

Berlin Program Alumni Panel  
at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual GSA Conference in Portland, Oregon  
October 5, 2019

# Across the Borders of Text and Nation

Intertextuality and Intermediality  
in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Film, Art, and Exhibition Culture

## Report



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**Berlin Program Alumni Panel**  
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**Across the Borders of Text and Nation: Intertextuality and Intermediality  
in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Film, Art, and Exhibition Culture**

Moderator: **Nichole Neuman, Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis**

Commentator: **Johannes von Moltke, University of Michigan**

**Sara Hall, University of Illinois at Chicago**

Mobilizing the International Intertexts of Policing, *The Great Police Exhibition of Berlin, 1926*

**Emily Dreyfus, University of Chicago & Freie Universität Berlin**

Musical Interludes and Zones of Political Consensus in German Cinema under National Socialism

**Jennifer Kapczynski, Washington University in St. Louis**

Mecki and Making Democracy Popular

**Tom Haakenson, California College of the Arts**

Dada Dimensions: Intertextual, Intermedial, & Transcultural Critique

Approximately thirty people gathered on Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup> to attend the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies alumni panel at the German Studies Association annual conference in Portland, Oregon (USA). The panel was moderated by Nichole Neuman, and Johannes von Moltke served as commentator for the four papers by Sara Hall, Emily Dreyfus, Jennifer Kapczynski, and Thomas Haakenson. All but Kapczynski are alumni of the Berlin Program. A rich panel with exceptional papers, it established a multi-faceted, transhistorical conversation about the interface between media forms both within and across the boundaries of individual texts and events. The panel illustrated how specific intertextual and intermedial representational practices have impacted audience formation and self-understanding and historically specific cultures of reception.

The panel began with Sara Hall's paper, "Mobilizing the International Intertexts of Policing, *The Great Police Exhibition of Berlin, 1926*," which examined *The Great Police Exhibition*. In 1926, the Prussian police sponsored and staged this exhibit—the single largest technology display in Berlin's history. Across three cavernous halls on the grounds of the modern Kaiserdamm exhibition arenas, police forces from around Europe and as far away as Japan and the United States displayed the trappings and tools of their profession, including nationally specific uniforms, the latest clue collection technologies, modern machinery, 3-D reproductions of crime scenes and work spaces, etc. They also performed demonstrations and delivered lectures on topics ranging from how to prepare quality meals in the barracks, how laypersons could recognize a criminal in their midst, and the intersection between social work and policing. Theatrical productions and film screenings were cross-programmed all across Berlin to coincide with and promote the exhibition. Through close readings of press accounts and catalog copy, Hall analyzed common and divergent aesthetic strategies and modes of audience address, all which aimed (to varying degrees of success) to present

modern German policing as both in-synch domestically and ahead-of-the-curve internationally. She demonstrated that the mediation and remediation of police work and the day-to-day lives of police officers in various narrative contexts formed a web of signification intended to support moderate democratic reform and to maximize the promise of recent economic recovery.

Emily Dreyfus's presentation, "Musical Interludes and Zones of Political Consensus in German Cinema under National Socialism," followed and considered the significance of classical music in a series of thematically organized entertainment features made under Nazi rule, broadly classified under the genre of the *Musikfilm*. As Dreyfus pointed out, cinema during World War Two increasingly relied on the representation of musicians and music-lovers, integrating works from the Austro-German canon into plots to generate emotional intensity. Her close readings of the historical conditions under which culturally conservative tendencies overlapped with the modernization of mass media illustrated how meaning was generated and how emotional reactions such as empathy were shaped. She argued that musical episodes in film functioned as "heterotopic" spaces, or sites of ideological instability or even subversion: at the point where spoken language broke off, music was called on to represent weakness, madness and failure. Although the invocation of high culture allowed these movies to pass as "film-art," the films themselves did not distract audiences as much as reach them through the purposeful articulation of shared sensuous experiences made manifest through heterotopic intermediality.

In her highly entertaining presentation, "*Mecki* and Making Democracy Popular," Jennifer Kapczynski examined the animated figure of "Mecki" and the famed hedgehog's (previously of comics notoriety) central role in a series of short films promoting democracy. A memo to the agency by Boris von Borresholm detailed his successful negotiations with the Diehl brothers on behalf of the Bundeszentrale für Heimatdienst (BfH), which contracted the character in 1954. These included assurances that the agency would hold the exclusive rights to the figure (which could not be devalued by insertion into "advertisements for hair tonic or laxatives"). The contract talks also, according to Borresholm, included assertions about the value of Mecki as a high-quality artistic creation "whose extraordinary popularity" was decisive in his selection as an "actor" for the BfH series. Kapczynski's presentation drew on archival materials and took up the case of the BfH series—which eventually included three animated shorts starring Mecki as a booster for democracy—in order to consider the complex marketing strategies that informed the push for postwar political transformation. She argued that the BfH relied on Mecki's star status to sell democracy to a skeptical public along two key axes. By creating the series through a known figure, the BfH could make more palatable the series' overt political content—strategically inserting his pleas for democratic adoption into a much larger oeuvre, and in ways that were consistent with his overall character. At the same time, the series relied on the intermedial figure of Mecki to combat popular views of democracy as a system both imported and imposed—mobilizing Mecki to render democracy in terms that appeared both familiar and fundamentally domestic.

