



# THE BERLIN JOURNAL

A Magazine from the American Academy in Berlin  
Number Thirty-Two Fall 2018

## CELEBRATING TWENTY YEARS OF FELLOWSHIPS

**REVITALIZING PUBLIC DISCOURSE**  
by Michael Sandel

**DEATH AND THE MINER**  
by Rosalind C. Morris

**ARTIST PORTFOLIO**  
Lucy Raven

**BECOMING A WHITE MAN**  
by P. Carl

**AFROFUTURISM**  
by Priscilla Layne

**THE YOUNG MAN  
WHO SELLS ANTIQUES**  
Fiction by Jesse Ball

We are deeply  
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for his generous support  
of this issue of the *Berlin Journal*.

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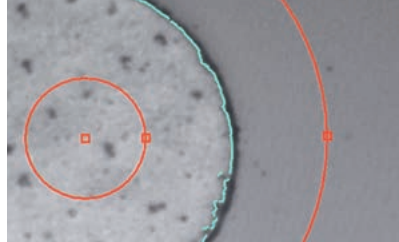
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## THE BERLIN JOURNAL

Number Thirty-Two,  
Fall 2018

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**EDITOR** R. Jay Magill, Jr.  
**MANAGING EDITOR** Sophie Maaß  
**ADVERTISING** Berit Ebert  
**DESIGN** Susanna Dulkyns,  
Julia Sysmäläinen

Copyright © 2018  
American Academy in Berlin  
ISSN 1610-6490

**COVER IMAGE** Kim Keever, *Abstract 10550*, 2014. Courtesy of Winston Wachter Fine Art, Seattle, USA

Printed by Ruksaldruck, Berlin

The Berlin Journal App



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# PRESIDENT'S NOTE

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## Looking About in Foreign Nations

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**"I AM MORE** and more convinced that poetry is the universal possession of mankind," Goethe said, in 1827. "I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same." This quote, as recorded by his secretary Johann Peter Eckermann, signals the beginning of *Weltliteratur*, according to Martin Puchner, the Academy's spring 2019 John P. Birkelund Fellow. In the later years of his life, Goethe was reading books from countries as far apart as China, Persia, and Serbia. "The era of world literature is at hand," he said.

It would be more than a century later before the *Norton Anthology of World Literature* was first published, in the United States, after World War II. Since then, millions of students in the US have read its selections of writers from "foreign nations," and have followed Goethe's advice to "look about" themselves. Puchner, the current editor of the *Norton Anthology of World Literature*, now in its fourth edition, writes in this issue of the *Berlin Journal* that "no other country I know has embraced world literature, and instituted it in higher education, as fully as the United States." He continues his studies of *Weltliteratur* at the American Academy in Berlin, just 139 miles (223 km) from Goethe's Weimar.

Coming from my previous home, in Los Angeles, to start my job as the new president of the Academy, I too am prompted to "look about me in foreign nations." The headlines are ominous. Transatlantic relations are apparently at an all-time low. A new world order is mooted. But when one looks a little further afield, at the challenges both the US and Germany face from an assertive Russia, an economically expansionist China, and a violence-plagued Middle East, the differences between Berlin and Washington, DC, tend to look less stark.

As a former foreign correspondent who spent 27 years covering stories from some of the world's least savory destinations, I have learned that today's headlines are, well, today's headlines. It is the mission of the Academy to take note of these headlines, but also to dig deeper into the sub-soil of culture, philosophy, literature, and the arts, where some of the most fundamental questions about human behavior and values originate. The inquiring minds of our resident fellows and visiting speakers help to put into greater context what flashes hysterically across our television screens every day. Most of all, they ask questions, just as the members of the very first Academy, under Plato, asked questions, and learned through discussion and debate.

And so, in this issue of the *Berlin Journal*, Fred Donner questions the historicity of the accepted narrative of Islam's foundation, and writes about the search for evidence in inscriptions, papyrus texts, and coins of what really happened in those crucial years in the seventh century, when a world religion came into being. Haun Saussy looks at how China, which famously lacks a foundational epic like the *Iliad* or the *Mahābhārata*, has recently sought to claim for itself the Tibetan epic of King Gesar, "generally accepted [as] the longest single piece of literature currently in the world canon, encompassing some 120 volumes and about 20 million words." Cultural appropriation—or a newfound appreciation in Han Chinese thinking for *Weltliteratur*? And who knew, apart from Peter Holquist, that it was the Russians, currently the *bêtes noires* of the West for their invasion of Ukraine, who were the prime movers in establishing the codified rules of war at the end of the nineteenth century that we still use today, banning exploding bullets and coining the notion "crimes against humanity"?

And yet . . . Joshua Yaffa visits a former Soviet prison camp in Perm, east of the Urals, and discovers a key difference between Hitler's concentration camps, where prisoners knew why they were killed, and the victims of the Gulags "who died bewildered"—killed for paranoid fictions that nobody really believed.

Not all is gloomy. Jesse Ball has a delightfully whimsical short story about an antiques store where customers must explain why they would like to buy an item before they can pay for it. Such civility! Corneliu Bjola, writing for the Holbrooke Forum, introduces the intriguing concept of the "Machiavelli Trap," humans' seemingly genetic resistance to change, and suggests ways in which digital diplomacy can overcome such resistance and achieve real change when properly applied. And Harvard's Michael Sandel bravely takes on some of the big political problems of our era—income inequality, populism, and a world where robots are taking away jobs from humans.

As I begin my time as president, I look forward to "looking about me" in Berlin and further afield, to starting many new conversations, and to engaging with the fascinating minds that the Academy continues to attract and support.

Terry McCarthy



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## Extraction and Its Afterlives

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Field of Dreams: *Zama Zama* men walking across the Highveld. Still from *We are Zama Zama*. Photo credit: Ebrahim Hajee and Rosalind C. Morris





# FOCUS





# DEATH AND THE MINER

The afterlives of gold  
in South Africa

by Rosalind C. Morris



**F**OR MORE THAN a century, the gold mines of South Africa were the sparkling center of a nation. Today, they are closing. In their ruins, moving along the more than 10,000 kilometers of underground tunnels that traverse the earth beneath the Witwatersrand—a 56-kilometer rocky scarp jutting 200-meters out of the earth—itinerant migrant miners called *zama zamas* scavenge for gold.

Historically, mining in this area depended on capital-intensive mechanization, including drilling, automotive and electrified rail transport, large-scale dewatering and oxygenation, as well as cyanide and mercury-based communion processes and industrial smelting. *Zama zamas* perform all of these functions manually—using only picks, hammers, battery-operated headlamps, and protective

clothing woven from jute sacks. Without the assistance of mechanized carriages, they slide down the shafts, following old and fraying cable. Upon finding a potential vein in the rock, they assay samples by panning, and use small amounts of dynamite to blast rock that they carry on their backs in bags that once held rice or corn meal. The men stay underground for days, weeks, even months at a time. Working in small groups of friends and relations who share a language, they sleep and eat, work and rest, listen to music stored on cellphones, smoke cigarettes, and recount stories of home, all while asking their ancestors for help in finding fortune. The word “zama” means “to try” in isiZulu. “Zama zama” means “to keep on trying,” but also “to gamble.” *Zama zamas* are those who risk everything to survive.





Sampling for Gold: Bhekani Mumpande underground. Still from *We are Zama Zama*. Credit: Prosper Ncube and Rosalind C. Morris

Above ground, women break the rock with hammers or other rocks. They then grind the broken stone into powder, which is mixed with water and poured over improvised sluicing tables from which the men gather visible nuggets and flakes before sifting the runoff. Finally, this is processed with mercury, which the men pass between their bare fingers, while observing the darkening color that betokens amalgamation. The residual sluice constitutes payment for the women, who then reprocess it. At the end of these gendered activities, which differ in both the time they take and the amount of gold they generate, both men and women sell tiny nuggets to local middlemen, who keep track of spot prices on the international commodities market, and pay in cash. Whether sold independently or

brokered by criminal syndicates, the gold will travel along the capillary networks that extend from Johannesburg to China and Pakistan, the US and Europe—where most of it will become jewelry.

**M**OST **ZAMA ZAMAS** are from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Malawi. They travel the same routes as have formal miners since the colonial era, when the Chamber of Mines and its labor recruiting organizations sought African workers for the most arduous labor underground. But today's *zama zamas* are mainly undocumented migrants, whose illegalized status excludes them from public education, healthcare, and the rights that citizens expect. The objects of fear and xenophobic violence,

they are doubly displaced, hyper-visible in the media and invisible as actual subjects of history.

Why make this arduous journey and expose themselves to such terrifying risks? Quite simply, the extreme poverty that they have left behind exceeds even that of the ruins in which they now seek leftover gold. “The mouth is dreaming,” say *zama zamas*, when describing the hunger that is their constant companion. Along with the threat of accident and the toxicity of their environment, these men and women are driven by daily need to flirt with death in order to defer it. Nor is the only threat below ground. The powdered rock clouds in the air enters the lungs of the women—and the infants strapped to their backs—just as the dust that rises from the blasted rock enters the lungs of the underground miners. The Oracle of Death writes her prophecy in the lines drawn by sweat or tears on their dust-powdered faces.

**D**URING MORE THAN two decades of research around the gold mines of South Africa, I have, perhaps improbably, come to see this underground world as a negative image—in the photographic sense—of the Parisian shopping arcades about which Walter Benjamin wrote nearly a century ago. The vaulted ceilings of the tunnels are made possible by the materials and technologies that also enabled the arcades’ construction. But whereas the arcades of Paris were theaters of display value, where commodities were illuminated as future relics of fashion, the value on display underground is that of technology itself: the incredible feats of engineering that have enabled mining four kilometers below the surface.

But something else links these distant worlds: the economy of the arcades was not merely one of mass reproduction, it was a system in which even waste could be a source of value—and “mined” by the ragpicker. Now, in the ruined



*Zama Zamas* in person: Darren Munenge (L) and Prosper Ncube (R). Photos: Ebrahim Hajee



gold mines of southern Africa, the ragpicker finds an uncanny doppelganger in the *zama zama*, whose dusty visage they liken to a ghost. They haunt the landscape where industrial reclamation activities devour the mine dumps: each an emblem of gold-mining's afterlife.

Benjamin's milieu provides unexpected parallels for the mine-made world, but it also made powerful contributions to it. Three of the figures behind the largest mining companies in the region, all created in the last decades of the nineteenth century, were German born. Julius Wernher, a Protestant mining engineer from Darmstadt, formed Wernher Beit and Co., with Alfred Beit, a German-Jewish businessman from Hamburg, who started out in real-estate speculation before partnering with Cecil Rhodes in the diamond and gold industries. They created the Wernher-Beit-Eckstein group of companies after joining with the son of a Lutheran pastor named Hermann Eckstein, a financier

from Hohenheim, who acted as the first president of the Chamber of Mines.

