

Berlin Program Summer Workshop
VIRTUAL GERMANS

June 19–20, 2014 | Freie Universität Berlin
REPORT



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Program Report

In her travels through Eastern Europe in the 1990s, the writer Ruth Ellen Gruber noted that non-Jews were embracing, creating, and marketing an idea of Jewishness that had little to do with the Jews who had lived in the region before the Holocaust. Through practices and cultural products, these “virtual Jews” had come in dialog with “their own visions of Jews and Jewish matters, and themselves.” In recent years, the historian Winson Chu has adapted this concept to show the enactment of a “virtually German” culture that serves commercial interests, European reconciliation, and cosmopolitan credentials in Poland today.

In June 2014, our third Berlin Program Summer Workshop expanded upon the idea of “virtual Germans” in a variety of constellations, including Germans and German-speakers who have fashioned new identities for themselves abroad, people living in Germany of diverse backgrounds whose German belonging is contested, as well as constructions of Germanness. The 12 speakers - from graduate students to full professors in German, History, Literature, Political Science and Sociology - paid special attention to the global flow of “Germanness” as well as to its local constructions. By exploring such representations and contestations, the 32 workshop participants (13 fellows and alumni) investigated how new definitions of Germanness arise and how new inclusions and exclusions are made.

Thursday, June 19

Panel I: German Identity and the United States

Moderator: Winson Chu, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Cora Granata, California State University Fullerton

From Hitler’s Europe to the Golden State: The Meanings of Germanness for Germany’s Postwar Immigrants in Southern California

Nicole Thesz, Miami University

The California Lightness of Being, or Being German – Displacement and Memory in Christa Wolf’s *Stadt der Engel*

David Huenlich, University of Texas at Austin

Germaericans: Transmigration and ‘Virtual Germanness’ in the U.S.

The first panel of this year’s Summer Workshop explored questions of German identity and Germanness among groups who had left Germany to come to the United States. Cora Granata began the session discussing German immigrants from the early postwar period who had eventually settled in southern California. Although the topic of the wartime exile and diasporic communities in California has been heavily researched over the last few years, Granata’s paper deviated from the typical subjects of investigation (left, anti-fascist, and Jewish exiles) to focus on

a more socially and politically conservative wave of migrants who followed. Rather than anti-fascism, this group brought with them anti-communist ideologies which not only fit into the more conservative, suburban southern California society, but also helped shape it throughout the early years of the Cold War.

Nicole Thesz followed with an investigation of the role of language, encounter, and place in Christa Wolf's *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud*. Approaching the text the changing meanings of the root *gegen* in the many situations and encounters related in the novel (*Begegnungen, Gegenwart, Gegenden*), Thesz elucidated the uneven, uncertain, and sometimes paradoxical path Wolf's semi-autobiographical main character took to self-realization on the foreign shores of California. As a thought-provoking turn at the end of her talk, Thesz asked us to look not just at the language, but of the meanings of the non-linguistic interactions and experiences related in the book.

David Huenlich ended the session with a paper investigating sentiments of Germanness among a group of transmigrants at the University of Austin, Texas. Each of the interviewees had been born and raised in Germany, but had left as a teenager to return to his/her parents' country of origin. Even after having been away from the country for much of their adolescence, each interviewee maintained a significant if not strong identity with and affinity for German culture and sense of feeling German. This finding brought up questions of integration and assimilation in multiple foreign countries and both the flexibility and potential limitations of cultural identities.

The panel was followed by a lively question and answer session, wherein conference and panel participants discussed issues of time, place, and identity. Some of the most thought-provoking threads of the discussion addressed the relationship between the three. Why, for instance, does temporal or spatial distance from one's culture or place of birth seem so crucial to the construction of one's identity? How, in other words, does one's sense of Germanness change when dislocation and memory come into play? Although we came to no clear, definitive answer at the end, the papers and discussion that followed shed some much-needed light on this complicated dimension of cultural and national identification.

