critical theory, and the history of the university in Europe and the United States—Peter Uwe Hohendahl was named to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2003 and awarded the Alexander von Humboldt Research Prize for Humanists in 2005. With gratitude and admiration the Institute for German Studies and the Department of German Studies are pleased to announce a joint conference to be held April 29-30 in honor of this highly accomplished colleague, who will retire from Cornell University’s active teaching faculty after spring semester of this year. “Literature and Criticism in the Public Sphere” will feature scholarly presentations by former graduate students who wrote their dissertations under Peter Hohendahl’s supervision. The keynote address will be delivered by Russell A. Berman, Walter A. Haas Professor in the Humanities at Stanford University and President of the Modern Language Association.

Judging History: Contemporary Perspectives on Leo Strauss
Organized by Peter Hohendahl and Jason Frank (Cornell University)
March 5, 2011

Political controversy has always surrounded the work of German Jewish émigré and political theorist Leo Strauss and his students, but these controversies reached their apogee over the past decade as scholars, journalists, and politicians speculated on Strauss’s powerful but somehow hidden influence on neoconservative ideology more broadly, and on the bellicose foreign policy of the Bush administration in particular. These critical speculations provoked several of Strauss’s most prominent students to write books defending Strauss’ intellectual legacy, insisting on its philosophical and “Socratic” rather than overtly political character. Now that the dust has settled and these controversies have largely subsided, a number of scholars have begun a reexamination of Strauss’s work from perspectives outside the often hermetic Straussian purview. A number of intellectual historians, for example, have situated Strauss within the political and intellectual context of Weimar, assessing his relationship to Heidegger, Schmitt, Scholem, Rosenzweig, Benjamin, and Arendt. Political theorists have examined the relevance of Strauss’s work for contemporary debates around secularism and the “theologico-political predicament,” dilemmas of political judgment, and the meaning and limits of liberal constitutionalism. This symposium brings together four political theorists engaged in this work and the controversies surrounding it with the hope of fostering a lively and productive conversation on the complex and still contested intellectual and political legacy of Leo Strauss.
In March, 2011, Cornell will celebrate the completion of an international collaborative research project that has involved scholars from several countries and many disciplines, working together with craftspeople, musical performers, and visual artists to recreate one of the masterpieces of early 18th-century German technology and artistry, an organ in the style of master-builder Arp Schnitger (1648-1719). The historicized construction, or fantasy reconstruction, of an iconic organ from early 18th-century Berlin in 21st-century Ithaca raises a series of profound questions to do with temporality, heritage, cultural identity, and our relationship to artifacts from the past. Many of these questions resonate today in contemporary Germany, and are laden there not only with aesthetic, but also with political baggage. It is particularly built spaces (and the organ is nothing if not an architectural monument) that most urgently call attention to these issues. But ‘classic’ music culture is itself deeply implicated in a negotiation between past and present, and one of the themes of the conference and concert festival that will inaugurate the organ is the exploration of that idea within the keyboard culture of 18th-century Berlin. When Charles Burney visited the Berlin court in 1770, he encountered a musical culture which he saw as frozen in time, even as Berlin’s philosophers and theorists were grappling with (and codifying) the newest trends in aesthetic theory. A quarter century earlier, J. S. Bach’s famous visit to the court of Frederick the Great at Potsdam in 1747 included the aged composer’s encounter with the newest Silbermann pianos, and yielded the extraordinary contrapuntal, yet galant, achievement of the Musical Offering. Berlin’s patronesses, Sara Levy at the end of the century, and Anna Amalia mid century both actively commissioned new works, while amassing great music collections that monumentalized a musical past.

The three-day conference is designed as an interdisciplinary exploration of some of the many issues that Cornell’s new-old organ brings into play. Disciplines represented will include architecture, German studies, literary studies, history of science, chemistry and music. Sessions will address topics including: the aesthetic and political issues of cultural reconstruction in Germany today; material culture, handcraft and the loss of tradition in organ-making; patronesses, princesses and the music collection; musical performance and repertoire at the Berlin court in the first decade of the 18th century, around 1747, and in the 1780s; the Bach family in Berlin; keyboard music and song.

