

Heidelberg Center for American Studies

## **Spring Academy Report**

*March 14-18, 2016*

The 13<sup>th</sup> annual Spring Academy started on March 14<sup>th</sup> with a reception in the Atrium of the Curt and Heidemarie Engelhorn Palais. Twenty Ph.D. students affiliated with institutions in eleven countries and representing thirteen different nationalities were welcomed by the HCA's founding director Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Junker. Professor Junker, who pointed out the special opportunity the Spring Academy offers as a place for networking and early cohort formation.

Following Professor Junker's address on behalf of the HCA, the university's Vice Dean for International Relations, Professor Dr. Dieter Heermann welcomed the conference participants on behalf of Heidelberg University. Highlighting the internationality of the participants, Professor Heermann pointed out how the group was a perfect example of the university's aim to continue and to expand its international orientation. Touching upon the importance of the Spring Academy as an intellectually stimulating occasion for collaboration across disciplines, he encouraged the participants to not just reach across disciplinary boundaries within the humanities and social sciences but to widen their scope to include the natural sciences. In light of the beautiful spring weather, he suggested that a first step in this direction could be taken by physically crossing the bridge to the other side of the Neckar river, where Heidelberg University's science campus is located. Professor Heermann concluded his address encouraging the conference participants to not just make the most of their time during the panels, but to use the time in-between the sessions to network with their peers.

Dr. Wilfried Mausbach, the HCA's Executive Director, and one of the two facilitator of the Spring Academy, followed Professor Heermann 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 the research pillars.

Following a brief reception that afforded everyone the chance to mingle and meet Dr. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Dr. Mausbach the Warm-Up Session commenced. Brief introductions by all participants were followed by rapid-fire summaries of their Ph.D. projects as part of an ice-breaker. This was followed by an extended discussion of American Studies,

exploring the uniting /connecting issue as umbrella term for all the projects presented throughout the week. Suggestions included “Race & Ethnicity,” “From Margin to Center,” “Representation ‘What is American?’ and “Past and Present.” The discussion centered on the issue of the future of the field of American Studies and tried to grasp new developments within the humanities, be it the way of doing research or the subject that is being researched. Dr. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung also pointed out a general trend toward dismantling rather than establishing American Studies departments and Dr. Wilfried Mausbach added that especially in Germany the field of American Studies is usually attached to English departments. The question about the future of American Studies thus remained. General trends and changes within science have been pointed out by several participants. Martina Koegeler-Abdi argued that Gender and Race Studies have shifted to Cultural Studies that are now becoming transnational. She thus emphasized the decline of the nation state itself and stressed the internationality of scientific approaches, especially in the field of American Studies. Dragos Manea observed that many scholars have now moved out of old-school Literary Studies. This leaves more room for the expansion of other subjects that are also now considered legitimate subjects, such as Film Studies or Graphic Novels. A shift towards new subjects can also be observed among the participants of the conference. Even though the discussion did not end with a conclusion as to where the field of American Studies is heading, the participants agreed on a shift toward the importance of the inter-national and interdisciplinary focus of American Studies.

The first panel, entitled “Comics and Graphic Novels,” was chaired by Dr. Fischer-Hornung. The panel addressed new trends in American Studies that were discussed during the opening session. Malgorzata Olsza (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland) focused in her presentation “The Reader/Viewer in the Graphic Novel: Reading Through Sequentiality” on the verbal/ visual gap within Graphic Novels and stressed the role of the reader/viewer who is, through sequentiality, more involved in comics than in films. In comics the reader does not have to follow the already prepared road but can individually decide when to move on from one page to another. Ranthild Salzer (University of Vienna, Austria) followed Olsza with a presentation on “Superhero Comics: (Re)Negotiating American Masculine Identities since 1938” in which she focused on the representations of manhood versus masculinity. The grounds of her research is Kimmel’s statement that the hegemonic definition of manhood is “a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power.” Salzer determined that the posterchild of hegemonic masculinity in American comics was the superhero masculinity. She contrasted

masculine characteristics with biological factors. Both contribute to the creation of manhood and masculinity.