Nicholas Ostrum, Berlin Program Fellow 2013-2014

Panel II: Turkish-German Identities

Moderator: Winson Chu, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Elisabeth Becker, Yale University

'From the Bavarian Earth into Allah's Heaven': Purpose Built Mosques and Muslim Belonging in Contemporary Germany

Victoria Bishop Kendzia, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

Performing 'Germanness'? Visiting Practices in and around the Jewish Museum Berlin

Elisabeth Becker reflected on her paper "'From the Bavarian Earth into Allah's Heaven': Purpose Built Mosques and Muslim Belonging in Contemporary Germany," posing questions about Islam, integration and belonging in Germany through the reception of the Penzberg "Transparent Mosque" and Cologne "Mega-Mosque." A perception that the Penzberg mosque is

both literally and metaphorically transparent has contributed to its success in being understood as embodying national democratic ideals and local community participation. Contrastingly, Becker further argues, the Cologne mosque, which was not seen as the product of a participatory process, is a contested site of kulturkampf. Victoria Bishop Kendzia considered the implications of her paper, “Performing ‘Germanness’? Visiting Practices in and around Jewish Museum.” This dissertation excerpt focused on a visit to the Jewish Museum Berlin by a majority-Turkish-background high school class. Bishop Kendzia analyzed “performed” behaviors in order to investigate how “acts of practice” produce exclusion from agency to interpret and exclusion from a sense of belonging overall. In acts such as singing the German national anthem outside of the museum, members of the Neukölln gymnasium group did not evince the Betroffenheit conveyed by elite West German visitors; students in this group also fought to receive attention from museum docents. The workshop conversation that followed focused on themes such as: cultural definitions of pluralism, the missions of the institutions discussed, and broader transatlantic debates. Moderator Winson Chu concluded the session by pointing to parallels in the European Union’s discussions about Europeanizing and diversity, and recommending Ruth Mandel’s *Cosmopolitan Anxieties* and Michael Meng’s *Shattered Spaces*.

Rebecca Uchill, Berlin Program Fellow Rebecca 2014-15

Panel III: Identity Redefined

Moderator: Jennifer Rodgers, University of Pennsylvania / FU Berlin

Veronika Fuechtner, Dartmouth College

Becoming German: Thomas Mann, his Brazilian Mother and the Construction of German Culture

Thomas O. Beebee, The Pennsylvania State University

Can Karl Kraus ‘Live Away’ from Austria? Translational Virtuality in Jonathan Franzen’s *The Kraus Project* (2013)

Where was German modernity created, and where does it carry on? Panel Three traced German literary culture beyond national boundaries to consider its origins and legacies in Brazil and the United States. Veronika Fuechtner considered the heritage of the novelist Thomas Mann, whose mother, Julia Mann, was the Brazilian daughter of a German merchant whose family background included indigenous and possibly African roots. Julia Mann was an accomplished memoirist, dedicated reader of German literature, and performer of the German Lied who shared her son’s interest in classical music and contributed to his Goethe obsession. Countering the interpretation of Julia Mann as an inspiration for the exoticism of her son’s novels, Fuechtner draws on her life and writings to explain what is German about him. While we know of many German authors who have become “virtually” American, few American writers have recreated themselves by immersing themselves in German culture. One recent case is Jonathan Franzen, who has made use of his struggle to learn German to define himself as a serious writer, and who has now attempted to breathe American life into one of his German fascinations by publishing *The Kraus Project*, a translated collection of writings by the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus. In his lengthy footnotes, Franzen vivifies Kraus’s world by analogy, comparing, for example, Kraus’s subject Heinrich Heine to Bob Dylan, and taking Kraus’s standpoints on Viennese culture as

inspiration for a lament on the state of the U.S. media. If “the Kraus project” is also “the Franzen project,” then the controversies of Vienna, an origin site of modernity, have a virtual afterlife in the United States.

Isaiah Wilner, Berlin Program Fellow 2014-15

Panel IV: German Identity and the Visual

Moderator: Johannes Zechner, Freie Universität Berlin

Chase Richards, University of Pennsylvania

Virtual Germanness or German Virtuality? National and Global Visions in the Family Papers, 1850s-1860s

Robert Pirro, Georgia Southern University

Aesthetic Legacies and Dashed Political Hopes: Caspar David Friedrich Motifs in Roland Emmerich’s Post-9/11 Popcorn Message Movies

This panel included two papers exploring visual approaches to the notion of “virtual” Germanness. Both point towards a specifically German relationship to illustration and image, but are at opposing ends of a temporal and medial spectrum.