The conference will run alongside a concert festival highlighting the organ, but also featuring the fortepiano, harpsichord and clavichord.

The festival is co-sponsored by the Institute for German Cultural Studies at Cornell, the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies (http://www. westfield.org) and the Department of Music, with funding from the Mellon Foundation, the Cornell Council for the Arts, and the University Lectures Committee. Events will take place in Lincoln Hall, Barnes Hall and Anabel Taylor Chapel on the Cornell campus, and will all be free and open to the public. Please see http://music.cornell.edu/calendar/ for updated program and performance details.
Recent years have seen several attempts to redefine aesthetics as a discipline and rehabilitate it as a mode of inquiry in literary studies. Sometimes pronounced a movement, these attempts found their common credo in the title of Jonathan Loesberg’s book A Return to Aesthetics (2005). The justificatory rhetoric of calls for such a return reflects the poor standing aesthetics had in literary theory for some years. Charged with supporting ideological constructs by theorists as divergent as Terry Eagleton and Paul de Man, aesthetics came under criticism for its claim to autonomy as well as for the metaphysical presuppositions associated with its mediating function between the sensible and the intelligible in the systems of classical German philosophy. Conversely, it is precisely this ‘impurity’ or ‘confusion’ of aesthetics as a field between sense (as meaning) and the senses that has attracted recent reflections on its political, ethical, and experiential import. Other aesthetic returns have called for renewed inquiry into the perennial topics of connections between art, truth, and knowledge. Questions we hope to address include: What are the (political, ethical, cognitive) uses and abuses of aesthetics? Can aesthetic approaches provide a framework for thinking about the experiences art affords us or do we have to move beyond aesthetics’ to theorize relations between art and thought today? Have returns to aesthetics given satisfactory answers to the charges directed against it? What becomes of aesthetics once it is stripped of its function in the philosophical systems to which it owes its constitution as a discipline? What is the status of aesthetics in literary studies, and how should we understand the relations between aesthetics and cultural studies in contemporary approaches to the humanities? What is the potential for critical aesthetics across the disciplines today? And what can disciplines in which aesthetics has not been configured in constellations of crisis contribute to the discussion?

Visiting Scholar from Gießen (March 8 - April 3, 2011)

The IGCS looks forward to welcoming Dr. des. Beatrice Michaelis as Visiting Scholar from Gießen in Spring 2011. Research Coordinator and Postdoctoral Fellow at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at the Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, she additionally teaches medieval German literature at the Goethe-University Frankfurt and is currently completing a book on the relationship between religion and skin color in medieval and early modern narratives and discourses of inclusion and exclusion. Beatrice Michaelis received her Ph.D. from the Humboldt University in Berlin as a member of the Research Group “Gender as a Category of Knowledge.” Forthcoming with De Gruyter Press, her dissertation book, (Dis-)articulations of Desire, analyzes effects of silence in scientific and literary texts on desire, gender and the body in the High and Late Middle Ages. Overarching research interests include literature of the High and Late Middle Ages, gender studies and queer theory, postcolonial studies, theories of intersectionality, narratology, and the history of science. Publications include co-edited volumes such as Quer durch die Geisteswissenschaften: Perspektiven der Queer Theory (2005) and Geschlecht als Tabu (2008) as well as a major article on queer methodologies in Theorizing Intersectionality and Sexuality (2010). The IGCS looks forward to Beatrice Michaelis’s visit to Cornell and especially to her colloquium presentation on April 1, “Gigantic Desire: Narrating the Interdependence of Race, Class, and Gender in the Prose Lancelot.” This colloquium will be of special interest to faculty and students in German Studies, Medieval Studies, and Feminist, Gender & Sexuality Studies.
Paul Flaig, a doctoral candidate in Cornell’s Comparative Literature department, presented a paper entitled “The Uncanny Animation of Weimar Cinema,” which examined the appeal of American cartoon characters in light of the psychological anxieties, post-war trauma, and political instability that dominated Weimar art cinema. The paper attempted to measure the influence of American cinema on German Expressionism, which included such genres as the Kammerspiel, Straßenfilm, and Fritz Lang’s film noir. In addition, it sought to explain the appeal of these films by documenting the considerable reception of the products and inventions of American pop culture (ranging from Mickey Mouse to Felix the Cat) by various intellectual luminaries of the Weimar period (such as Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin).