It is in the ruins of one of the mines founded by Wernher, Beit and Co., that I have been making a film with and about migrant miners. The images in this portfolio are from a documentary project entitled "We are Zama Zama," which I have been making with South African cinematographer Ebrahim Hajee and three *zama zama* miners: Rogers "Bhekani" Mumpande, Darren Munenge, and Prosper Ncube. Our shared ambition is to create a documentary testimony to the lived experience of this marginal community in a manner that makes the *zama zamas'* risk-filled lives comprehensible.

The project also responds to the intensifying "problem" of migrancy today. As walls—both figurative and actual—are being erected around the world to keep economic migrants from escaping their poverty, the iconography of



The hands that grind: woman with ring. Still from *We are Zama Zama*. Credit: Ebrahim Hajee and Rosalind C. Morris



Home life: Bhekani and Sarah Mumpande, and their daughter, Alicia, in their 2×3-meter shack. Still from *We are Zama Zama*. Credit: Ebrahim Hajee and Rosalind C. Morris.

migrancy in the Euro-American media is increasingly limited to the spectacle of the Mediterranean. While important, the privileged iconography of the Mediterranean risks a too-narrow perception of migrancy as a crisis of and for Europe. Yet, much of the migration born of poverty in Africa takes place *within* rather than as a movement *out* of the continent.

In addition to local problems, which range from corruption to warfare, this African crisis also has European history: not only the legacy of resource-based colonialism (of which Wernher, Beit, and Eckstein were a part), but the histories of foreign aid that generated dependencies now being severed. As global neoliberal governance leads to the demand that decolonizing states cut back on their own social-grants programs, a rising tide of populist nationalism calls formerly colonizing states to reduce their foreign-aid contributions. As a result, vast zones of uninhabitability are emerging, a situation that will only worsen with changing climatic conditions.

Making a film about undocumented migrants is not an answer to these problems. But it is an effort to open conversation with a different lens and a widened focus. To ask different questions about the causes and possible means of redress demanded by this complex problem requires, firstly, that the lives lived in industrial modernity's ruins be recognized in their fullness. The stories of my film, of the ruined mines, and of the migrants who gravitate to those now-abandoned temples of technology and international financial capital, are stories of the future: dream images that the Oracle of Death demands we confront. □







Gold! – Hand-smelted nugget. Still from *We are Zama Zama*. Credit: Ebrahim Hajee and Rosalind C. Morris



Dandies at the Dam: *Zama Zama* boys. Photo: Ebrahim Hajee.

# BEAT KNOWLEDGE

We are all African,  
when we listen

by Ronald Radano

**W**HAT MIGHT IT mean to say “we are all African, when we listen”? By this, I am not suggesting that we return to the origins tales from over a century ago, when leading musicians and critics made fantastical claims about civilization’s rise from a primal, sonic humanity, as in the German composer and conductor Hans von Bülow’s “In the beginning was rhythm.” Nor am I referring to paleoanthropological theories tracing humanity’s beginnings to the African continent; nor, for that matter, to the Nigerian-born, London artist JJC, whose recording “We are Africans” was an international hit in 2010.

My phrase points to something else: namely, that what we take to be the common sense of Western musicality—the conventional understanding of what music should sound like and communicate—is inseparable from the modern history of the African continent. This, to be sure, has been a fraught history, marked by two major tragedies generated

from the outside. The first commenced with Africans’ forced, transatlantic displacement as slaves; the second was the result of the continent’s invasion by European colonizers. What emerged in the US and Europe as “our music” over the course of the past 150 years developed directly from both of these tragic legacies. Embracing the notion that we are all African when we listen is a means of recognizing this past in our present. It enables us to re-center our thinking about the cultural history of the US and Europe in order to acknowledge Africa’s audible place within it.

In making this claim, it might appear that I am challenging European classical music’s standing at the pinnacle of high art. But I have no quarrel with classical music’s established importance; its legacy of musical innovation and thought still informs how we conceptualize the very idea of music and measure its aesthetic value. I have, instead, a different concern, which is to say that, despite

classical music's lasting significance, it is the sonic world of "Africanity" that best characterizes the listening orders of the West.

Indeed, as far as the realms of the audible go, African musicality, in its many transatlantic iterations, has already won the cultural wars; it has done so in large part with the assistance of the very forces that served to dominate black people. The way we hear and what we tend to like musically are deeply informed by the unintended legacies of African involvement in the West—the result of the displacement of Africans to North America and the subsequent dissemination of their musical practices within the newly capitalized, global markets of modern entertainment. The Africanization of popular sound that begins during the US's antebellum era and that escalated rapidly around 1900 did not take shape because African-based musical practices possessed some inherent, special value. It did so because of a set of material circumstances having to do with the tragedies of Euro-African contact, which assigned to African-based musical practices a special value, a value that, in turn, motivated the rise of professional black performance. What emerged as the normative stylistic orientation of popular music developed out of the legacies of containment and conquest of African people and cultures, by which a distinctive kind of racially "black" music became the touchstone of a public, musical common sense.

**T**HE TRANSFORMATION OF music has been so profound and enduring that we hardly notice it. But think about this: the quality and character of public sound in the present, indeed over the past century or more, has developed according to the persistence of a conspicuous African audibility heard in cities from Los Angeles to Prague. Many scholars and commentators have long acknowledged this influence, often with clichéd references to the power of "the beat." These references tend to downplay the radicalism of musical and aesthetic change, relegating the global influence of musical Africanity to a vague, cultural retention (e.g., blue notes, syncopation, etc.). They also obscure the extent to which the overall character of pop music has emerged from a greater idea and practice of black rhythm. Pop has done so not simply by retaining the African musical use of repetition, but by creatively advancing upon it according to a set of beliefs that ideologically specify rhythm as a racial essence, a kind of audible blackness, as a quality of being sonically situated at the core of what we consider to be modern. The concept of "beat," we might say, has itself been profoundly informed by a racial fantasy about "natural rhythm" sustained from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century eras of slavery and early colonial encounter. It is what would drive musical innovation in a proliferation of genres from the ragtime era onward, providing a key means by which US black and diasporic African musicians affirmed their claim of their own musical forms.

What is especially important in comprehending this argument of audible Africanity is to recognize how, since

the beginning of the modern era, African repetition has exceeded practices racialized as "black." Today, we can hear the primacy of the beat nearly everywhere, from country & western, to European club music, to the many international expressions of rock, jazz, and blues. The priority given to racialized repetition is so pervasive, so deep, that it has affected our aural comprehension of what is right in a given musical production. As an idea caught up in the Western fantasy of race, it represents a veritable knowledge, a *beat knowledge* informing musicians' and listeners' affective and aesthetic experiences worldwide. Racialized, black rhythm, one might argue, now identifies the common denominator of music as such. Indeed, the expanse of racialized concepts of rhythm have reordered the auditory qualities of public culture at large, its influence extending beyond the social field of the popular into the seemingly rarefied domain of musical modernism. Beat knowledge has become a reference point by which classically trained composers craft their art in affirmation or denial of its aesthetic value and influence.

A second indication of an African-inspired transformation has to do with timbre and tone. In the early twentieth century, at a moment when European composers were radically challenging the ordering grammar of tonality, US black musicians were introducing styles of lasting, cultural consequence, their pitch-bending techniques and innovative, timbral effects challenging not European music's harmonic conventions but rather the very nature of equal temperament and diatonicism (i.e., obedient to the constraints of scale-form). The stylistic practices that developed as part of the rhythmic revolution of pop rewrote the rules of playing-style and instrumental intonation—as heard, for example, in circus bands and syncopated orchestras (James Reese Europe), hot jazz (Louis Armstrong), swing ensembles (Duke Ellington Orchestra), Chicago blues (Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf), and gospel, rhythm 'n' blues, and soul singing (Mahalia Jackson, Little Richard, Aretha Franklin, James Brown).

With the new advances in commercial recording before and after World War II, African and black Caribbean musicians advanced their own contributions to the making of a black transatlantic tonal-character, inspiring a range of genre innovations (rumba, calypso, biguine, compas, ska). With the rise of hip-hop, black music's enduring push against the strictures of European song-form reached a kind of stylistic apotheosis. Seminal groups of the late 1980s (Public Enemy, NWA) had largely done away with the templates of song form established in the nineteenth century (later revised in Tin Pan Alley) in order to craft a sound largely committed to innovations in tone color, cast against new experiments of the beat.

As with beat knowledge, what we might call the Africanization of tone color reorients the orders of performance, proposing a normative "colored sound" or what Amiri Baraka has called Western music's "brownish" cast. Such tone coloring is pervasive and conspicuous, even if we don't recognize it immediately. Take, for example, the



tendency for pop singers to employ black, gospel inflections, conspicuously present in performances from the Euro Song Contest to the American TV show *The Voice*. We hear it again at major sports events, in so many gospel-inspired renditions of the “Star-Spangled Banner,” and yet again in the recorded selections routinely played in chain-store coffee houses such as Starbucks. The “natural voice” of the West—and, indeed, of the global metropolis—is an Africanized one, betraying Africa’s conquering presence resonating globally from the flesh of its former conquerors.

**WE MIGHT WONDER** why this happened in the first place. Why did these intrusions into the norms of European music once upholding racial conceptions of whiteness carry such effect? Why was this African character valued among majority-white populations that had otherwise devalued the actual lives of black people? This is perhaps black music history’s most critical question, the answers being at once complex and contested. But what seems abundantly clear, at the least, is that the embrace of Africanized forms ironically had a lot to do with black people’s social devaluation.

In the US, where these patterns first took shape, black music’s claim by white listeners became a way of underscoring racial supremacy over what were deemed an inferior, “naturally musical” people. The pleasure that white majorities obtained from black music related directly to this one-way transaction that sought to affirm white, racial superiority; pleasure aligned with the expropriation of a cultural currency afforded to the music of black people. What undermined this tendency, however—and established a sec-

between black and white. Accordingly, the incompleteness of a racialized economic transaction became the basis of aesthetic value, driving an entire history of black and white consumptive behavior. Across the twentieth century, the incompleteness or interruption of exchange became a generative principle in the production of an essential, black musical character, its racially based inalienability serving as a key catalyst for a flood of African diasporic creativity. A transatlantic black sound would variously congeal, again and again, bringing to form various qualities of racially conceived black musical distinctiveness to satisfy the Africanized tastes of listeners across the West and around the world.

We might think of the double character of black musical pleasure as a negative formation, by which the white-majority intention of ownership and its deferral establish the cultural logic of racialized invention. It identifies black music not as something equivalent to European music, but as a creative sound-form that is at once less-than, and more-than, “music.” The valuation of black music as something less-than and more-than “music” develops as part of a greater commodification of culture, its new and “peculiar” forms circulating a greater beat knowledge that re-ordered the character of listening worldwide as it positioned the right of ownership at the center of popular aesthetics. Recognizing the logic producing the Africanization of the audible public not only helps us to understand the appeal of US black music in European cities from London to Paris to Berlin, but also why listeners in, say, 1930s Shanghai, were drawn to black jazz forms. As the cultural critic Andrew Jones shows in his wonderful book, *Yellow Music*, listeners embraced black forms, together with their Chinese reinterpretations, according to the same discursive fantasies of race, rhythm, and form that circulated globally along with American bands and commercial recordings. Well before the United States’ global dominance after World War II, the world had begun to sound distinctly African.

