

Heidelberg Center for American Studies

Spring Academy Report

March 19-23, 2018



The 15th annual HCA Spring Academy started on Monday, March 19th, with a reception in the Atrium of the Curt and Heidemarie Engelhorn Palais. Twenty Ph.D. students representing nine different countries and affiliated with institutions in ten countries came together at the HCA to get to know each other over a cup of coffee before the HCA's director Prof. Dr. Welf Werner spoke a few words of welcome. Professor Werner not only pointed out the special opportunity the HCA Spring Academy offers as a place for networking and early cohort formation, he also congratulated the Spring Academy on its fifteenth anniversary by listing quite a number of alumni who are excelling in various fields today. While most of our alumni occupy academic positions in teaching and research, others have built their careers in free enterprise.

The HCA's Executive Director, Dr. Wilfried Mausbach, followed Professor Werner with a brief introduction of the HCA. Pointing out the HCA's three pillars – education, research, and public outreach, he located the Spring Academy within these fields of research. Dr. Mausbach, also known as "Mr. Spring Academy," has been one of the two main facilitators of the conference since the early years of the HCA Spring Academy.

Following a brief reception that offered everyone a chance to mingle, "Ms. Spring Academy," Dr. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, and Dr. Mausbach led the way to the conference venue in order to start the week off with the "Warm-Up" Session. They introduced themselves to the participants and explained about the process of choosing the twenty candidates to present their projects at the Spring Academy 2018. Subsequently, the (in)famous cowbell announced the start of "academic speed dating," an exercise with a long tradition at the Spring Academy, in which the participants explain their Ph.D. projects to each other blazingly fast. This was followed by an extended discussion of "What is/are American Studies?," where the group tried to connect different key words as umbrella terms for all the projects to be presented throughout the week. Suggestions included "transformation," "identity," "intermediality," and "positionality." The terms "change" and "transformation" provided for an extensive discussion, as Dorothea Fischer-Hornung stated, "research often has to anticipate what is not there yet." Martin Fernandez-Fernandez blamed a lot of the change on the role of social media and drew a connection to the way in which their generation constructs their identity through social media. While Agnese Marino argued that she and the others belonged to a "generation of a transition period," which does not have one certain identity as it was, for example, for the generation of the 1960's, Jiann-

Chyng Tu disagreed by stating that there are many direct standpoints our generation brings forth, as for example the “Black Lives Matter”-movement. “Movement,” “Protest,” and “Social conflict” then became other terms that were mentioned in the debate. “Class” and “Gender” were not represented on the bulletin board, which came as a surprise to Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, though Wilfried Mausbach’s answer to this is that the triad race – class – gender has been replaced by a focus on blue-collar culture versus the elites. Considering American Studies from the standpoint of professionals, Mikkel Jensen directed the conversation towards the differences between teaching American Studies in Europe and in the United States. The collected terms were revisited at the end of the week.

The first panel, entitled “(Bio-)Sketching the United States,” was chaired by Dr. Tobias Endler, himself a Spring Academy alumnus and a political scientist at the HCA. Sophie Joscelyne from the University of Sussex, UK, focused her presentation on “The Totalitarian Disease: The American Intellectual Left, Body Politics, and the Image of America in the World from the Cold War to the War on Terror.” Sophie argued that while totalitarianism has been the enemy of the United States ever since the 1930’s, the rise of right wing populism in Europe and the election of Donald Trump pose a need to revisit and to revise the concept of totalitarianism. She does so in her dissertation by focusing on the social protests of the 1960’s and the activism following 9/11. For her argumentation, Sophie relies on the works of activist Eldridge Cleaver and the author Norman Mailer.

The panel’s second speaker was Mirjam Grewe-Salfeld, who came to us from Potsdam University, Germany, introducing parts of her Ph.D. project on “Do-It-Yourself.” In her presentation entitled “With My Own Two Hands – Do-It-Yourself Biology and the American Maker” Mirjam spoke about how the American principle of individualism leads to the trend of the body becoming a project that aims at perfection. Mirjam argued that DIY is a movement with political and social power and with cultural value, as it has become part of our everyday life. DIY-biology, therefore, tries to take biology out of the laboratories and open it up for everyone, ranging from making fluorescing colors to analyzing one’s own DNA. In addition to highlighting the downsides of DIY-biology, Mirjam argued that fundamental American values such as individualism and exceptionalism pathed the way for the DIY-movement.