Tuesday's session began with "Trauma and War" chaired by Dr. Tobias Endler. First to speak was Loredana Bercuci (University de Vest Timisoara, Romania) on "Graphic Trauma: The Demands of Visuality on the Representation of Trauma in Graphic Memoirs." In her dissertation she makes the claim that representations of trauma in the 21<sup>st</sup> century tend to be autobiographical and have created a new trauma aesthetics. During her presentation she focused on the example of "Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic" by Alison Bechdel to describe the two existing types of trauma, namely insidious (the everyday trauma) and punctual trauma (for example are blast). She concluded that the trauma always happens somewhere "in the gutter" separating the images and if it is represented visually it is allegorical. The day's second speaker was James Clark (York University, Canada), who gave a presentation on "From Historic Event to Global Discourse: The Impact of 9/11 on Canadian War Writing." Due to the global reach of the U.S.A. culturally and politically, it has influenced the discourse concerning 9/11 around the world. The U.S. narrative has to be adapted to other cultures as well. Clark identifies several features in the Canadian discourse that link it to the American: In Canada the perception was that Canada was also attacked on 9/11 and because of its significance as a key ally to the U.S. was part of the response to 9/11. Based on these assumptions he analyzed captivity narratives, news sources, letters and emails as well as governmental documents in order to demonstrate that the shift in Canadian identification after 9/11 is visible in a wide range of cultural artefacts, no matter the medium.

After a brief coffee break, Mishio Yamanaka (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA), began the third panel on "Creole Culture" with "Racial Desegregation, Social Equality and Creoles of Color in Post-Civil War New Orleans: A Case Study of Public Schools." Yamanaka aims to show that desegregation was not only seen as a twentieth century idea of racial equality, but it developed as a new racial vision among African Americans during Reconstruction. She identifies schools and education as a means to establish racial equality and calls it the key to racial harmony. Due to several legislative steps, New Orleans started desegregating schools. The number of desegregated schools rose steadily from only 4 in 1871 to 29 in 1877. Yamanaka claimed that there are numerous case studies on the Jim Crow Era that show that desegregation existed but had not been legalized yet. She pointed out that the ethnic community of creoles might have had an advantage over blacks in demanding desegregation. Marie Demars (University Paul Valéry-Montpellier III, France) followed

Yamanaka with a presentation on “At the Crossroads: South Louisiana Creoles, Music and Technology.” She emphasized the importance of preserving Creole Culture with a special focus on zydeco, an accordion-driven musical genre combining traditional French music and blues. She also analyzes the role played by new technologies and social media in the preservation of Creole culture and identity. This process, she argued, challenges the dichotomies between rural and urban, tradition and modernity, by systematically deconstructing stereotypes.

The fourth and final session on Tuesday revolved around the theme of “Religion” and was chaired by Prof. Jan Stievermann. The session’s first speaker, Ryan Hoselton (Heidelberg University, Germany), introduced the participants to Cotton Mather’s and Jonathan Edwards’ experiential interpretive approach in defining their exegetical emphases and conclusions and how this shaped the identity of the evangelical movement in America. His presentation, “Religious Experience and Early Evangelical Biblical Interpretation: A Case Study”, allowed Hoselton to stress the importance of reason and the need for religious and spiritual knowledge in order to understand and interpret the scriptures, going along with Jonathan Edwards who viewed the scripture as a spiritual narrative. The final speaker of the day was Jennifer Callaghan (Northwestern University, USA) on “‘Our Pulpits Propose It for Them’: The Politics of Language in Chicago’s Liturgical Reforms, 1963-1969.” Callaghan stressed the importance of the problematic translation and the policing of the conversation between religious and political speech. She used an interdisciplinary approach between different disciplines: Religious Studies, American Religious History and American Catholic Studies to explore her topic more thoroughly.

The second day concluded with a traditional German meal at a historic German restaurant in the Old Town, followed by a guided walking tour with the “Night Watchman” as historical tour guide.