## The embrace of Africanized forms ironically had a lot to do with black people’s social devaluation.

ond, critical dimension of aesthetic pleasure—was the inability for white populations to complete the ownership of black music. Because the blackness of black music was racially determined, its exchange to white ownership would never be completed, even when consumers put down money to buy it; such a completion would destabilize the very distinction

**IF, INDEED, WE** are all African when we listen, what does it mean to listen to African music of the late- and post-colonial eras, to the music produced and enjoyed for over a half century on the Continent? Some appreciation of the collision of musical Africanity and Western racial thought may help us to recognize how best to engage that musical past, acknowledging the distorting lens of racial representation, by which “Africa” as a sound-world has been repeatedly mediated and recast into a veritable fantasy of global sound.

That African popular music developing before and after World War II drew deeply and profoundly from what was an imagined sonic Africa generated in the West is one of the great ironies of the late colonial and postcolonial eras. But it is this same practice of drawing from the outside that also catalyzed the powerful, anticolonial musics accompanying the formal end of European, colonial regimes. Recordings



such as E.T. Mensah's "Ghana Freedom" (1957) and Joseph Kabasélé's "Indépendance Cha Cha" (1960), and later, Fela Anikulapo Kuti's copious oeuvre of "Afrobeat" would not have been heard and understood as they were—(they would not have carried such effervescence, such meaningful significance)—had it not been for the racial fantasy of black music, together with the music's messy background as a racialized subject of contested and capitalized property brought into form as commercial sound recordings. It is fascinating to consider how these very fantasies are now catalyzing new, popular practices specific to the African continent. A transnational blackness in sound is arising, its manifold productions at once affirming and revising the character of a US-based musical Africanity that had developed out of Africa's first tragedy—and now, by turns, giving rise through the very same mechanisms of global capital circulation to a new, postcolonial African sound resonating from the cities of Lagos, Accra, Nairobi, Kinshasa, and Johannesburg.

Finally, we might wonder what of the "real" African music, the precolonial, traditional musics that brought character to the songs of slaves celebrated by W.E.B. Du Bois and that gave rise to the very idea of "black music." We know of this different music, this music of difference, through a plethora of ethnomusicological field expeditions that documented a musical world of great depth and complexity. What about those practices that were evolving dynamically for centuries before all the interventions and mediations of European contact, before the concept of race generated the massive distorting lens of "blackness" itself? For in the success of African auralities' inadvertent conquering of the West and the global metropolitan at large, so has it seemingly witnessed the occlusion of its own history, relegated to von Bülow's primitive "beginning." The very idea of "black music" would appear to mark that loss. And yet, we are faced anew with a new set of challenges at the moment when the tombs of colonial archives—in London, Paris, Johannesburg, and, most recently, Berlin's new Humboldt Forum—are releasing for public consumption the seminal recordings produced at the cusp of the early colonial era. It is a question we'll want to consider seriously, as the recovery of early recordings enables us to ponder a past with perhaps a greater sense of responsibility. For if it is true that we are all African in certain ways, it will behoove the West to reflect collaboratively with the greater African continent in order to consider what it means now to make sound and to listen. □



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# BIGGER PROFITS, SLOWER GROWTH

Extracting value from the  
information economy

by Herman Mark Schwartz

**E**THNONATIONALIST, ANTI-IMMIGRANT, ANTI-SYSTEM parties emerged in wealthy OECD countries three times over the past century—the 1920s, 1960s, and again today. Each of these episodes has complex causes, but the deepest and most common are related to status anxiety: fears of diminished social, household, and racial authority on the part of core male ethnonational populations in European and North American countries. The crumbling hierarchies of race, gender, and ethnicity in each of these episodes triggered backlashes against immigrants, minorities, and women.

But these three episodes of populist uproar did not gain equal traction. Why? For an economist, the answer lies not just with social dynamics, but rather with the economic factors driving them: weakening employment and wage prospects.

Today, as in the 1920s, wage growth has been muted in many countries, with specific segments of the male population experiencing falling wages. And even where wages have risen, the gap between the top, the bottom, and the middle has widened. Moreover, growing income inequality has a distinctly regional flavor, with a handful of cities or regions experiencing robust growth and others stagnating.

By contrast, the 1960s had robust and relatively equally distributed growth that countered—though certainly did not eliminate—other changes in status. Incomes for the male ethnonational core population were rising so quickly in the 1960s that other challenges to identity receded in importance. Older men could see a clear path forward for their sons and the sons of other men. Lurking behind much political sloganeering today is an aspiration that harkens back to that optimistic time: How can we get back to more rapid and egalitarian growth?

**IN THE AREA** of international economics, addressing slow growth and inequality requires a correct analysis of those problems' sources. Contemporary debates about slow growth—also known as “secular stagnation”—pit supply-side arguments about technological exhaustion against demand-side arguments about insufficient income for the poorer 90 percent of the population. The American economist Robert Gordon, for example, recently argued that the US economy has exhausted almost all sources of productivity growth that powered the expansion of the US economy in the first half of the twentieth century and then spread to the rest of the world in the



second. In his view, flush toilets mattered much more than flashy cell phones ever will. And since there's nothing worth investing in that will yield huge productivity improvements, slow growth is the new normal. This is a supply-side argument.

But there's a problem with this, as a tour of any major research university or the archives of "Technology Surveys" in the *Economist* will reveal: backlogs of significant innovations are waiting for commercialization. So, why haven't those innovations flowed into the economy? One reason is that it takes some time for innovations to radically change an economy. The full benefits of the electrification of production were not felt for roughly fifty years, and they required substantial physical and managerial reorganization of production processes. Another reason is the dearth of incentives for firms to invest in new technologies. The continuous-flow assembly line, which required electrification, did not become a pervasive production-format until there was enough demand in the economy to justify investing in it. These reasons point away from the supply-side of the economy and towards the demand- or income-side.

Demand-side arguments, largely associated with former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, start from a simple point: the marginal propensity to consume decreases as household income rises. In other words, the percentage of total income a household spends falls as its income rises. And because the rich have a lower marginal propensity to consume, rising income inequality leads to less overall consumption. And not just in America: income inequality has been rising in all the rich OECD countries, albeit at different rates. Even Sweden and Germany have pre-tax and transfer-market incomes that resemble those of the United States, which means that robust welfare states can mitigate but not eliminate this market-driven behavior.

Like the supply-side arguments, demand-side arguments are also correct but incomplete—in two ways: First, if the top 10 percent or 1 percent of income earners are receiving an increasingly larger share of national income, that would explain why consumption might not be growing so quickly, since fewer people with more money are buying less. But if the wealthy are not spending their money buying things, they must be saving it. Yet these increased savings are not translating into investment into the creation of new productive capacity, thus accelerating GDP growth. Instead, their capital is flowing into the GDP-neutral purchase of existing assets, e.g. stocks and bonds.

Second—and the focus of the rest of this essay—is that arguments about income inequality don't explain *why* it has been rising. They look at households but ignore the fact that households get their income from somewhere, and that somewhere is, generally, firms. Firms do the bulk of productive investment. They do so by using current profits, or by pledging to repay borrowed money out of future profits. Firms are the primary source of income, and the primary generators of net new productive investment. So, in order to understand firms' role in the creation of broader inequality, we need to look at their recent tendencies

toward sluggish investment and the limits set on government spending incurred by tax avoidance.

**THE NEW WAY CORPORATE** inequality can be seen is via the measurement of levels of inequality among firms' profits. This is evidenced by something called the Gini coefficient (named after the early twentieth-century Italian statistician Corrado Gini). This standard measure ranges from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (one firm or person gathers all income). Sweden has a household income Gini of 0.28; Germany, of 0.29; the United States, 0.39; South Africa, 0.62. The Gini for cumulative profits of the 2000 largest firms in the global economy over the past 13 years is 0.69. Because these firms collect roughly one-third of all profits for the 28,000 global firms with annual revenues over \$200 million, the true Gini is likely even greater. This evidences a profit inequality among firms even higher than that of households or individuals. But this was not always the case. Though the Gini for the 1,361 profitable American firms in 1960 was similar to today, those firms employed al-

#### GINI COEFFICIENT

Sweden	0.28
Germany	0.29
United States	0.39
South Africa	0.62

most a third more US workers proportionately. This raises a big question: What happened to firms such that this massive inequality of profitability now translates into massive income inequality?

The answer, quite simply, is that changes in corporate strategy and structure over the past thirty years have increased inequality in the distribution of profits among and within firms, and thus in income for households. While this is a worldwide phenomenon, it is an uneven one, because these changes in corporate strategy and structure have not occurred uniformly everywhere.

Still, in the old economy, from roughly 1950 to 1985, profits flowed from control over physical capital deployed in vertically integrated (i.e. everything inside) firms. Mid-twentieth century firms' profitability depended on their control over these large fixed physical-capital investments, and the efficient management of that physical capital. The biggest and most profitable firms did most of their production in-house, and their employee base incorporated a huge range of ancillary services supporting production. Think of General Electric or General Motors or Siemens or Volkswagen in the 1960s. GM employed 600,000 people in 1960, and it did, *inter alia*, its own accounting, cleaning, and

catering. (The nearest equivalent today would be the diversified industrial giant Samsung.) In the 1960s, 80 percent of the stock market capitalization of the US S&P 500 was tangible physical assets such as plants and equipment, and big firms like GM and GE captured the bulk of profits.

By contrast, today's "information economy" profits are earned from controlling intellectual property rights (IPRs)—patents, copyrights, brands, trademarks, licensing—deployed in vertically *disintegrated* production chains. IPRs create monopolies, so firms that successfully control IPRs in a production chain capture the bulk of profits. This shift in strategy and industrial structure drives rising inequality among firms and individuals because IPR firms do not distribute their monopoly rents over a large workforce. They also don't need to make large investments as compared to the old economy firms. The firms with the biggest market capitalization and profitability are those controlling the most valuable IPR portfolios.

In a significant change in industrial organization, information-economy firms largely subcontract everything not related to the direct production of their IPRs, including the physical production of goods, shrinking their employee base to the absolute minimum. Apple, for example, employs 90,000 people, but 60,000 of them are contract workers in its retail stores. Apple subcontracts virtually all of its physical production to firms like Foxconn that employ cheaper Chinese labor. By 2015, 83 percent of the market capitalization of the S&P 500 was intangible assets, and Apple collected 3 percent of the cumulative profits of the 600 largest US firms from 2006–2016; Microsoft collected 2.2 percent. These are historically large percentages, and they drive the very high Gini coefficient for global profits.