After a brief coffee break, Agnese Marino, an Italian Ph.D. candidate at the HCA, started the second panel on “Living Cosmopolitanism,” which was again chaired by Tobias Endler. In her presentation on “The Loving Generation and the Cosmopolitan Identity,” Agnese presented the backbone of her dissertation project on “Performative Cosmopolitanism and Mixed-Race Contemporary Autobiography.” After the group watched a clip from the documentary *The Loving Generation*, Agnese argued that the children of mixed-race parents represented in the documentary do not identify as such, but rather as either black or white. Agnese stated that external and internal identification co-exist but

are not really dealt with in society. However, especially since Barack Obama became the first mixed-race president of the United States, she sees a trend of self-declared mixed-race Americans who are politically active and try to promote mixed-race collaboration instead of a post-racial society.

Chiann-Chyng Tu, a Taiwanese native at Humboldt University Berlin, Germany, concluded the first day of the conference with his presentation on "The Transnational Self and Cosmopolitan Imaginary: Romance, Germany, and the Postwar African American Novel, 1948-2016." In his talk, he focused on his analysis of William Gardner Smith's novel "The Last of the Conquerors" (1948), an autobiographical account of the author's experience as black GI serving in a segregated army in the American sector of Germany after WWII. In his discussion of the novel, Chiann-Chyng argues that the main character feels he finds himself in a "colorblind" society for the first time during his stay in Germany, and he sees the post-war Berlin, depicted in Smith's novel, as a utopian place with traces of a cosmopolitan city.

Tuesday's session began with "Discovering America: Intersections of Media and Literature" chaired by Dorothea Fischer-Hornung. Mikkel Jensen from Aalborg University, Denmark, presented his Ph.D. project on "David Simon's American City" for which analyses of Simon's TV series "The Corner," "The Deuce," "Show me a Hero," "Treme" and "The Wire" build the corpus. Mikkel argued that Simon is one of the most prominent "showrunners" of the time, combining creative power and administrative power in his role as writer-producer, who is not only head of the writer's room but also present on the set. After explaining his approaches to the analyses of the series, Mikkel introduced the group to his positioning of Simon's productions in the context of U.S. urban history. Especially Simon's most famous show, "The Wire" (2002-2008), produced in Baltimore, touches on a number of urban issues, including interconnectedness, deindustrialization, suburbanization, and the war on drugs.

The day's second speaker, Adriano Tedde, spoke about "Paul Auster, Jim Jarmusch, Tom Waits: Looking for America in books, movies, and songs." Adriano, an Italian Ph.D. candidate at the University of Brisbane, Australia, focused his project on the idols of his childhood. He argues that all of the artists he studies – Auster, Jarmusch, and Waits – use the same storyline in their works and portray a picture of America that is different from the mainstream idea of the country. In his research question, which he tried to answer partially in his presentation at the Spring Academy, Adriano asked how the three artists participate in the public debate on social justice and the failure of the American Dream. Adriano argued that through the works he analyses, he looks at the American society from the bottom up, celebrating the common man and basing the American Dream on values other than wealth and financial stability. In the discussion following the presentation, the group went on to discuss other themes of the works apart from the American Dream, including masculinity and the "foreign element."

In panel 4, we had a look at “U.S. Military History from the Bottom Up,” which was chaired by Wilfried Mausbach. Krysten Blackstone, who came to us from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, spoke about “The Day We Have Been in an Uproar: Tensions and the Creation of the Continental Army.” In this part of her Ph.D. project, Krysten discussed the role of morale in the formation of the continental army, which she defined as “the willingness and ability of an individual or group to endure the hardships of war.” Krysten explained General George Washington’s struggle to unite the thirteen colonies in one unified army to fight against the common enemy, Great Britain. She considered the continental army neither an American nor a European one, but rather a fusion of both. Krysten argued that although morale was not a key concern at the beginning of the Revolutionary War, Washington succeeded in creating a national spirit on the grounds of morale, for example through the establishment of military camps for the education of otherwise unexperienced soldiers.