Wednesday’s first session, “Native Americans”, was chaired by Dr. Wilfried Mausbach. Augustin Habran (Paris Diderot University, France) gave a presentation on “Redefining Indianness in the 1820s: The Southeastern Nation’s Re-Activation of “Strategic Mimesis.” Coining the term of “strategic mimesis” as an adoption of American, maybe even Southern, core values and thus redefining Indianness, Habran claimed that Indians took on Southern and Republican traits and through this “resistance through acculturation” managed to become central participants in the making of the Early American Republic and the West in the Antebellum Period. Habran explained that by re-activating the strategic mimesis Indians strategically changed their role to be regarded as “civilized.” The panel concluded with Baligh

Ben Taleb's (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA) presentation on the dialectic between settler colonialism and truth and reconciliation. His talk, "The Awards of the Indian Claims Commission and the Grievances of American Settler Colonialism in the Great Plains," examined the impact of the Indian Claims Commission (ICC) on the Plains Indians and concluded that the ICC offered a more substantive reconciliation effort than more recent initiatives in other countries. It also focused on historic land cessions which is the crucible of American settler colonialism.

The panel on Wednesday concluded with a workshop on "Academic Writing and Publishing," led by Dr. Fischer-Hornung and Dr. Sherry Föhr. Participants were given tips and motivational instructions on writing their theses by Dr. Föhr who facilitated the Writing Resources Center in the English Seminar of Heidelberg University. Dr. 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. Afterwards they were offered the opportunity to make an appointment for an individual consultation on either writing or publishing.

Following the final workshop for the day, the Spring Academy participants were then 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 displays their success with participants as one of the greatest American-German partnerships in manufacturing. Following a warm welcome and introduction by Public Relations and Brand Management Manager, Dr. Oliver Neumann, the group was led on a walking tour of the main factory to see the extensive operations of this American company in Germany. Back in the visitor's center, the group was treated to a light snacks and were able to have pictures taken standing next to or sitting in a large trademark tractor.

Dr. Fischer Hornung introduced Thursday's first session, "Gender and the Immigrant Experience." The day's first presentation was Martina Koegeler-Abdi's (University of Copenhagen, Denmark) talk on "Rediscovering Rosemary Hakim: The Adaptive Agency of Miss Lebanon-America 1955", in which she exemplified one of the six cases studies concerning Arab American Womanhood she outlined in her dissertation. Her main sources for her case study on Rosemary Hakim are her non-published memoirs that between the lines reveal a lot about transnational history. Hakim, Miss Lebanon America 1955, uses her status to engage in transnational Arab American politics when she is invited to the Lebanon by the government after her nomination. The sixth panel ended with Eva Pelayo Sanudo (University of Oviedo, Spain) and her presentation entitled, "Herstory Sagas: Cultural Memory and Pictorial

Genealogies” focusing on female Italian American production within the genre of the saga. The methodology she used is feminist, intersectional narratology with which she aims at exploring immigration that has been missing in Italian historiography in recent years. Sanudo will analyze if memory and especially memory linked to immigration is important in these narratives.

After a brief coffee break, the seventh panel, chaired by Dr. Tobias Endler, “Germany and the U.S.”, was started by Lara-Zuzan Golesorkhi (The New School for Social Research, USA) with her presentation on “State-Islam Relations in Contemporary Germany and the US: When Muslim Immigration and Secularization Meet.” Golesorkhi aims at exploring the two different Muslim practices, namely prayer in the public education sector and clothing in the public employment sector. By adapting a comparative approach between Germany and the U.S., Golesorkhi wants to find out how Muslim immigration has affected the relationship between religion and the state in Germany and the US as well as how the state has organized state-religion relations for Islam and what the effects are on secularization. The second speaker of this panel, “Kaete O’Connell (Temple University, USA) gave a presentation on “Hungry for Democracy: Humanitarianism and the U.S. Occupation of Germany”, analyzing the impact of U.S. food relief in occupied Germany. The German hunger in the post-war period was soon acknowledged as presenting a serious obstacle to peace and thus the power of food relief in occupied Germany as a diplomatic tool was realized. To support her argument O’Connell mainly focused on imagery of food relief with an emphasis on children as recipients of food aid.