Thomas Haakenson's project, "Dada Dimensions: Intertextual, Intermedial, & Transcultural Critique," closed out the panel presentations. His discussion of DADA (founded in 1916 by Tristan Tzara and Hugo Ball in Zurich, Switzerland) examined the intertextual and intermedial strategies of the first Dada artists and extended Dada practice to the present day. As a global signifier of radical aesthetic disruptions that defy categorizations typical of other, European-based, accounts of Dada, Haakenson pointed to the movement's transcending of geopolitical spaces as a means to connect early conceptions of Dada to global artistic moments: from the early Dada-inspired journals of MAVO movement in 1920s Japan to the intentionally immolated Xiamen Dada exhibition in China in 1986, from the borderless Cyber Dada Manifesto at the turn of the new millennium to the contemporary political aesthetics of Adam Pendleton's Brooklyn-based Black Dada project. As one case-in-point, Haakenson detailed Pendleton's Black Dada Flag (Black Lives Matter) project, which was installed by Frieze for six months at Scylla Point (formerly Negro Point), and which took as its inspiration Amiri Baraka's "Black Dada Nihilismus." He highlighted how Dada's "slipperiness" allowed for spaces of discourse between cultures and time.

Report written by Nichole Neuman

**Emily Dreyfus** is a Ph.D. candidate in Germanic Studies at the University of Chicago and an active musician. She holds a joint B.A. in Classics and German from Oxford University and an M.A. in Comparative Literature from the University of Göttingen. Her research interests include audio-visual poetics and the history of cultural politics and mass media in the German-speaking world. She is currently finishing a dissertation on "Popularizing Classical Music in Third Reich Cinema," supported by the German-American Fulbright Commission, the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies (2018–2019) and the DAAD.

**Thomas O. Haakenson** is Associate Professor in Critical Studies and Visual Studies at California College of the Arts in San Francisco and Oakland, USA. Haakenson is co-editor of the book series *Visual Cultures and German Contexts* with Bloomsbury. He has co-edited several anthologies, including *Jürgen Habermas and the European Economic Crisis: Cosmopolitanism Reconsidered* with Gaspare M. Genna and Ian W. Wilson and *Representations of German Identity* with Deborah Ascher Barnstone. Haakenson received numerous awards including a postdoc fellowship from the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies (2003–2004) in which he currently serves as a member of the program's academic advisory board.

**Sara F. Hall** is Associate Professor of Germanic Studies and Studies and Interim Director of the School of Literatures, Cultural Studies and Linguistics at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Hall is an alumna of the Berlin Program 1997–1998 and is currently completing a term on the GSA Executive Board. Her research interests center on international silent film, contemporary German cinema and transnational film markets, and women film pioneers. She has published widely in *German Quarterly*, *German Studies Review*, *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, and *Modernism/Modernity*. Her latest piece, on the aesthetic of pastiche in Babylon Berlin, is forthcoming in the European journal *Communications*.

**Jennifer M. Kapczynski** is Honorary Associate Professor of German at Washington University in St. Louis and an independent scholar, currently pursuing a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology at the Wright Institute in Berkeley, CA. Her research focuses principally on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century literature and film. Her monograph *The German Patient: Crisis and Recovery in Postwar Culture* (2008) examines the importance of illness metaphors in discussions of German guilt after 1945. She has also co-edited three volumes: *Die Ethik der Literatur*, with Paul Michael Lützeler (2011); *A New History of German Cinema*, with Michael D. Richardson (2012); and *Persistent Legacy: German Studies and the Holocaust*, with Erin McGlothlin (2017). Together with Caroline Kita, she is completing the manuscript for a fourth edited volume, *The Arts of Democratization: Styling Political Sensibilities in Postwar West Germany*.

**Johannes von Moltke** is Professor of German and Film, Media and Television at the University of Michigan. His research and teaching focus on film and German cultural history of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. He is the author of *The Curious Humanist: Siegfried Kracauer in America* (2015) and *No Place Like Home: Locations of Heimat in German Cinema* (2005) and has published articles e.g. in *New German Critique*, and *German Studies Review*. Together with Gerd Gemünden von Moltke is the series editor for *Screen Cultures: German Film and the Visual at Camden House*. A Berlin Program Alumnus of 2000–2001, he presently is the President of the GSA and a Senior Fellow at the FRIAS Institute for Advanced Studies at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg.

**Nichole Neuman** is Assistant Professor of German and Hoyt-Reichmann Scholar of German-American Studies and German Language and Culture at Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis where she also serves as the Director of the Max Kade Center. She received her Ph.D. in 2016 from the University of Minnesota, where her doctoral work focused on transnational German cinema. Her recent and forthcoming publications include a chapter on transnational film archives in *Becoming TransGerman: Cultural Identity Beyond Geography* and an article on the emergence of cinema as object of study in the Twin Cities in *The Moving Image*. Nichole was a Max Kade Berlin Postdoctoral Fellow at the Berlin Program 2018–2019.

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