James Brookes from the University of Nottingham, UK, concluded panel 4 with his presentation on “A Most Horrid Picture: Soldier-Artists and the Civil War Combat Experience.” In his project, James analyses images of the Civil War that show a different picture of the war than the ones that could be found in newspapers, as he focuses on the rather negative, more realistic images of the war created by soldiers at the front. This “new visual language,” James argued, gave soldier-artists a way to draw an emotional picture of the combat experience, to handle trauma, and to call upon the imagination of the spectators to imagine the war. In his presentation, James showed the group two paintings by soldier-artists, which were not chosen to be distributed to the public as they threatened the “positive” representation of war by the elites. In the following discussion, James added that such works were mostly created to be sent home to the soldiers’ families, but they have become an educational tool after the war.

The second day of the 15th Spring Academy concluded with a workshop on “Academic Writing and Publishing,” led by Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Dr. Sherry Föhr. Participants were given tips and motivational instructions on writing their theses by Sherry Föhr who used to facilitate the Writing Resources Center in the English Seminar of Heidelberg University and is considered a “true genius” by many Spring Academy cohorts. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung shared her expertise in the publishing world as a co-editor of a scholarly journal. The workshop proved effective and instructive to participants.

We concluded the second day with a walking tour through Heidelberg with Kristian Willenbacher. Snowflakes rounded up the experience of German Romanticism in Heidelberg’s Old Town, where Kristian shared informative stories about the city’s romantic history. The evening ended with a traditional German meal at a restaurant in the Old Town.

Wednesday’s first panel “Transing the USA” was chaired by Dorothea Fischer-Hornung. Ewa Scibior from the University of Warsaw, Poland, talked about “Hypermasculinity and Drag in American

Literature of the 1970's." Since the 1969 Stonewall rebellion in Greenwich Village, New York, the gay liberation movement has fought against homophobia in the United States. In her project, Ewa focuses on the author John Rechy, whose autobiographical fiction novels served as a kind of manifesto for the gay liberation movement in the 1970's. As examples from the text showed, the hustlers in Rechy's works acted straight and embraced the looks of hypermasculinity as a form of self-protection. Ewa argued that Rechy's emphasis on masculinity, however, was one of the main problems in the gay liberation movement, as it limited acceptable roles of the gay community by internalizing the hetero-social order. In a brief comparison, Ewa explained the similarities she sees in the gender identities of hustlers and drag queens, not only visually, but also as outcasts of the social order who long for admiration.

Simon Whybrew from the University of Graz, Austria, concluded the panel with their talk on "Reclaiming Trans-Histories: Affects of Becoming Trans in Contemporary U.S. Science Fiction." In this chapter of their presentation, Simon analyses Kim Stanley Robinson's SciFi novel *2312*. Simon notes that it was only in the 1990's that literature began to discuss transsexuality as an option for humans, before that, intersex characters were often portrayed as aliens or the like. Simon argues that the novel presents sex-modification as a means of preserving physical health and explains how time-travel plays another major role in the novel. In a lively discussion after the talk, the group discussed the participation of texts in genres and the transgression of genres, which turned out to be an interesting link to Simon's project.

Following panel 5, the Spring Academy participants were escorted to Mannheim for a private tour of the John Deere Europe factory. As sponsor of the Spring Academy, John Deere not only supports the program financially but also underlines the company's success as one of the greatest American-German partnerships in manufacturing. After a light reception and a warm welcome and introduction by Public Relations and Brand Management Manager, Dr. Ralf Lenge, the group was led on a walking tour of the main factory to see the extensive operations of this American company in Germany.

After returning to the HCA, Wilfried Mausbach chaired the last panel of the day on "American Spaces: Classical Gardens and Urban Parks in U.S. Intellectual and Social History." Steve Gallo from the University of Nottingham, UK, presented his project on "'From an Eyeshore to a Thing of Beauty': Public Parks and Race in Postbellum Richmond." In his thesis, Steve examines the South's adoption of the urban park model that was first popularized in Northern cities. For his presentation, he focused his research on Richmond, Virginia, especially the neighborhood of Chimborazo, where the white population feared the loss of their supremacy in the years following the Civil War. Racial tensions and the absence of police stations in the city flared tempers between the black and white communities. As Steve argued, whites used public spaces to promote behaviors they considered appropriate, so the

white Richmond community purchased 35 acres of Chimborazo hill, populated by blacks, in order to remodel the area into a public park for whites only. Steve argued that apart from seeing parks as urban aesthetic, they are created in order to fulfil a desired ideal, like, in the case of Richmond, removing the black population in order to restore white supremacy.