The next piece of the puzzle: profit inequality interacts with changing corporate structure to produce income inequality. Integrated firms once internalized production chains; most of the work force involved in production was *legally* inside the firm as well as physically inside the factory or other corporate buildings. Cleaners, accountants, engineers, designers, managers, and production workers all worked side-by-side and were legally employees of that firm. A firm like GM generated 70 percent of its final value internally. Now, production chains are split among global and domestic supply chains that involve different *kinds* of firms. Indeed, workers from different firms often see labor side-by-side in the same factory, with contract production workers, subcontracted cleaners, external logistics firm-workers, and the factory owner's employees all rubbing shoulders. In the old factory, unions and the solidarity created by having the same employer tended to redistribute monopoly and oligopoly rents towards workers, and among workers from higher skilled to lower skilled workers. Today, weaker unions and the fragmentation of workers over multiple employers limit this kind of intra-firm redistribution.

If most firms were the same, this might not matter. But firms have also fragmented into three different general types. Most value-chains now form a "wedding cake" structure, composed of human capital-intensive, small

labor-headcount IPR firms; physical capital-intensive firms producing components or owning real estate; and labor-intensive, high-headcount firms that do simple assembly or service tasks. This produces an upside-down pyramid of profits and a right-side-up pyramid of workers. The monopoly position of IPR-owning firms concentrates profits into the hands of those firms. The barrier-to-entry created by big physical-capital investments gives firms in the middle more moderate profits. And firms at the bottom have neither a monopoly nor a barrier-to-entry, and so typically make the smallest profits.

This explains the next step: higher-profit firms pay higher wages, so increased profit-inequality drives increased wage and income inequality outside the firm. This, in turn, underlies the limits on consumption growth, because high-profit firms employ far fewer workers in aggregate than do the other firms. Microsoft's 100,000 employees generated cumulative profits during 2005–2016 that were roughly equal to the combined one million employees at Volkswagen-Audi, BMW, and Daimler. Foxconn's one million employees, who assemble much of the world's electronic equipment, generated profits equaling only one-fifth of Microsoft's.

Profit inequality also limits investment growth. Profit-rich IPR firms don't need new investment to expand production (in the extreme case, a new MP3 file or copy of iOS has zero investment or production costs). Instead, they hire coders or designers. Firms that do engage in physical production have neither the will nor ability to generate much net new investment. They lack IPR firms' outsized profits; they find it safer to meet slow growth in demand through normal productivity growth. Indeed, Apple had to give Corning Glass \$200 million to induce them to build a new factory for the next generation of Gorilla Glass cell phone screens.

The conclusion: rising income inequality, and, in turn, secular stagnation, flows from the combination of the change in firms' profit strategies (where profit comes from) and from changes in industrial organization (how profit gets distributed).

**I** DENTIFYING THE CORPORATE roots of inequality and stagnation makes it possible to identify better, attainable solutions to those problems and thus to address the economic roots of the current populist backlash they have helped to induce. The solutions fall into four groups of actions that should be undertaken by national legislatures, especially the United States Congress. They need to:

- 1) **Address the root causes** of profit inequality by strengthening national and global level anti-trust law. In parallel, they also need to reform IPR law, since patent and copyright protection is needed to induce innovation. Currently patents are too easy to receive, and they constitute an overly strong barrier to entry. Moreover, copyright lasts well beyond the lifespan of



any author, and currently rewards corporations and heirs.

**2) Strengthen workers' bargaining position.**

Here, the United States in particular needs a more robust welfare state that guarantees access to healthcare and provides a minimum income. This could be offered in exchange for twenty hours of work in the market or in social services. In the private labor market, brand owners should have legal responsibility for labor practices and wages in their franchisees. A higher minimum wage would also boost purchasing power.

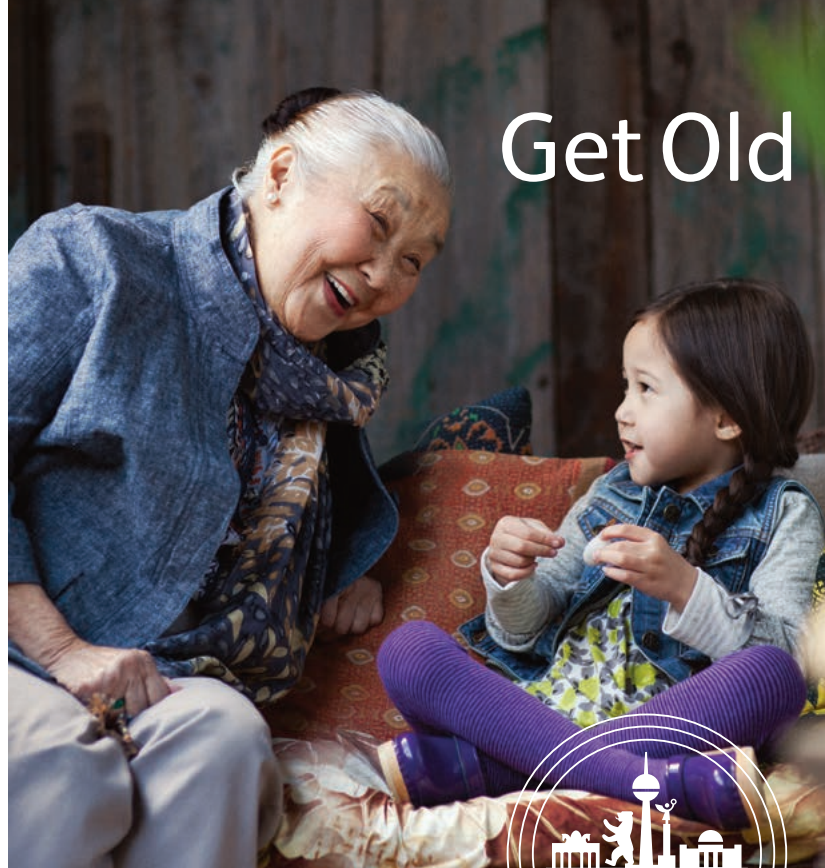
**3) Fix taxation so that corporate** and individual tax-avoidance is more difficult to accomplish. The OECD has already started on this road, with its Base Erosion and Profit Shifting initiative, which monitors profit-shifting by firms with strong IPR portfolios.

**4) Pursue international trade agreements** that raise labor standards and work conditions in low-wage competitors. This would broaden markets for high-quality products from advanced economies and help workers in poorer ones.

**A** **LL OF THESE** initiatives would induce more labor-saving innovation and investment, which would, in turn, drive growth and validate higher wages across the wealthy OECD economies.

But the economy, of course, is easier to fix than people's attitudes and identities. Changing those, as Max Weber put it, is a process of strong and slow boring of hard boards. Though attitudes about race, gender, and sexual identity have shifted significantly over the past half-century, the explosion of overt misogyny and racism on social media and in the political sphere reveal many hard mental boards that are the basis for planks in anti-system parties. It will probably take a generational change to shrink the residual population holding those attitudes. Yet the political crisis posed by anti-system parties is already acute. Considering the absence of sustained, successful anti-system parties in the 1960s can point us towards economic policy as a better short-term response to anti-system parties. These kinds of economic-policy changes—and not mere anti-populist rhetoric—are what will lead to immediate ameliorating effects. □

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# UNEXCEPTIONAL POLITICS

## The impasse of deliberative democracy

by Emily Apter

There is nothing more fragmented, interrupted, repetitive, conventional, and contradictory than political speech. It never stops breaking off, starting over, harping, betraying its promises . . . getting mixed up, coming and going, blotting itself out by maneuvers whose thread no one seems to be able to find anymore.

– Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 2013

**P**RESIDENT OBAMA'S ELECTION in 2008 precipitated a hard-right turn in US politics, already in an archconservative place after two terms of the junior Bush presidency. By Obama's second-term election, a culture of venomous incivility, fanned by Tea Party extremism, further encouraged the incessant posturing of the "party of no." Partisan voting blocs in Congress and the Senate, acting in

lockstep, opposed all legislative and diplomatic initiatives, from routine committee member nominations to nuclear nonproliferation agreements with Iran to virtually any meritorist environmental legislation or gun control. The expansion of "conceal and carry" and "stand your ground" laws at the very moment of mass shootings; the increase in militias, border militarization, and incarceration without due process; the failure to prosecute police in the killings of black men, women, and children, along with the impact of movements associated with corrosive ideologies—"corporations are people," Citizens United, abortion restrictions, "right to work" attacks on organized labor, curtailment of public welfare, climate change denial—all contributed to the deathliness of obstruction.

It goes without saying that governance at a standstill has only been further exacerbated in the era of Trumpism. Legislative blockage is not only the chronic symptom of



politics as usual, or the nasty aftereffect of government shutdown and paralysis, but also channels a lethal undertow, a death wish; it tolls the suicidal endgame for deliberative democracy.

One thinks here also of *Berlusconismo*, which the Italian philosopher Paolo Flores d'Arcais associated in the 2011 *New Left Review* with the destruction of critical independence brought about not by Fascism, but “through the creation of a *pensée unique* that blends conformism and commercial spectacularization, reducing culture to a form of consumption.” *Berlusconismo* is distinguished by its variety-show effect and anthemic proclamations: with the Ministry of Love or Party of Love, featuring, d'Arcais writes, “rituals of enthusiasm worthy of Ceaucescu, replete with slogans and songs—“Thank heavens there’s Silvio!”” A political pasquinade, *Berlusconismo* resorts to the mawkish props of hair transplants and face-lifts, sexual boasting, and vulgar jokes to distract from the spectacle of counterfeit democracy.

By contrast, *Merkiavellianism* (an expression coined by the late German sociologist Ulrich Beck, in a much-circulated 2012 editorial in *Der Spiegel*) is a sober affair. Beck attributed the Chancellor’s effectiveness to “a tactical adroitness that might well be deemed Machiavellian,” specifying that

Merkel has positioned herself between the Europe builders and the orthodox adherents of the nation state *without* taking either side—or rather, she keeps both options open. She neither identifies with the pro-Europeans (whether at home or abroad) who call for binding German commitments, nor does she support the Euroskeptics, who wish to refuse all assistance. Instead, and this is the Merkiavellian point, Merkel links German willingness to provide credit with the willingness of the debtor nations to satisfy the conditions of German stability policies. This is Merkiavelli’s first principle: on the subject of German money to assist the debtor nations, her position is neither a clear Yes or a clear No, but a clear Yes and No.

For Beck, Merkiavellianism denotes the art of “deliberate hesitation,” a method of coercion that turns on the constant threat of “withdrawal, delay, and the refusal of credit.” Merkiavelli’s “trump card,” said Beck, is actually a “siren call”: “better a German euro than no euro at all.” Of all the leaders in Europe, Merkel has proved to be the most successful in navigating between a punishing austerity policy that violates democratic principle, and a “humanitarian” stance on refugees that puts the onus of responding to their dislocation



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on countries like Greece, Italy, and Turkey. Navigating the posts between being feared and being loved, Merkel epitomizes the stance of what Beck called the “good-natured hegemon.”