Flaig primarily related the appeal of American cartoon animation to the theme of the anxiety-inducing, animated world of modernity informed by a repressed underside, which, as he argued, permeated the Weimar period. Within the context of Weimar cinema itself, Flaig made visible these resonances by highlighting particular moments when American (or American-inspired) cartoon characters were appropriated by German artists and filmmakers. By virtue of their ability to unsettle or destroy a disconcerting reality, the animated characters humorously acknowledged and affirmed the uncanny “out there.” Paul Leni and Guido Seeber’s crossword Rebus shorts (ca. 1925), showcased, for example, how montage and stop-motion animation of the narrator-like cartoon characters gave the uncanny – immanent to the characters’ very “animated-ness” – a light, humorous inflection. As a result, Flaig concluded, these characters’ brisk and effortless dismantling, re-assemblages and metamorphoses revealed to Weimar audiences a new dimension of the chaos of their own contemporary reality, but also instructed them on how to re-master and/or re-inhabit this very world.

(Anna Horakova)
In the second session of this fall’s colloquium series, Sabine Berthold (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) presented her paper “Coolhunters and Shopaholics: Advertising, Branding, and the Staging of Emotions in Children’s Literature.” As an expert on German literature for children and young adults, media studies, and the intersections between literature and consumer culture, Berthold introduced her presentation as part of a larger research project on “Advertising and Consumer Culture in Children’s and Youth Media.”

Berthold’s comparative analysis of the textual depiction of advertising and Warenästhetik in children’s literature focused on literary works from the 1920s and late 1990s. Examples included Erich Kästner’s Emil und die Detektive (1929) and Wolf Durian’s Kai aus der Kiste (1926) as well as Christian Kracht’s Faserland (1995) and Florian Illies’s Generation Golf (2000). Pointing out the correlation between the occurrence of advertising and consumer aesthetics in these texts with the development and expansion of consumer society, Berthold characterized children’s literature as a lens through which one can observe the paradoxes of consumer culture. Through the literary depiction of advertising, these works highlight consumer culture’s potential for effective seduction on the one hand, and for eliciting productivity and participation by the consumers on the other.

During the discussion of Berthold’s paper, questions primarily addressed consumer aesthetics and emotions as global and national phenomena, as well as the status of Marx’s commodity fetishism in readings of children’s literature and advertising.

(Claudia Schmidt)
In his paper, “Rebuke: From Trope to Event in Paul Celan’s ‘Zähle die Mandeln,’” Brian Tucker (Wabash College) presented Celan’s “Zähle die Mandeln,” first published in the collection *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952), as a paradigmatic example of how meaning emerges on the far-side of referential signification in Celan’s poetry. Tucker aligned himself with a tradition that emphasizes the performative over the representational dimensions of Celan’s poetry and understands his poems as constituting textual events rather than conveying meaning via metaphors and tropes. According to Tucker, “Zähle die Mandeln” stages such a passage “from trope to event” in the language of the poem itself; the poem thus takes on qualities of a “meta-poem” allowing us to understand how signification functions more generally in Celan’s work.

Tucker identified two opposing forces of signification in the poem: differentiation between discrete units as the structural basis of signification, and un-differentiation as the corresponding breakdown of conventional meaning. The tension between these tendencies characterizes the poem on several levels, but it is revealed most prominently by the metamorphoses of the central concept of counting: while the imperative of the first line, “zähle die Mandeln,” demands that things be held apart, the “zuzählen” of the final line calls for submersion of the individual elements into an undifferentiated unity.