Alley Jordan from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, concluded the day with a talk about "Beautiful shells from the shore": Thomas Jefferson's Sacred Grotto of 1771." Alley defined a Grotto as a place of escape, purification, and worship. Thomas Jefferson, who was highly influenced by the gardens he saw on his travels to Europe in the late 1780's, used the garden as a place of spiritual and intellectual retreat. Alley argued that in his imaginary garden, Jefferson took his visitors on a spiritual journey from ignorance to enlightenment.

On Thursday, we started the program with panel 7 on "Remembering, Recalling, and Reviving American History," chaired by Wilfried Mausbach. Sarah Sporys from Freiburg University, Germany, started the panel with her project on "The Construction of Transatlantic Memory – Conceptual Considerations." Sarah defined memory as a socially constructed analytic tool and she shares Halbwach's separation of historical memory and collective memory. In her talk, Sarah presented the theoretical background of her Ph.D. thesis, in which she analyses the influence of collective or transnational memory on transnational politics. Sarah argues that for example NATO is more than a political alliance, but also represents a certain "transatlantic" identity, which is chosen or has derived from a shared historical memory.

The panel's second speaker was Martin Fernandez-Fernandez, who came to us from the University of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Martin presented his project "Through the Lens of Trauma: The Emmett Till Case in U.S. Literature." He bases his dissertation on trauma studies, arguing that the Emmett Till case caused trauma for the whole African American community. The murder of Emmett Till, a black teenager from Chicago who was killed in Mississippi in 1955 after a white woman accused him of offending her at a grocery store, became the inspiration for a great number of works in the years to follow. Martin's research examines the fictional novel "Wolf Whistle" (1993) by Lewis Norman in the context of trauma studies, as he argues that the field of study helps the study of literature and vice versa.

After a short coffee break, panel 8 on "Images of the Turn-of-the-Nineteenth-Century Female" was introduced by Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and started off by Juliet Conway from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Juliet spoke about "Disoriented and Disillusioned: The Flirt as an Emblem of the Lost Generation," positioning literature of from the 1870s to the 1920s at the center of her research. For her Spring Academy presentation, Juliet analyzed the character of the "flapper," who embodies the woman of the "Roaring Twenties." Writings of the Lost Generation often use the theme of depression

and disillusion, for example in Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" or in Anita Loos' "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" (1925), which Juliet presented to the group. Juliet argues that the female main character Lorelei Lee not only represents the "New Woman" of the 1920's, but ensures her position in power of men by flirting. The flapper in literature also conflicted with the idea of masculinity in the Twenties, demasculating gentlemen through strong female characters.

Christine Bachman-Sanders, University of Minnesota, USA, concluded the panel with her presentation on "Time, Space, and Bicycle Travel: The Queer Archive and Mapping Anachronistic Histories." In her project, Christine revises the feminist liberation through bicycle travel with a focus on tactility and queer temporality for her Spring Academy presentation. Her case study derived from the diary of a female cyclist, which offers a rich glimpse of cycling culture and which Christine examines with the help of queer analysis. However, the use of "queer" in her study is non-sexual but rather used as a methodology with which she hopes to read the diary against the common narrative. Christine argues that queer time helps defining anachronistic approaches to history. Interestingly, Christine has cycled the route the diary depicts herself.

The next panel in our tight schedule "The Politics of Spaces and Places in Metropolitan America" was chaired by Prof. Dr. Ulrike Gerhard from Heidelberg University's Department of Geography. Michael Savage from the University of Toronto, Canada, presented his topic "Tactical Metropolitanism: The Politics of Metropolitan School Desegregation in the American North in the 1960s and 1970s." Michael argued that the "tactical metropolitanism" approach aimed at the same goals as segregation but by different means, which he bases on case studies in Detroit, Boston, and Philadelphia. With tactical metropolitanism, Michael explained, quotas for schools were set according to their racial composition and therefore legalized de facto segregation. With his choice of case studies, Michael wants to bring the North into the Civil Rights discussion.