A particularist politics that could never be dubbed good-natured is now named *Trumpism*. It represents the endgame of politics as name-branding, as well as a type of the impolitic associated with “janking,” a term connoting the art of dissing or offending, as in the game “the dozens,” or rapping and slamming. “Janking off” describes Trump’s incessant jibing and calumniating, specifically, the vicious, viral, Twitter vomit of his lamely derisive adjectives, weaponized as cyber-bullying. Trumpist janking derives its energy from hate speech, trolling, and verbal battery. It exults in forms of baiting reliant on ad hominem attacks on a person’s heritage, race, gender, physical “rating,” character, and body parts, or a worker’s professional integrity (as when he vilified Chuck Jones, union leader of United Steelworkers

Local 1999, who called out Trump for “lying his ass off” after Trump made specious claims about saving jobs at the Carrier plant in Indiana). No “average Joe,” no former beauty pageant queen, no building contractor, no newscaster, no journalist, no actor nor comedian is too unworthy of public interest to qualify for targeting by the Trumpist jank. The jank-off not only comes close to satisfying the risibility factor of the jank, but underlines the importance of scaling to the art of belittlement and to tumescent states of the ego in situations of political contest and phallogocentric competition. Trump’s denunciation of Washington’s stalemate political culture with the phrase, “It is out of control. It is gridlock with their mouths,” invents a strange figure of speech that, when one focuses on the mouth of the utterer, registers like a warning signal against *mouthing off*.

Mouthing off, wandering off script to some indefensible position that must be defended for lack of any other possible strategy is the essence of jank, and it becomes



Trump Rally in Washington, DC, March 4, 2017. Photo: Ted Eytan.



consonant with a new meaning of the verb “to trump,” signifying quite literally the vagaries of disestablished politicking, or going rogue.

“Trumping” (close to *tromper*, to betray or act mistakenly) describes the strategy of brazenly upping the ante of the counterattack when you are patently at fault. The justice it recognizes belongs to the kangaroo court, where damages are routinely awarded to plaintiffs who make baseless allegations of libel and injury. *Trumpism* in this sense means justice flouted, and justice that panders to the caprice of the infant sovereign in the ego. Thin-skinned reactions to criticism or public displays of animosity and grievance are championed and fully claimed as the tactics of a winner at all costs. Trumpism brings to the public stage a performative incivility, taken in its full measure as a political concept designating extreme *impolitesse*—improper or uncivilized behavior, *uncivic-mindedness*, bad manners, and displays of contemptuous mockery that destroy the fellow-feeling

of spirited raillery. Trumpism calls up what the French philosopher Étienne Balibar discerns in his 2015 book *Violence and Civility* as the profound violence inherent in civil society, including the “modalities of subjection and subjectification” in *Sittlichkeit* (Hegel), such that civility is in fact little more than a response “to contemporary extreme violence from inside extreme violence.”

Trumpism inflates the dollar value of its patent with the trappings of wealth, with garish fashion redolent of the 1980s era of greed: tall buildings, gold fixtures, private jets, trophy wives. This plutocratic display is pumped up further by a litany of jankish hyperboles: “very, very best,” “great,” “tremendous,” “huge,” and so forth. While intended to provide ballast to the old doctrines of American exceptionalism, this bombast dissipates into vatic trumpeting. Trumpism—whose “ism” is keyed to populist autocracy—is identified with a rogue way of speaking that provides scaffolding for an absent political discourse. The proper name is tautologically performative, which is to say, Trumpism trumps public interest by facilitating the decampment of the citizen from the demos to media theaters of depoliticized life. Trumpism lines up on axis with Berlusconiism inasmuch as both qualify as names for oligarchic name-branding, *pasquinade*, and the mastery of political special-effects. In each case, the proper name erects a fence—a wall—around a motley assortment of personality traits, bait and switch tactics, and crass publicity stunts that supply the playbook of political impasse.

**IMPASSE, THEN, IS** perhaps the newest watchword for the contemporary state of politics. *Impasse* is at once unexceptional and diffusely traumatic. This is fitting: University of Chicago social theorist Lauren Berlant makes the argument that once trauma is conceived no longer as an exceptional event, and “crisis ordinariness” takes hold as the norm, history becomes little more than an adjustment narrative, in which difficulties are succumbed to or navigated. From this perspective, the extraordinary, she writes in *Cruel Optimism* (2011), “always turns out to be an amplification of something in the works, a labile boundary at best, not a slammed-door departure. In the *impasse* induced by crisis, being treads water; mainly, it does not drown.”

Perhaps it is this sense of “small t” trauma that most effectively captures what is at stake in “small p” politics today: from the ordinariness of exceptional crisis and the routinization of habitual politics, to the micropolitics of molecular cultures implanted in the byways of managed life. □

This essay is derived from the Introduction of *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (Verso, 2018).



# REVITALIZING PUBLIC DISCOURSE



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## Populism, Trump, and the future of democracy

by Michael J. Sandel

**T**HESE ARE DANGEROUS times for democracy. Russia, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, and other places that once offered democratic hope are now, in varying degrees, falling into authoritarianism. In the United States, Donald Trump poses the greatest threat to the American constitutional order since Richard Nixon. One might think that Trump's inflammatory tweets, erratic behavior, and persistent disregard for democratic norms would offer the opposition an easy target. Yet for those who would mount a politics of resistance, the outrage Trump provokes has been less energizing than paralyzing. The opposition has yet to find its voice.

There are two reasons for the paralysis. One is the investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller into the Trump campaign's possible collusion with Russia. But the hope that Mueller's findings will lead to the impeachment of Trump is wishful thinking that distracts Democrats from asking hard questions about why voters have rejected them at the both the federal and state level. A second source of paralysis lies in the chaos Trump creates. His steady stream of provocations has a disorienting effect on critics, who struggle to discriminate between the more consequential affronts to democracy and passing distractions.

The hard reality is that Donald Trump was elected by tapping a wellspring of anxieties, frustrations, and legitimate grievances to which the mainstream parties have no compelling answer. This means that, for those worried about Trump, and about populism, it is not enough to mobilize a politics of protest and resistance; it is also necessary to engage in a politics of persuasion. Such a politics must begin by understanding the discontent that is roiling politics in the US and in democracies around the world. Moral outrage can be politically energizing, but only if it is channeled and guided by political judgment. What the opposition to Trump needs now is an *economy of outrage*, disciplined by the priorities of an affirmative political project.

What might such a project look like? To answer this question, we must begin by facing up to the complacencies

of establishment political thinking that opened the way to Trump in the US and to right-wing populism in Britain and Europe.

### THE FAILURE OF TECHNOCRATIC LIBERALISM

**LIKE THE TRIUMPH** of Brexit in the UK, the election of Trump was an angry verdict on decades of rising inequality and a version of globalization that benefits those at the top but leaves ordinary people feeling disempowered. It was also a rebuke for a technocratic approach to politics that is tone deaf to the resentments of people who feel the economy and the culture have left them behind.

Some denounce the upsurge of populism as little more than a racist, xenophobic reaction against immigrants and multiculturalism. Others see it mainly in economic terms, as a protest against the job losses brought about by global trade and new technologies. But it is a mistake to see only the bigotry in populist protest, or to view it only as an economic complaint. To do so misses the fact that the upheavals we are witnessing are a political response to a political failure of historic proportions: the right-wing populism ascendant today is a symptom of the failure of progressive politics.

In recent decades, the Democratic Party has become a party of a technocratic liberalism more congenial to the professional classes than to the blue-collar and middle-class voters who once constituted its base. A similar predicament afflicted Britain's Labour Party and led, following its defeat in the last general election, to the surprising election of anti-establishment figure Jeremy Corbyn as party leader.

The roots of the predicament go back to the 1980s. Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher had argued that government was the problem and that markets were the

solution. When they passed from the political scene, the center-left politicians who succeeded them—Bill Clinton in the US, Tony Blair in Britain, Gerhard Schröder in Germany—moderated but consolidated the market faith. They softened the harsh edges of unfettered markets but did not challenge the central premise of the Reagan-Thatcher era—that market mechanisms are the primary instruments for achieving the public good. In line with this faith, they embraced a market-driven version of globalization and welcomed the growing financialization of the economy.

In the 1990s, the Clinton administration joined with Republicans in promoting global trade agreements and deregulating the financial industry. The benefits of these policies flowed mostly to those at the top, but Democrats did little to address the deepening inequality and the growing power of money in politics. Having strayed from its traditional mission of taming capitalism and holding economic power to democratic account, liberalism lost its capacity to inspire.

All that seemed to change when Barack Obama appeared on the political scene. In his 2008 presidential campaign, he offered a stirring alternative to the managerial, technocratic language that had come to characterize liberal public discourse. He showed that progressive politics could speak a language of moral and spiritual purpose.

Alas, the moral energy and civic idealism he inspired as a candidate did not carry over into his presidency. Assuming office in the midst of the financial crisis, he appointed economic advisors who had promoted financial deregulation during the Clinton years. With their encouragement, he bailed out the banks on terms that did not hold them to account for the behavior that led to the crisis and offered little help for ordinary citizens who had lost their homes. His moral voice muted, Obama placated rather than articulated the seething public anger toward Wall Street. Lingering anger over the bailout cast a shadow over the Obama presidency and would ultimately fuel a mood of populist protest that reached across the political spectrum—on the left, the Occupy movement and the candidacy of Bernie Sanders, on the right, the Tea Party movement and the election of Trump.

The populist uprising in the US, Britain, and Europe is a backlash against elites of the mainstream parties, but its most conspicuous causalities have been liberal and center-left political parties—the Democratic Party in the US, the Labour Party in Britain, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Germany, whose share of the vote reached a historic low in the last Federal election, Italy's Democratic Party, whose vote share dropped to less than 20 percent, and the Socialist Party in France, whose presidential nominee won only six percent of the vote in the first round of last year's election.

Before they can hope to win back public support, progressive parties must rethink their mission and purpose. To do so, they should learn from the populist protest that has displaced them—not by replicating its xenophobia and strident nationalism, but by taking seriously the legitimate grievances with which these ugly sentiments are entangled.

Such rethinking should begin with the recognition that these grievances are not only economic but also moral and cultural; they are not only about wages and jobs, but also about social esteem.

## RETHINKING PROGRESSIVE POLITICS

**H**ERE ARE FOUR themes that progressive parties need to grapple with if they hope to address the anger and resentments that roil politics today: income inequality; meritocratic hubris; the dignity of work; patriotism and national community.

**Income inequality:** The standard response to inequality is to call for greater equality of opportunity—retraining workers whose jobs have disappeared due to globalization and technology; improving access to higher education; removing barriers of race, ethnicity, and gender. It is summed up in the slogan that those who work hard and play by the rules should be able to rise as far as their talents will take them.

This slogan now rings hollow. In today's economy, it is not easy to rise. This is a special problem for the US, which prides itself on upward mobility. Americans have traditionally worried less than Europeans about inequality, believing that, whatever one's starting point in life, it is possible, with hard work, to rise from rags to riches. But today, this belief is in doubt. Americans born to poor parents tend to stay poor as adults. Of those born in the bottom fifth of the income scale, 43 percent will remain there, and only 4 percent will make it to the top fifth. It is easier to rise from poverty in Canada, Germany, Sweden, and other European countries than it is in the US.