The breakdown of poetic language as a result of undoing differentiation does not, however, merely negate meaning, but enables another way of speaking, or what Tucker called a “second sound.” To illustrate this movement from loss to recuperation, Tucker foregrounded paranomastic operations suggested by the poem: collapsing the spaces between words (semantic undifferentiation) allows them to be joined into new (and newly) meaningful units. The phrase “den Krügen,” for instance, morphs into “DenKrügen,” the “rebukes” of thought of Tucker’s title. Understood as a stand-in for tropes in general – vessels for containing and transporting (*meta-pherein*) meaning – “the jugs” are first de-structured and then reconstituted as determinate gestures of rebuke and objection. Tucker concluded by arguing that Celan’s poetry indexes history not through representations of extra-textual historical reality, but by demonstrating the effects of history on language in the language event that constitutes the poem.

(Johannes Wankhammer)
Dislodged Statues: The Vanishing Act of German Romantic Sculpture

November 5, 2010

Why does sculpture, venerated throughout Germany’s eighteenth century, suddenly become devalued in the nineteenth? This question is central to “Material Anxieties: The Disappearance of Sculpture in the German Nineteenth Century,” the colloquium paper presented by Catriona MacLeod (University of Pennsylvania), which draws on research from her forthcoming book, All That is Solid Melts into Air: Sculpture and Literature in the German Nineteenth Century.

MacLeod argued that as sculpture as an artistic medium was heavily criticized in nineteenth-century Germany, coming under criticism by theorists such as Schlegel, Schelling, and Hegel, it reappeared in literary form in the work of writers such as Brentano, Achim von Arnim, and Eichendorff. Such a shift in aesthetic sensibility, claimed MacLeod, must first be understood within the context of industrialization, as this shift reflected the rise of mass culture and the coinciding emergence of the reproducible commodity object, both of which signified a new dominance of the objective “thing” over subjectivity and “spirit.” Sculpture, associated with materiality and manual labor since the Renaissance, not only became a victim of this aesthetic turn, but a touchstone for the philosophical expression of related anxieties over femininity, object-hood, and death. Schlegel, for instance, stressed the irreducible corporeality of sculpture, which, in contrast to the newly prevalent medium of landscape painting, closed it off from an engagement with its spectator, while the classicist Wilhelm von Humboldt criticized the female nude statuary of Johann Heinrich Dannecker as being “zu dick und zu nackt” (“too fat and too naked”) to be beautiful.

MacLeod concluded that sculpture’s newfound home in literature and philosophy, exemplified by the prominent role it plays in such texts as Arnim’s “Die Weihnachts-Ausstellung” (1817), enabled the medium itself to be explored and thematized from a reflective distance that had hitherto not been possible.

(Matteo Calla)
In his essay, “Ein Totenbuch des Ich: Carl Einstein’s Bebuquin II,” Devin Fore (Princeton University) investigated the relationship between Einstein’s Expressionist novel Bebuquin oder die Dilettanten des Wunders (1912) and his later unfinished work Bebuquin II.

Bebuquin II looks like an attempt to rewrite the highly experimental early novel as an autobiography, a central prose genre for New Objectivity. As such, it would appear to mark a regress from modernism to prior realist modes of representation and to be premised on the existence of a stable extradiscursive reality as the referent of literary texts. Fore argued, however, that one should not be misled by the ostensibly anti-modernist rhetoric of Einstein’s autobiographical work. Far from rejecting the avant-garde project, Bebuquin II proves, upon closer examination, to pursue it in an even more radical fashion.

To interpret Bebuquin II, and, more generally, to elucidate the transition from modernism to the variety of realisms that succeeded it, Fore drew on Einstein’s own reflections on the passage from analytic to synthetic cubism, as well as on a tradition of regarding the exteriorization of memory in acts of semiosis as a vehicle of forgetting. Among the figures invoked in this context were Kant, Hegel, and Eco. According to Einstein, both analytic and synthetic cubism aim at abolishing the subordination of perception to memory effected by mimetic realism, but the techniques employed are opposed. If the former patently rejects figuration and tries to block mnemonic processes by shifting attention to the surface of the canvas through perceptual impoverishment, the latter takes recourse to figuration only to render representation undecidable and hallucinatory; it attains the same goal of subverting memory by means of strategies of excess. Fore read Bebuquin II as an attempt to use the genre of autobiography to ultimately dismantle the ego through both excessive semiosis as well as an overabundance of recollection, very much in the spirit of synthetic cubism.