Jeremy Williams, a British native from Free University Berlin, Germany, finished off the last panel of the day with his presentation on "Between the Idea and the Reality: New Public Spaces in the United States." Jeremy's primary case study is "The High Line" in New York City, a hugely popular public park, which serves as ground zero for spectacle techno-capitalism. Jeremy defines new public spaces, among other features, as socially controlled, with an externally defined purpose and a private element, a spectacle and performance. With his project, Jeremy hopes to influence conversations, which materially affect how public space is built, conceptualized, and managed – both, in the academic and the non-academic context.

After the sessions concluded, the participants had the chance to partake in a one-on-one consultation with Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Sherry Föhr to speak about individual issues concerning writing and publishing.

As 2018 marked the 15th anniversary of the HCA Spring Academy, in the evening the Spring Academy facilitators cordially invited all participants, as well as staff and students of the HCA, to gather at the HCA's Atrium. The HCA was especially honored to welcome Klaus Seibold of the John Deere company, as well as their former Public Relations and Brand Management Manager Oliver Neumann, with whom the Spring Academy worked together closely for many years.

In preparation of this event, the team has invited former Spring Academy participants to the HCA and we were happy to welcome back Paul Musslewhite, 2010 alumnus and now assistant professor of history at Dartmouth College, Katharina Gerund, 2009 alumna, who is in the process of writing her habilitation at University Erlangen-Nuremburg, and Bryan Banker, alumnus of Spring Academy 2014, who teaches at a private university in Munich while finishing his dissertation. To acknowledge the success of the past fourteen conferences, Wilfried Mausbach showed pictures of how the setting changed over the years, and he welcomed all former Spring Academy team members who came together at the HCA for the event. Long-time Spring Academy coordinator Katia Rostetter joined our three alumni on the podium, where they discussed "The Future of American Studies," with Dorothea Fischer-Hornung as moderator. Afterwards, the guests got a chance to continue the discussion during a reception.

The last day of the conference started off with a workshop on "Why 'Birth of a Nation' (1915) is Still Relevant in American Politics: Political Film and the Social Construction of U.S. History," facilitated by our visiting scholar Dr. Frank Rusciano from Rider University, USA. Frank deconstructed the film in his talk, noting the importance of film as a kind of political advertisement. The group then engaged in a heated discussion covering a wide range of topics, clearly reflecting the relevance "Birth of a Nation" still has today.

After lunch, the tenth and last panel on "Nature Between Exploitation, Activism, and Reimagination" was chaired by Dorothea Fischer-Hornung. Robert Oxford from the University of Texas at Austin, USA, introduced to us his project on "Fracking Texas: Activism and Critiques of the 21st Century Oil and Gas Industry Along the Supply Chain." Robert's thesis developed out of his interest in tracking the fracking movement in Texas, and he now studies environmental justice in a form of environmental racism, though his study focuses on urban regions and whites living close to fracking areas. After outlining the environmental effects of fracking, Robert argued that whiteness denotes cleanliness, but with climate change, the stability of whiteness is challenged.

The last speaker of this year's Spring Academy was Noemi Quagliati, an Italian Ph.D. candidate at Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich, Germany. Noemi presented her project on "Wildness in the time of Photography: An Itinerary in the Modern Representation of Nature." She started her presentation with a video she produced herself, which shows different representations of nature,

leading to her main question of how the representation of nature has changed throughout the past decades. Noemi argued that the wilderness is central to America but at the same time the exploitation of the land made the country the leading force in economy it is today. With examples of different photograph exhibitions, Noemi visualized the change in the representation of American nature since the 1940's, ranging from seeing "the quintessence of the thing" to criticizing the American treatment of nature.

To conclude the conference, Friday's "Cool Down" Session referred back to the collected key terms from the beginning of the week. The group added "collaboration"/"outreach," "intersectionality," "innovative connections," "affect"/"emotion," and "spatiality"/"space/place" to the collection of "What is/are American Studies?" on the bulletin board. However, "race" and "class" were still excluded from the discussion! In a brief feedback round, the participants thanked the team and facilitators for the interesting and enlightening week. After Ms. and Mr. Spring Academy fulfilled their last duty for this year by handing out the certificates, the HCA invited the participants to a farewell dinner at a prestigious German restaurant to celebrate another successful HCA Spring Academy.

Franziska Pentz