This may explain why the rhetoric of opportunity fails to inspire as it once did. Progressives should reconsider the assumption that mobility can compensate for inequality. They should reckon directly with inequalities of power and wealth, rather than rest content with the project of helping people scramble up a ladder whose rungs grow further and further apart.

**Meritocratic hubris:** The relentless emphasis on creating a fair meritocracy, in which social positions reflect effort and talent, has a corrosive effect on the way we interpret our success (or the lack of it). The notion that the system rewards talent and hard work encourages the winners to consider their success their own doing, a measure of their virtue—and to look down upon those less fortunate than themselves. Those who lose out may complain that the system is rigged, that the winners have cheated and manipulated their way to the top. Or they may harbor the demoralizing thought that their failure is their own doing, that they simply lack the talent and drive to succeed.



When these sentiments coexist, as invariably they do, they make for a volatile brew of anger and resentment against elites that fuels populist protest. Though himself a billionaire, Donald Trump understands and exploits this resentment. Unlike Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, who spoke constantly of “opportunity,” Trump scarcely mentions the word. Instead, he offers blunt talk of winners and losers.

Liberals and progressives have so valorized a college degree—both as an avenue for advancement and as the basis for social esteem—that they have difficulty understanding the hubris a meritocracy can generate, and the harsh judgment it imposes on those who have not gone to college. Such attitudes are at the heart of the populist backlash and Trump’s victory. One of the deepest political divides in American politics today is between those with and those without a college degree. To heal this divide, Democrats need to understand the attitudes toward merit and the work it reflects.

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**The dignity of work:** The loss of jobs to technology and outsourcing has coincided with a sense that society accords less respect to the kind of work the working class does. As economic activity has shifted from making things to managing money, as society has lavished outsized rewards on hedge fund managers and Wall Street bankers, the esteem accorded work in the traditional sense has become fragile and uncertain.

New technologies may further erode the dignity of work. Some Silicon Valley visionaries anticipate a time when robots and artificial intelligence will render many of today’s jobs obsolete. To ease the way for such a future, they propose paying everyone a basic income. What was once justified as a safety net for all citizens is now offered as a way to soften the transition to a world without work. Whether such a world is a prospect to welcome or to resist is a question that will be central to politics in the coming years. To

think it through, political parties will have to grapple with the meaning of work and its place in a good life.

**Patriotism and national community:** Free trade agreements and immigration are the most potent flashpoints of populist fury. On one level, these are economic issues. Opponents argue that free trade agreements and immigration threaten local jobs and wages, while proponents reply that they help the economy in the long run. The passion these issues evoke suggests something more is at stake.

Workers who believe their country cares more for cheap goods and cheap labor than for the job prospects of its own people feel betrayed. This sense of betrayal often finds ugly, intolerant expression—a hatred of immigrants, a strident nationalism that vilifies Muslims and other “outsiders,” a rhetoric of “taking back our country.”

Liberals reply by condemning the hateful rhetoric and insisting on the virtues of mutual respect and multicultural understanding. This principled response, however, valid though it is, fails to address an important set of questions implicit in the populist complaint. What is the moral significance, if any, of national borders? Do we owe more to our fellow citizens than we owe citizens of other countries? In a global age, should we cultivate national identities or aspire to a cosmopolitan ethic of universal human concern?

These questions may seem daunting, a far cry from the small things we discuss in politics these days. But the populist uprising highlights the need to rejuvenate democratic public discourse, to address the big questions people care about, including moral and cultural questions.

Any attempt to address such questions, to reimagine the terms of democratic public discourse, faces a powerful obstacle. It requires that we rethink a central premise of contemporary liberalism. It requires that we question the idea that the way to a tolerant society is to avoid engaging in substantive moral argument in politics.

## REVITALIZING PUBLIC DISCOURSE

**T**HIS PRINCIPLE OF avoidance—this insistence that citizens leave their moral and spiritual convictions outside when they enter the public square—is a powerful temptation. It *seems* to avoid the danger that the majority may impose its values on the minority. It *seems* to prevent the possibility that a morally overheated politics will lead to wars of religion. It *seems* to offer a secure basis for mutual respect.

This strategy of avoidance, this insistence on liberal neutrality, is a mistake. It ill-equips us to address the moral and cultural issues that animate the populist revolt. For how is it possible to discuss the meaning of work and its role in a good life without debating competing conceptions of the good life? How is it possible to think through the proper relation of national and global identities without





asking about the virtues such identities express, and the claims they make upon us?

Liberal neutrality flattens questions of meaning, identity, and purpose into questions of fairness. It therefore misses the anger and resentment that animate the populist revolt; it lacks the moral and rhetorical and sympathetic resources to understand the cultural estrangement, even humiliation, that many working class and middle class voters feel; and it ignores the meritocratic hubris of elites.

Donald Trump is keenly alive to the politics of humiliation. From the standpoint of economic fairness, his populism is fake, a kind of plutocratic populism. His health plan would have cut healthcare for many of his working class supporters to fund massive tax cuts for the wealthy. Yet to focus solely on this hypocrisy misses the point. When he withdrew the US from the Paris climate change agreement, Trump argued, implausibly, that he was doing so to protect American jobs. The real point of his decision, however, its political rationale, was contained in this seemingly stray

in what philosophers call “liberal public reason.” The first is an economic doctrine, whereas the second is a principle of political morality that insists government should be neutral toward competing conceptions of the good life.

Notwithstanding this distinction, there is a philosophical affinity between the neoliberal faith in market reasoning and the principle of liberal neutrality. Market reasoning is appealing because it seems to offer a way to resolve contested public questions without engaging in contentious debates about how goods are properly valued. When two people make a deal, they decide for themselves what value to place on the goods they exchange. Similarly, liberal neutrality is appealing because it seems to offer a way of defining and justifying rights without presupposing any particular conception of the good.

The neutrality is spurious in both cases. Markets are not morally neutral instruments for defining the common good; liberal public reason is not a morally neutral way of arriving at principles of justice. Conducting our public discourse as if it were possible to outsource moral judgment to markets, or to procedures of liberal public reason, has created an empty, impoverished public discourse, a vacuum of public meaning. Such empty public spaces are invariably filled by narrow, intolerant, authoritarian alternatives—whether in the form of religious fundamentalism or strident nationalism.

That is what we are witnessing today. Three decades of market-driven globalization and technocratic liberalism have hollowed out democratic public discourse, disempowered ordinary citizens, and prompted a populist backlash that seeks to clothe the naked public square with an intolerant, vengeful nationalism.

To reinvigorate democratic politics, we need to find our way to a morally more robust public discourse, one that honors pluralism by *engaging* with our moral disagreements, rather than *avoiding* them. Disentangling the intolerant aspects of populist protest from its legitimate grievances is no easy matter. But it is important to try. Understanding these grievances and creating a politics that can respond to them is the most pressing political challenge of our time. □

## TO REINVIGORATE DEMOCRATIC POLITICS, WE NEED TO FIND OUR WAY TO A MORALLY MORE ROBUST PUBLIC DISCOURSE.

remark: “We don’t want other countries and other leaders to laugh at us anymore.” Liberating the US from the supposed burdens of the climate change agreement was not really about jobs or about global warming. It was, in Trump’s political imagination, about averting humiliation. This resonates with Trump voters, even those who care about climate change. For those left behind by three decades of market-driven globalization, the problem is not only wage stagnation and the loss of jobs; it is also the loss of social esteem. It is not only about unfairness; it is also about humiliation.

Mainstream liberal and social democratic politicians miss this dimension of politics. They think the problem with globalization is simply a matter of distributive justice; those who have gained from global trade, new technologies, and the financialization of the economy have not adequately compensated those who have lost out. This misunderstands the populist complaint. It also reflects a defect in the public philosophy of contemporary liberalism. Many liberals distinguish between *neoliberalism* (or *laissez-faire*, free market thinking) and the liberalism that finds expression

A version of this essay was delivered as the Academy’s 2018 Airbus Lecture and draws upon the author’s “Lessons from the Populist Revolt,” published by Project Syndicate, and “Populism, Liberalism, and Democracy,” published in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* (2018).

# OUT OF THIS WORLD

## Whence Afro-German Afrofuturism?

by Priscilla Layne

**T**HE TERM “AFROFUTURISM” was first coined by cultural critic Mark Dery, in his 1994 essay “Black to the Future,” which described a decades-old cultural and theoretical phenomenon that had since spanned several countries in the African diaspora. Afrofuturism encompassed the space fantasies of jazz artist Sun Ra and the sci-fi stories and novels of Octavia Butler, and African diasporic artists’ engagement with science, science fiction, speculative fiction, and fantasy. Dery proposed that African Americans in particular had found solace in engaging in sci-fi narratives, whether in literature, music, or film. Considering the strangeness of African diasporic life, science fiction had become one of the most suitable genres for addressing their experiences. Dery writes,

African Americans, in a very real sense, are descendants of alien abductees; they inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often

brought to bear on black bodies (branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment, and tasers come readily to mind).

Articulating the African diasporic experience through science fiction allowed Black musicians, artists, and writers to highlight the alienating, inhumane, and otherworldly treatment of Black people throughout history. (I capitalize “Black” because I use it as a political category rather than a term that suggests separate races exist.) From the outset, some of the key questions Afrofuturism has been concerned with are: Who is human? To what extent have Black people been excluded from the category of humanity? How does the legacy of dehumanizing Blacks (both in slavery and colonialism) continue to plague Black lives, whether those of unarmed Black men shot by police in the US or the lives of Black migrants who die in the Mediterranean?

Up until now, much of the scholarship surrounding these questions has focused on the United States. But the problem of anti-Blackness is also a German problem.



In February 2017, for example, a damning report about Germany was issued by the United Nation's Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, claiming that African refugees were regularly faced with racism and violence in Germany. This might come as a surprise, considering that, only a year earlier, Germany was praised for taking

## WHITE GERMANS HAVE EQUATED GERMANNESS WITH WHITENESS SINCE THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, AND THEREFORE BLACK GERMANS WERE CONSIDERED AN ONTOLOGICAL IMPOSSIBILITY.

in over one million Syrian refugees. But it is possible to both accept Syrian refugees and reject African refugees, if one identifies the problem not as xenophobia, but of anti-Blackness. That bias has a long history, of course, and one that presages Afrofuturism's appearance on the scene in German art, literature, and theater in recent years.

**D**ESPITE A PRESENCE in Germany that reaches back centuries, Black Germans have only in recent decades been acknowledged as a part of the national community. Since the 1980s, Black German scholars such as May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, Fatima El-Tayeb, and Marion Kraft have not only traced the historical documentation of this presence, they have also theorized why white Germans have been so invested in ignoring and excluding Black German history. Scholars have pointed to three main reasons: white Germans have equated Germanness with whiteness since the eighteenth century, and therefore Black Germans were considered an ontological impossibility, labeled with derogatory monikers such as *Mohr* or *Neger*. Second, though there have been several movements led by Black Germans who wished to be recognized as members of the national community—including during the Weimar Republic and, later, in the 1980s—their relatively small number made it difficult to achieve the kind of critical mass necessary for a political movement to garner broader attention. Third, part of Black Germans' structural invisibility had

to do with postwar Germany's commitment to not recognizing the constructed category of race.