(Ana-Maria Andrei)
Antonomastic Names in Paul Celan’s Poetry

December 3, 2010

At the semester’s final colloquium, Cornell Mellon postdoctoral fellow Anna Glazova presented a work in progress, “Antonomastic Names in Paul Celan’s Poetry,” which addressed the difficult question of the influence of Judaism on Celan’s poetry and poetic practice.

Glazova sought to identify two possible sources of influence on Celan’s poem, “Unter die Haut meiner Hände genäht,” from the collection Atemwende (1967): Gershom Scholem’s book Die Geheimnisse der Schöpfung (1935) and Hugo Bergmann’s essay “Die Heiligung des Namens” from the anthology Vom Judentum (1914). Both of these works, so Glazova, address the tradition of Jewish mysticism that sees language as coinciding with the creation of the world. In “Unter die Haut,” Celan appears to be transferring a “sacral linguistic act onto the poetic plane,” or translating, in Walter Benjamin’s sense, biblical Hebrew into poetic German.

Sabbatean mysticism holds that the impure state of “words” reflects the broken state of the world, whose redemption and thus completion will be heralded by a purified language of “names”—akin, Glazova added during the discussion, to what Benjamin calls “das reine Wort.” Where Celan departs from the Sabbatean tradition, however, is in his performative suggestion that these holy names may not only be as yet unpronounceable; they may even remain, for us, forever unknowable. Thus while hinting at something like “Messianicity without Messianism,” to quote Derrida, poetic language is for Celan constitutively suspended in a state of imperfection. Names, writes Glazova, “remain unnamed.” Alluding to Derrida’s reading of the Shibboleth as the quasi-paradoxical mark of both separation (from the Gentile community) as well as unification (with the divine), Glazova concluded by leaving open whether it was ever possible for Celan to have a poetic or non-Jewish relationship to Judaism.

(Ari Linden)
THIS SEMINAR HAS TWO PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVES: to explore recent work at the intersection of performance studies and media studies and to consider how that work might enable us to rethink performance in a cross-section of genres (including dance, opera, cinema, and theater). Both performance studies and media studies have emerged as enormously generative sites of inquiry in Germany and the USA. And while we will inevitably note some of the similarities and differences in the intellectual programs of these fields, our primary interest will be more pragmatic. That is, we will explore how work in these fields enables us to (re-)conceptualize and (re-)experience performance. We will pursue this exploration along two axes: on the one hand, we will read a host of literature on the history, theory, and praxes of performance and mediality (including, for example, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht and Carolyn Abbate on presence; Dieter Mersch on intransitivity; Friedrich Kittler on media technologies; and Sybille Krämer on performativity & mediality); on the other, we will consider a variety of performances (in a variety of genres, and in a variety of media, i.e., live and via DVD, simulcast, live-stream, YouTube, etc.) that are alert to the politics and play of mediality (such as work by the choreographers William Forsythe [Frankfurt/Dresden] & Sasha Waltz [Berlin]; the filmmaker Alexander Kluge; and recordings of performances at the Vienna State Opera [Verdi/Don Carlos/ Konwitschny], the Bayreuth Festival [Wagner/Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg/ K. Wagner] and the Théâtre du Châtelet [Rossini/La Pietra del Paragone/Corsetti, Sorin, Beziat]). Among the questions we will address: how might we conceptualize the medial status of performance? How does mediation figure in the dramaturgy of performance? What role does 'presence' play in our conceptualization (or indeed, our experience) of performance? Discussions will be centered on key texts and performances as well as on participants' research.