After lunch, Associate Professor of English at Northwestern University, Dr. Ivy Wilson, was introduced by Dr. Fischer Hornung. Dr. Wilson chaired the final panel for the day on “Race and State Power.” Rosemary Pearce (University of Nottingham, GB) presented ““The Movement on Wheels’: Emotional Displays in Protesting Segregated Transport,” in which she focused on the emotions displayed and felt by both black and white individuals during nonviolent challenges to segregated transportation. Pearce concluded that although the emotions that were hidden or expressed as part of these nonviolent challenges did not really change between 1947 and 1961, the intended audience or consumers of those emotions did shift focus, from passengers and segregationists to outside observers. The last presentation of the day was given by Nora Krinitzky (University of Michigan, USA) on “Fighting the Third Degree: Police Violence and Critique in Interwar Chicago.” Her dissertation focuses on the building of the American coercive state from the end of World War I through the interwar decades, while in her presentation she concentrated on Chicago as the site of analysis for the

transformations in modern American history and their relationship to crime control. She outlines the role of the NAACP when taking over police brutality cases. Even though they tried to get as much money as possible for their clients, namely individual restitution, they faced considerable obstacles during the process.

Friday morning began with the ninth panel chaired by Dr. Wilfried Mausbach on “Human Rights”. Rasmus Soendergaard (University of Southern Denmark) presented first on “The (Ab)Use of Human Rights: Executive-Legislative Struggles over U.S. Policy towards Nicaragua in the 1980s”, answering the question of whether Congress advocated for a larger role of human rights in U.S. foreign policy. In his presentation he focused on the Reagan administration and its Central America policy, arguing that the promotion of human rights in Nicaragua was a tool for the promotion of democracy and for gaining public and congressional support for U.S. foreign policy. Thus, Soendergaard argues, human rights became an important frame for the Reagan administration in seeking legitimacy for its Nicaragua policy. Sarah Earnshaw (Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Germany) followed Soendergaard with a presentation on “Humanising Security: The Constitution of Global Order.” In her dissertation Earnshaw aims to open up a “history of the present” of U.S. post-Cold War foreign policy and security practices. She criticizes the fabrication of a vision of international order, created by a framework of rights that is defined as secure and peaceful, defining the opposite as barbarous and insecure.

After a brief coffee break, Dr. Ivy Wilson (Northwestern University, USA) facilitated a workshop on “Trans/Locality and Hip Hop; or The Roots and Routes of an American Culture”, in which he tried to recover the genealogy of blackness by tracing it to West Africa and comparing images from Ethiopians and Egyptians to modern images of urbanized African-Americans in the United States. He stresses the importance of music, especially Hip Hop and Jazz, in the identity formation of blacks in Africa and the United States.

After lunch, the 10<sup>th</sup> and final panel on “Television”, chaired by Dr. Fischer-Hornung, began with a presentation by Oscar Winberg (Abo Akademi, Finland) on “Liberal Disruption: How *All in the Family* Became the Most Watched Show on Television. Winberg argued that even though the show *All in the Family* was not an immediate success on television, it highlighted political arguments in a way television previously had shied away from. Winberg aimed at exploring conservatism and its discourses on entertainment television and thus uses *All in the Family* to explore the portrayal of economic politics and economic paradigm shifts of the 1970s. The last presentation of the day was given by Dragos Manea (University of

Bucharest, Romania) on “The Afterlives of Ichabod Crane: *Sleepy Hollow* (NCB, 2013--) and American Cultural Memory,” exploring the ways in which historical fantasy can serve to reconcile audiences to pre-existing hegemonic narratives and practices. During the presentation he outlined one of his case studies, namely the numerous adaptations of *Sleepy Hollow*, implying that every adaptation is more than just a representation of the source text but an expression of the current society. Thus, the transformation of Crane through different adaptations of the story imply the historical evolution of his character as well as which character traits became more dominant over time. The adaptations of the show thus show the evolution of Crane’s identity which reflects the image society has of him.

To conclude the conference, Friday’s “Cool Down” session started out with a feedback section and prompted new questions about the direction of American Studies. New key words about what American Studies is were added to the ones collected in Monday’s warm-up session: “identity,” “adaptation,” “gender,” “struggle,” and “emotion” were among the many new concepts. The participants concentrated on new developments of the field, tying on ideas brought up in Monday’s session. Many concluded that literature is losing its importance with an increase in visual cultures. They also outlined that many projects now focused on the unspoken or unportrayed, trying to fill in gaps in this field. After the cool down session, the HCA hosted a farewell dinner in honor of the participants, who contributed to another successful Spring Academy.

Stella Müller