Chase Richards’s chapter “Virtual Germanness or German Virtuality? National and Global Visions in the Family Papers, 1850s-1860s” introduces the use of wood engraving for the illustration of family magazines as a tool that served commercial and political purposes. Richards emphasizes the importance of illustration in family magazines in the format’s construction of German liberal subjecthood, or a “German virtuality” (a process not to be separated from the shift of German nationalism from the left to the right in the last decades of the nineteenth century). Using examples from a number of magazines, Richards shows how popular illustrations complicated the construction of this “virtual Germanness” with a visual vocabulary that was also cosmopolitan.

Richard Pirro’s contribution, an article entitled “Aesthetic Legacies and Dashed Political Hopes: Caspar David Friedrich Motifs in Roland Emmerich’s Post-9/11 Popcorn Message Movies,” mediates deftly between Hollywood director Emmerich’s big-budget hits *Independence Day* (1996), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *2012* (2009), and *Anonymous* (2011), the landscape painting of the Romantic artist Friedrich, and nineteenth-century German-American cultural hybridity. His complex argument suggests that visual references to Friedrich’s paintings in Emmerich’s work suggest a return to Germany for the émigré director. Pirro reads this furthermore as evidence of a post-9/11 shift towards the expression of politics, specifically political disillusionment, in the director’s oeuvre.

Jessica Plummer, Berlin Program Fellow 2013-14

Friday, June 20, 2014

Keynote

Joyce Mushaben, University of Missouri St. Louis

Belonging in 3D: Re-forming Citizenship and Identity at the European, National and Local Levels

Moderator: Jenny Wüstenberg, European Law School Wiesbaden / FU Berlin

Joyce Marie Mushaben from the Department of Political Science at the University of Missouri, St. Louis gave the keynote speech at the 2014 Berlin Program Summer Workshop. Mushaben's work focuses on issues of citizenship, identity between East and West Germany, and broader topics related to migration and citizenship in the EU. Her presentation, "Belonging in 3-D: Re-forming Citizenship and Identity at the European, National and Local Levels," discussed the role of EU directives in addressing on-going issues surrounding migration in member states. Her talk focused on citizenship and the social integration of migrants coming from non-EU states, known as third country nationals. Focusing on the German case, Mushaben traced a series of EU directives through the 1990s and 2000s that guided Germany's efforts to build social cohesion and inclusion for third country nationals. She identified how the European Court of Justice has established specific steps to actually implement many of these directives, which had previously remained symbolic and unrealized when left to the member states. Mushaben argued that national identities are declining as the nation-state becomes more obsolete. In their place, she identified the increasing salience of local identities paired with an international European identity. She views this local, *Alltag* level as the primary location for building social cohesion and belonging among third country nationals. Following her presentation, keynote moderator Jenny Wüstenberg, of the Freie Universität and European Law School Wiesbaden, fielded questions for Mushaben, which lead to a fruitful discussion of the role of neo-liberalism in shaping EU policy-making, the EU's possible role in reinforcing national identity, and the effect of right-wing parties on EU migration politics.

Briana Smith, Berlin Program Fellow 2014-15

Panel V: Defining Group Identities

Moderator: David Patton, Connecticut College

Sonja Ostrow, Vanderbilt University

Virtual Democrats? Measuring Public Opinion in West Germany

Winson Chu, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

"Lodzermensch" and Litzmannstadt: Making "Virtually German" Sites in Łódź after 1989

Panel Five dealt with the question of how national groups attempt to re-shape their collective identities as they grapple with troubled pasts. Sonja Ostrow traced how American occupation officials used large-scale polling as they endeavored to determine whether West Germans were truly moving away from the authoritarian modes of thinking that had characterized the Third Reich. Although many Germans were not at ease with the clip-board-wielding officials who asked probing questions about their lives, American pollsters argued that the very practice of polling promoted democratic values such as the freedom of thought and expression. When American

polls began to show ‘insufficient’ progress toward democratic beliefs, the nascent German polling industry criticized these results and began to collect its own data on wide-ranging aspects of German opinion, in the process helping to shape a new national identity.

In his paper, Winson Chu investigated the city of Lodz as a window into post-1989 Polish memory culture. Chu found that, in an attempt to present Lodz as a model cosmopolitan city, Lodz’s leaders have reframed the city’s history by emphasizing its “virtual German-ness” and “virtual Jewishness,” a reference to Lodz’s pre-1939 past, when Poles, Jews and Germans lived side-by-side before the creation of the Lodz Ghetto during WWII and the expulsion of the city’s German residents in 1945. Chu argued that the reconstruction of a multicultural past ultimately has more to do with Poles’ attempt to whitewash their own image; Germans still tend to be cast in a purely negative light, and the fate of Jewish victims receives little attention. The panel was followed by a discussion of the formation of Holocaust memory on the national level, issues of generational change, and the question of how scholars can cross disciplinary boundaries.