APPLICATIONS DUE MARCH 1, 2011
FOR INSTRUCTIONS, PLEASE SEE THE DAAD WEB SITE AT WWW.DAAD.ORG
Assistant Professor of early modern German history, Duane Corpis (Ph.D., New York University) joined the Cornell University faculty in 2006 after teaching at Georgia State University. His areas of specialization include religious, cultural, and social history with a focus on post-Reformation (seventeenth- and eighteenth-century) conflicts between Protestants and Catholics in the Holy Roman Empire. He is currently completing a book titled “Crossing the Boundaries of Belief: Geographies of Religious Conversion in Southern Germany, 1648-1806,” which analyzes the transgressive consequences of converting from one Christian confession to another. Against traditional arguments that the Peace of Westphalia privatized religion, leading ultimately to the separation of church and state and the rise of religious toleration, he argues that the resolution of the Thirty Years’ War gave an even more rigid shape to religious differences, resulting in a continuous cycle of institutionalized and highly politicized confessional competitions, antagonisms, and exclusions that often centered on the body and soul of the convert/apostate. Corpis explores this dynamic through micro-historical studies of quotidian interactions and confessional boundary crossings between Catholicism and Protestantism, especially around matters such as reading practices and books, rituals, magic, miracles, sacred spaces, and charity. He is also interested in the relationship between marginality and conversion narratives, which operated as tales of social as well as religious redemption.

In the future Corpis will pursue several new research projects. One examines the ways that Protestants and Catholics both created and subverted religious difference by fashioning competing (yet overlapping) acoustic landscapes using bells, songs, music, laughter, and other sonic practices. Another project will explore the globalization of Protestant charity from the seventeenth through the eighteenth century. Corpis spent summer 2009 in Leipzig, Dresden, and Halle conducting preliminary research on these two topics with the generous support of a seed grant from the Einaudi Center and a summer research grant from the Cornell Institute for Social Sciences. His interest in space, place, and religion has resulted in two recent publications: “Losing One’s Place: Memory, History, and Space in Post-Reformation Germany,” published in Enduring Loss in Early Modern Germany, edited by Lynne Tatlock (2010), and “Mapping the Boundaries of Confession: Space and Urban Religious Life in the Diocese of Augsburg, 1648-1750,” published in Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe, edited by Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (2005). As a member of the editorial collective of the journal Radical History Review, Corpis has also recently co-edited a special thematic issue of the journal with Rachel Scharfman, Critical Approaches to Religion and Politics (Volume 99, Fall 2007). At Cornell he has offered undergraduate and graduate courses exploring the following topics: “Crime, Law and Society in Early Modern Europe,” “Early Modern Religion and Society,” “Deviants, Outcasts and Other Others,” and “Witches and Witch Hunts in the Atlantic World.” Future courses will include “The Enlightenment and Its Shadows,” “Early Modern Europe in Global Context,” and “The History of Noise.”
Schoenberg’s Playlist
Listening to Vienna at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Xak Bjerken, Director

Guest Artists:
Daedalus String Quartet
Mezzo-Soprano Rachel Calloway
Pianist Michael Friedmann

Events:

Thursday, Jan. 27, 12:30, B-20, Lincoln Hall: Recital of works for piano from 1903-1915 by Bartok, Stravinsky, Debussy, Ravel, and Scriabin, performed by students of Xak Bjerken.

Friday Jan. 28, 1:30 pm. B-20, Lincoln Hall: Combination Musicology Colloquium and Composer’s Forum with talks by Michael Friedmann (Yale) and Mike Lee (Cornell) on performance practice issues in Schoenberg and Webern’s piano music.

Friday, Jan. 28, 8 pm, Barnes Hall
Pre-concert talk at 7:15 with Michael Friedmann, Roger Moseley, and Mike Lee
Songs by Webern, Schreker, Schoenberg, and Zemlinsky Calloway/Bjerken
Berg Quartet, op.3 (1910) Daedalus String Quartet
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Webern Variations for Piano, op. 27 Mike Lee
Karl Weigl Quartet No. 3 in A Major, op. 4 (1903) Daedalus Quartet

Saturday, Jan. 29, 5 pm, Johnson Museum
Viennese food for purchase provided by Dano’s Heuriger, and special display of Kandinsky’s “Small Worlds” paintings.