In the US, citizens are frequently asked to check a box indicating whether they are white, Black, Asian, Native American, or Other. In Germany, no such category exists. This does not mean, of course, that race has been a non-issue in post-1945 Germany. Rather, Blackness had become the new parameter according to which Germanness was defined and policed. One especially visible example of this binary thinking was the case of the 5,000 Afro-German children born during the immediate World War II years to German women and African American GIs. Dubbed "Brown Babies," they aroused fears that their inherent otherness (their Blackness, not their dual nationality) would make it impossible for them to assimilate. Suggestions were floated to have the children adopted by African American families abroad. Barring that, and accordant with paternity laws at the time, children born out of wedlock—as most of these children were—became wards of the state. Many of the children were removed from the homes of their biological mothers and fathers to grow up in orphanages.

The generations of Afro-Germans born since then have diverse backgrounds; some are second or third generation Afro-Germans; some have African American, African, Caribbean, or Afro-European parents. Still, this sociohistorical context puts Black Germans in an epistemological bind. Though they have experienced racism, exclusion, harassment, and violence motivated by a perceived racial difference, the historical taboo surrounding the term "race" has prevented white Germans from acknowledging such mistreatment as racism. Instead, discrimination is often explained away as an interpersonal singular incident, or as motivated by xenophobia. But "xenophobia," of course, refers to a fear of someone foreign; many Black Germans are German citizens, were born and/or raised in Germany, speak fluent German, and are, as scholar Fatima El-Tayeb claims, quite successfully "integrated."<sup>1</sup> As a result, Black Germans suffer from a racism they are not allowed to name.

For decades, Black Germans have approached this dilemma by attempting to gain recognition for their membership in the national community. Over the course of the past forty years, autobiographies have been published about the experience of being both Black and German, including by Black Germans born in the Weimar era (Theodor Michael's *Black German: An Afro-German Life in the Twentieth Century*, 2017), prior to Hitler's rise to power (Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi's *Destined to Witness*, 1999), following World War II (Ika Hügel-Marshall's *Invisible Woman*, 1998) and who grew up in East Germany (Gerd Schramm's *Wer hat Angst vorm schwarzen Mann*, [Who's Afraid of the Black Man] 2011). Additional volumes are published each year, often with titles that focus on the author's otherness. Faced with a German public that has long tried to erase or obscure

<sup>1</sup> Fatima El-Tayeb, "Blackness and its Queer Discontents," in *Re-mapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics and Culture*, edited by Sara Lennox (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 243-259.

a Black presence, Black German autobiographical texts often function as an act of declaration that demands recognition of Black German subjects. Throughout the twentieth century, the act of claiming German subjectivity has been an important speech act claiming a more inclusive definition of German identity not based on whiteness.

Even though white Germans have become more comfortable with and accepting of Black Germans, in the current political moment—plagued by anxieties about globalization and migration—this acknowledgment is not enough to battle anti-Black racism in Germany. While Black German autobiographies may testify to the ways in which Afro-Germans can be accepted as part of the national community, their existing status as ethnic German citizens might be what makes such acceptance more feasible. This is not the case for the other Black people in Germany—immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.

The consideration of how the status of citizenship can impact anti-racist activism has also affected the Black German community at large. While much of the early Black German activist work in the 1980s and 1990s concentrated on the experience of Afro-Germans or Germans with one white German parent and one parent who is from the African Diaspora, in recent years this focus has widened to include Black people in Germany who may not be citizens and not ethnically German. This shift can be seen, for example, in the decision by the organization Initiative Schwarze Deutsche (Initiative of Black Germans) to change its name to the Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (Initiative of Black People in Germany). This purposeful inclusion of *all* Black people in Germany in Black German activism acknowledges, firstly, that the problems of racism do not only affect Black German citizens, and, secondly, that the way in which non-citizen Blacks are dehumanized in anti-immigrant political rhetoric can affect Black German citizens. That's the poison of blunt racism: it does not discriminate. This is why scholar Peggy Piesche proposes the possibility that "... citizenship for Black (Germans) and POC remains a mirage."<sup>2</sup>

**ENGAGING WITH AFROFUTURISM** has been one strategy Afro-German artists have relied upon to provide new, liberating representations of Black people, to expose structural racism, rewrite the past, explore the future, and to try out alternative, more hopeful worlds in their art—from the "Afronauts" painting cycle (1999), by Daniel Kojo Schrade, and the poetry of Philipp Khabo Köpsell, to the prose of Sharon Dodua Otoo, in the novella *Synchronicity* (2014) and her Ingeborg-Bachmann-Prize-winning short story "Herr Gröttrup setzt sich hin" ("Herr Gröttrup Sits Down," 2016), to the plays of Olivia Wenzel (*Mais in Deutschland und anderen Galaxien* [Corn in Germany and Other Galaxies], 2015, and *We are the Universe*, 2016) and Simon Dede

Ayivi (*First Black Woman in Space*, 2016). Increasingly since the mid-2000s, in fact, a young generation of Afro-Germans has turned increasingly towards the Afrofuturist modes of science fiction, speculative fiction, and fantasy. This is perhaps because of all of the dangers facing Black people across the West:—police brutality, the prison industrial-complex, hate crimes, necropolitics—sad developments that evince a world where it is difficult for Black life to exist. The question of whether or not Black lives will matter in the future is a concern not just for African Americans, but also for Black people in Germany, where anti-Blackness enters public discussions in the form of neo-Nazi violence, mistreatment of Black refugees, and the disregard for Black life lost in the Mediterranean. A Berlin chapter of Black Lives Matter was founded in late 2017.

**THE PRIME IMAGINATIVE** mover of Afrofuturist sentiment globally is creating a world beyond earth that is safe for Black people, especially because so many representations of the future have been populated solely by white people. Sun Ra (néé Sonny Blount), one of the first Afrofuturist artists, not only claimed to be from Saturn, but in his landmark film *Space is the Place* (1974), he envisioned that he would take African Americans and Latin@s away from the racism and oppression of the United States on a space ship. Over forty years later, his message has not lost its relevance. African diasporic artists and intellectuals are rethinking our concept of the world, and to what extent our current world, whether that refers to earth, a specific country, or a specific neighborhood, might be deadly for Black people. In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates envisions that his childhood neighborhood of West Baltimore was a separate "world," subjected to different laws of gravity and force than the world inhabited by white Baltimoreans. Visual artists like African American Nick Cave and Nigerian Yinka Shonibare create statues of "soundsuits" and "Afro-nauts," respectively, suggesting that Black people need a special protective covering to shield them from toxic atmospheres on earth.

In the beginning, theorization of Afrofuturism was closely tied to African American culture, owing to the immense trauma of slavery that looms particularly large. But this model does not necessarily work when discussing Black European Afrofuturism, which typically locates its African diasporic roots in postwar migration, whether American soldiers occupying Germany, African immigrants traveling to Europe to study or work, or African refugees fleeing for economic and political reasons. And so, as the future draws closer every day, it is worth asking what in Afrofuturism particularly appeals to contemporary Afro-German authors and artists, and what kinds of interventions might they be trying to make into the Afro-German archive and the German discourse on race by way of Afrofuturism. If we can understand more clearly what they are doing, and why, maybe we can then understand how Afro-German Afrofuturism is a way to break entrenched binary ways of thinking about race, culture, and identity. □

2 Peggy Piesche, "Towards a Future African Diasporic Theory: Black Collective Narratives Changing the Epistemic Map," *Frauen\*solidarität* 1 (2006): 24.



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The image shows a grayscale, textured surface, possibly a biological specimen like a cell or a microscopic view of a material. A large, smooth red circle is centered on the right side of the image. Within this circle, there is a smaller, also smooth red circle. A cyan-colored, irregular boundary line follows the outer edge of the textured area. Two small red squares are positioned on the right side of the inner red circle, one slightly above the other. The word "FEATURES" is written in white, uppercase, sans-serif font across the middle of the image, partially overlapping the red circles and the cyan boundary.

FEATURES



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New Work by Academy Fellows and Friends

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Lucy Raven, still from AO, work in progress, 2018

# TRUCKSTOPS ON THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

Epistles from a prehistory  
of the cloud

by Tung-Hui Hu

**I**N 1970, THE same year that computer scientist John McCarthy asked whether home computer networks could lure TV viewers away from the tube with alternative sources of information, a modified Chevrolet van hit the road. Equipped with a clear plastic bubble, antenna, TV window, silver roof-mounted speaker domes, and a dashboard camera, the van bore a striking resemblance to a B-52 bomber. For the next year, this peculiar vehicle would be the home of the experimental architecture collective Ant Farm, a group perhaps best known for their 1974 artwork *Cadillac Ranch*, which buried ten antique Cadillacs nose-first in a Texas wheat field, their distinctive tailfins angled skywards. First, though, they

were absorbed by the thought that cars and vans could be used to create a new information network.

Ant Farm's "Truckstop Network" was born of the idea that one might reverse the dreary flow of information (and, arguably, propaganda) pumped into peoples' homes by ABC, NBC, and CBS by taking information into one's own hands. Excited by the potential of the new Portapak handheld video camera, Ant Farm began to experiment with programming their own video feed. Enter the Media Van: on a year-long tour through colleges and other points of interest, they shot video of "dancing chickens, an okra farmer, a ground-breaking in Scottsdale, aspiring pop singer Johnny Romeo belting out a ballad in the Yale School



of Architecture . . .”, to quote curator Steve Seid. If commercial television refused to broadcast these images, their souped-up Media Van would bring the network directly to the audience’s door.

For Ant Farm, as for many citizens’ video groups, radical liberation movements, environmentalists, guerrilla television activists, Yippies, and McLuhanite experimenters, the late 1960s and early 1970s became a test bed for questions that would preoccupy network culture: If you could design a two-way, “feedback network,” could you even out the structures of power and create a more participatory media environment? And if you could change the media, would its viewers see differently? These are large questions, but ones that have inevitably lost their potency over time, because so many of these structures have come into fruition: viewers feed back images and videos to television shows all the time, as with citizen-generated videos and tweets that regularly air on the evening news, and YouTube has become an even more eclectic repository for images than cable ever was.

We take distributed networks, and their properties, such as two-way interaction, for granted. As Yale art historian David Joselit reminds us, while video and community-access cable may be a “cautionary tale regarding the internet’s claims as a site for radical democracy,” it is an embarrassing lesson to learn, particularly given how quickly those technologies became commercialized and assimilated into the system of power they once claimed to subvert.

But Truckstop Network was more than an extended road trip; it was also an investigation into the possibilities of mobile living. Standing on the hinge between auto window and computer window, it proposed a countrywide network of truck stops for “media nomads.” Placed just off the highway, each truck stop would offer an array of services for those living on the road: housing, electricity, and water; truck repair and a communal kitchen; but also communications services—computers and video equipment—seen,

“like food and gas, as nutrients necessary for survival.”