David Harrisville, Berlin Program Fellow 2014-2015

Berlin Replicata: Architectural Copying in the Capital City – Walking Tour

Steven Lauritano, Yale University / Freie Universität Berlin

As the starting point for our walking tour Steven Lauritano, Ph.D. candidate at Yale University and currently doctoral research fellow at the Berlin Program, selected Märkisches Museum. Completed in 1908, the ensemble pays homage to architectural precursors of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as well as regional building traditions. This introduction gave us a perspective for considering questions of copying and authenticity.

Across the street, the Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment houses three city models in its permanent exhibition “Urban Development – Planning, Models, Projects”. A haptic model and a GDR master plan for the development of East Berlin offered alternative conceptions of the urban landscape.

Our third stop was a striking set of buildings that now house part of Berlin’s central library. The Ribbeck House, Berlin’s oldest Renaissance building (1624), and the adjacent Marstall, one of the few early Baroque buildings (c. 1660), are hidden treasures in Mitte’s Breite Str. 32-37. The Ribbeck House’s richly-decorated round-arched portal – a copy - gave us a glimpse into the decorative splendor of that time and had us ponder the new meanings which the use of copies create.

Around the corner, another famous portal can be admired. The former Staatsratsgebäude is seen among architectural historians as an example of “Ost-Moderne”. The façade exemplifies the humus in which both spolia and architectural copying thrive: From the balcony of the city palace’s portal # IV Karl Liebknecht proclaimed the “Socialist Republic” on November 9, 1918. There is more than a touch of irony in the fact that the “Karl-Liebknecht-Portal” now welcomes students of the European School of Management and Technology.

Literary theory has taught us to seek out silences and absences, so the fifth stop took us to the site of Schinkel’s Bauakademie (building academy). Completed between 1832 and 1834 and standing across from the Royal Palace, the building academy was spectacular by the standards of

the time. Its cubic construction and its industrial architectural language set trends for modern architecture. Badly damaged in the war, it was demolished in the 1960s in order to make room for East Germany's "new socialist urban center". Both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Palace of the Republic have been in turn demolished after the wall came down. To get the proposals for rebuilding off the ground, a Musterfassade of the historic Bauakademie was erected in 2001/2002. With an exact copy of the North-East corner incorporating copies of over 600 pieces of the original façade, the missing pieces were simulated by a huge canvas of brick-red tarpaulin.

Our sixth stop showed us how far the idea of copying can be taken. When the Bertelsmann Foundation bought the site at Unter den Linden Nr. 1, the Berlin Senate entailed the building to be a historic reconstruction of the Alte Kommandantur.

We finished this wonderful afternoon with a look at the old royal library (alte königliche Bibliothek), commonly called "Kommode" in Berlin. Modelled on plans for the North façade of the Wiener Hofburg, the "copy" in Berlin was finished before "the original" in Vienna. Given the current difficulties with certain building projects in the city, this may strike us as surprising. The fact the Hochburg was finally finished a good century later after several revisions, should nevertheless give us hope for such Großprojekte.

The reuse of materials strikes close to home with most of us as do questions of authenticity and appropriation. This walking tour asked what happens when spolia and copies are used in another historical context and whether their presence creates new meaning.

Karin Goihl, Berlin Program

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THE BERLIN PROGRAM FOR ADVANCED GERMAN AND EUROPEAN STUDIES promotes a new generation of young North American scholars with specialized knowledge of modern and contemporary Germany and Europe. The program supports scholars in all social science and humanities disciplines, including historians working on the period since the mid-18th century. Since its inception in 1986 at the Freie Universität Berlin the program has brought more than 290 fellows to Berlin. With our Summer Workshop we wish to offer an opportunity to engage with a timely topic and strengthen ties between the program and scholars working in German and European studies. **Contact us @:** Berlin Program, FU Berlin, Garystr. 45, 14195 Berlin, Germany, ☎ +49 30 838 56671 bprogram@zedat.fu-berlin.de, www.fu-berlin.de/bprogram

COVER ILLUSTRATION

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