Berg Four Pieces, op.5 for clarinet/piano Richard Faria/Bjerken
Szymanowski Romance in D Major, op. 23 for violin/piano Nicholas DiEugenio/Bjerken
Stravinsky Three Pieces for String Quartet Daedalus Quartet
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Schoenberg Five Pieces, op. 23 Michael Friedmann, piano
Johann Strauss’ Kaiser Waltzes (arr. Schoenberg)

Sunday, Jan. 30, 3 pm Barnes Hall
Songs by Debussy, Berg, and Korngold, 12 minutes Calloway/Bjerken
Korngold violin sonata, op 6 (1913) 36 minutes Joseph Lin/Miri Yampolsky
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Debussy Nocturnes for 4 hands Bjerken/Yiran Wang
Mahler Songs of A Wayfarer, arr. Sch (1920) conducted by Jeff Meyer with Rachel Calloway, mezzo-soprano

For full details, see: www.music.cornell.edu/calendar
Present with support from the Department of Music, the Ensemble X Fund, Cornell Council for the Arts, German Studies, the Institute for German Cultural Studies, the Johnson Museum of Arts, and the Center for European Studies.
February 4
Gizem Arslan
German Studies, Cornell University
“WO KEIN NAME MEHR WÄCHST”
NULL POINTS OF ORIENTATION IN
YOKO TAWADA’S
SPRAECHPOLIZEI UND SPIELPOLYGLOTTE

March 4
Jan-Werner Müller
Department of Politics, Princeton University
DEMOCRATIC SELF-DEFENCE:
FROM CARL SCHMITT TO
PRESENT-DAY EUROPEAN POPULISM

April 1
Beatrice Michaelis
German Literature & Medieval Studies
Research Coordinator,
Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture
Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen
GIGANTIC DESIRE: NARRATING
THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF RACE,
CLASS, AND GENDER
IN THE PROSE LANCELOT

April 15
Robert Buch
Visiting Professor of German,
University of Pittsburgh
UNTRÖSTLICH.
HANS BLUMENBERGS ARBEIT
AN DER PASSIONSGESCHICHTE
Spring 2011

Calendar of Events

Jan. 27-30  
SCHOENBERG’S PLAYLIST: LISTENING TO VIENNA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY  
Director Xak Bjerken (Cornell University)  
For full details see http://music.cornell.edu/calendar/

Feb. 18-19  
SINN UND SNNLICHKEIT: USES AND ABUSES OF AESTHETICS TODAY  
GERMAN STUDIES GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE  
LYNCH CONFERENCE ROOM, HERBERT F. JOHNSON MUSEUM OF ART

March 5  
JUDGING HISTORY: CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON LEO STRAUSS  
Organized by Peter Hohendahl and Jason Frank (Cornell University)  
258 GOLDWIN SMITH HALL

March 8-13  
KEYBOARD CULTURE IN 18TH-CENTURY BERLIN AND THE GERMAN SENSE OF HISTORY  
CONFERENCE AND CONCERT FESTIVAL TO CELEBRATE THE INAUGURATION AND  
DEDICATION OF CORNELL’S NEW BAROQUE ORGAN  
Organized by Annette Richards and David Yearsley (Cornell University)  
For full details see http://music.cornell.edu/calendar/

April 22-23  
POSSIBILITIES OF THE NEW: THE SUBJECT OF TRUTH IN PSYCHOANALYSIS  
Psychoanalysis Reading Group Conference  
RUTH WOOLSEY FINDLEY HISTORY OF ART GALLERY, GOLDWIN SMITH HALL

April 28  
MULTIDIRECTIONAL MEMORY AND THE IMPLICATED SUBJECT: ON SEBALD AND KENTRIDGE  
Presented by MICHAEL ROTHBERG (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)  
4:30pm GUERLAC ROOM, A. D. WHITE HOUSE

April 29-30  
LITERATURE AND CRITICISM IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE:  
A CONFERENCE IN HONOR OF PETER UWE HOHENDAHL  
A.D. WHITE HOUSE

May 5  
ISLAMIC VISIBILITY IN EUROPEAN PUBLICS: SECULARISM, CULTURE, AND THE SACRED  
UNIVERSITY LECTURE by NILÜFER GÖLE (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France)  
4:30pm FILM FORUM, SCHWARTZ CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS  
Reception to follow in Schwartz Center Lobby

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

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).