Indeed, the computer aspect was essential to this plan: not only would it link all the planned truck stops, or “nodes,” in Ant Farm’s parlance, into a nationwide “communication network,” but it would also direct the visitor to the services available at

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THE POSSIBILITIES  
OF MOBILE LIVING.

other truck stops—a wood-working shop, or astrology lessons, for example. Truckers could be sent to other nodes via several highway directions; a placemat passed out to audiences on the Ant Farm tour maps several of these cross-country routes, including the “Overland Route” (Chicago to Salt Lake City to the San Francisco Bay) and the “Sunset Route” (Los Angeles to New Orleans). On the flip side of the placemat, a star identifies potential Cold War surplus sites that could be reused as nodes, an act of reappropriating what Mark Wasiuta describes as the nation’s “expanding computerized military network and its underground command centers.” A sketch for one of these sites, identified as a former desert missile silo near Wendato (likely Wendover, Utah), contains plans to transform layers of the silo into various layers for maintaining software (film/video) and hardware (auto/bus), all wired via a solar dish to its nervous system/core.

For Ant Farm, the interconnections turned each node into what they referred to as a “physically fragmented . . . ‘city’” of media. Distributed across the country in places where “land is cheap and codes are lax in between the cities”—one thinks of the arid field in Amarillo, Texas, where they executed Cadillac Ranch, or the

California deserts where they set up inflatable structures—the Truckstop nodes would be connected by the simplest yet most robust piece of Cold War infrastructure, the interstate highway. And by placing the nodes at the side of the highway, it was possible to build an existence where the journey was the destination, and where the motion of the network was the point of the network. Cars traveling between the nodes thus became packets; remaining in constant motion, each packet would not stop at one node for long before traveling to another node—in other words, “packet-switching,” the technology that the internet now uses to route and deliver packets of information from one end of the world to the other. Without a centralized node (although at one point Ant Farm envisioned a central computer to direct traffic), the network would constantly move information from point to point while avoiding the concentration of information in any one place. Moreover, the nodes were cheap, inflatable, and flexible. In effect, Ant Farm had envisioned an anarchic, distributed network for mobile living.

WE MAY BE tempted to dismiss this plan for “mobile living” as so much New Age artist cant. But Truckstop Network articulated an idea of mobility that would soon profoundly shape the internet. For the first internet protocol was designed to solve a very similar problem: while there was an existing computer network, known as ARPAnet, it consisted of fixed links that connected bunker-sized computers. Military planners envisioned a more flexible system for soldiers on the move, and commissioned researchers at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) to experiment with mobility. Though there is no evidence that SRI’s engineers saw any of Ant Farm’s media productions, they nonetheless shared a similar vision: media would need to be produced and consumed on the road.

For SRI’s engineers, this meant retrofitting a “bread truck”-style van to test the difficulty of broadcasting and

receiving network signals on the move. They wanted to see if, for instance, their packet radio connection would remain intact if the van went under a highway overpass. (Packet radio is an early version of today's cellular networks.) Rigged on the inside with a DEC LSI-11 computer and two packet radio transmitters, the SRI van ran its first successful test in August 1976, six years after Ant Farm's own media van. The test was of a protocol that would bridge the aerial network—the Packet Radio Network, or PRnet—with the ground-based ARPAnet. The inter-network they built was a way of allowing a highly mobile, even ethereal network—packet radio—to tap into a pre-existing, fixed network infrastructure. It was the first time two disparate computer networks were bridged, and as a result, it is considered the first inter-network, or internet, transmission.

The two media vans soon went into storage: SRI's to a forgotten back lot; Ant Farm's to a bunker in Marin County, California. But the inter-networking protocol SRI tested in 1976, TCP, would cement the growth of what would be christened the “internet” in 1983, and the networks' shapes would resemble the possibilities—the freedom of the road; a constantly moving, physically fragmented existence—once offered by the highway. For its part, Ant Farm's “information super-highway” had articulated a new kind of lifestyle, where media processors could go mobile, feeding information (often in the form of video) back into the cloud. Even the shift from the media of the van to digital media was not a particularly hard one to envision. On one drawing of Truckstop Network, Ant Farm mused that:

“EVENTUALLY WE WILL ABANDON PHYSICAL MOVEMENT FOR TELEPATHIC/CYBERNETIC MOVEMENT (TELEVISION) AND OUR NETWORK WILL ADAPT TO THE CHANGE.”

No matter that American highway culture itself had begun to decline due to the oil crisis. The potentialities that the highway once represented—the idea of the highway without the highway

itself, simultaneously decentralized and yet an infrastructure from the Cold War—remained.

It is unknown whether the video freaks and the network engineers driving in Portola Valley rubbed shoulders over a beer, though Ant Farm did visit the Xerox PARC computer archives in the early 1970s, to research an upcoming exhibition. Some contact is certainly possible; after all, there was a rich relationship between the counterculture and computer scientists of the San Francisco Bay Area. For instance, the former Merry Prankster Stewart Brand became the publisher of the seminal *Whole Earth Catalog*—a kind of freewheeling World Wide Web in print that inspired the hobbyists who founded the Berkeley Homebrew Computer Club, and, in turn, catalyzed the development of the personal computer. But tracing a direct link between the two groups is largely beside the point, because it only reinforces our popular imagination of technologies as inventions developed through scientists working in their labs, government funders responding to policy dictates, or entrepreneurs who stumble upon overlooked needs. What that story misses is how technology is always shaped by wider debates and structures of thought embedded in culture—and why we need to study not just inventions in their narrow moment of realization but the cultural and aesthetic problems that recur throughout time.

Let me offer an example. We typically read that ARPAnet and the internet were “invented” by the US military as a way of creating communication links that could survive a nuclear strike. But if we subscribe to this story's world view, then the imagined network that we come away with is the deeply paranoid vision of today: a global system where all nodes are seemingly connected, and thus fertile ground for conspiracy theories; an insecure world of kill switches and malicious actors and “mutually assured cyberdestruction,” against which we are told to defend ourselves. In truth, that narrative of military invention is a just-so story, like Kipling's

story of how the leopard got its spots. Even the story of SRI's test contains many other interwoven threads. As the van's driver, protocol engineer Jim Mathis, describes, its final stop was chosen because it was a “hostile environment”—in keeping with relevance to military application.” Mathis continued, “This was the parking lot of Ross[o]tti's biker bar in Palo Alto, still well in reach of the repeater units at Mt. Umunum and Mission Ridge—and with a good supply of local bikers who gave the appearance of hostility after the requisite number of beers.” There's a knowing wink here at the need to keep up appearances with the project's military sponsors, even as the van contained several other projects, including a computer program for encoding speech run by the “Network Speech Compression and Network Skiing Club,” that reflected a more utopian heritage within SRI of using computers to augment human capabilities. SRI's engineers placed a Mickey Mouse phone inside its van to test this program over the packet network; this research in digital speech resulted in the decidedly unmilitary Speak & Spell toy for children.

In their specificity, in their improvisatory strangeness, the transmissions of a Mickey Mouse phone or a dancing chicken from a media van rub against the grain of universalist claims for what media or technology do. Yet these weird and unexplainable moments offer the potential for an alternate, reparative reading of internet culture. A few miles down from Rossotti's, you could buy a catalog containing Ant Farm's latest inflatable architecture projects or video schematics from Brand's “Whole Earth Truck Store,” a physical precursor to the *Whole Earth Catalog*. It is hard to resist the conclusion that the first node on the inter-media network was a truck stop, or, in the case of SRI, a biker bar.

A VIGOROUS DEBATE about power and the centralization of networks was in the air in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Computer scientists, sociologists, urban planners, government



bureaucrats, privacy advocates, epidemiologists, and, of course, the aforementioned video artists were keenly aware of the centralizing tendencies of networks. At a congressional hearing on privacy in 1966, these experts asked what might happen if the new computer network became a “natural monopoly” like the electricity or telephone companies and began

THE TRANSMISSIONS  
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to concentrate our personal data into data centers. They spoke to a receptive audience; the congressmen likely thought of FCC commissioner Newton Minow’s earlier warnings about the “concentration of power in the hands of the networks” in a speech decrying the “wasteland” of television programming. Though the companies are different now, these questions remain stubbornly relevant to our present day. By taking the literal technology out of the picture, we can better see the various networked imaginaries before they were solidified in place as the internet—and perhaps that can help us imagine life after it. □

This essay is derived from Tung-Hui Hu’s 2015 book *A Prehistory of the Cloud*, published by The MIT Press. Reprinted with permission.



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# THE YOUNG MAN WHO SELLS ANTIQUES

Fiction by Jesse Ball

I, **DERMOT MORE, WAS** a seller of antiques, which is to say that I was lucky enough to work in an antique store, and to have obtained some knowledge about the past, and about the things of the past, enough knowledge at least to allow me to speak on behalf of these objects, and convince customers to buy what would otherwise be mere curiosities, but which, after careful description, become necessities. A home must be filled with meaning, I always say—and some of it must come from your life. But some may come from the lives of others. Admit that light, if you are brave enough. That is one of my pitches.

**I WORKED AT** the antique store every day. It is a special store. The rules of the store are, it is open when I am there, or when the old man is there, and if we are there we will sell you something if you want to buy it and if we like you. We try to be there as much as possible. It is a store where sales are rare. We might sell one item per day. That would be pretty good. So, a lot of the time we sit around, the old man and I, or the old man sits alone or I sit alone, and no one comes in at all.

But, there is a light on! There is the street with its bent black metal light-posts and the narrow glass windows of the shops, and at the end, our shop, with its light on—and you may come in if you like. If you do, if you did—then we would perhaps say nothing at







all to you. You'd come in and the door would shut softly behind you.

Ahead you would be confronted by a series of beautiful cabinets. Each cabinet has on the outside a thin and perfectly painted script and written in that thin and perfectly painted script a set of words, and described by those words, the contents of the cabinet. You may purchase the contents if you like, and you may ask to have the cabinet opened if you like. You may also open the cabinet if you like. The key is actually in the lock waiting to be turned, and that stands for every one of the 64 cabinets.

At our antique shop, we have 64 cabinets, and each one contains an antique that may be purchased. When one is bought, we replace that with another antique from our stores. Those antiques that are not in cabinets may not be bought, not for any price. This is the understanding that exists between ourselves, the antique shop proprietors, and the antiques themselves. They must wait their turn.

Of course, I am taking quite a bit on myself by saying I am one of the proprietors. In fact, I am a sort of glorified servant. I serve in the antique shop only at the behest of the actual owner and his wife, either of whose displeasure would immediately and



permanently disqualify me. At such a time, I would be given a little sack with some payment and sent off. Although this has never happened, I have often imagined it happening, as I sit through the late hours of the night in the window of the antique shop.

Part of the charm of the antique shop is that the proprietor of the antique shop, or the attendant, if you will, sits in the very window where he may be observed by anyone going up and down our little street. Of course, no one ever does go up or down that street. The only reason would be to come to the antique store. Everyone who lives in the houses of the street,

which are many and grand, has reached such an age that they go nowhere and see no one. They are huddling against the warmth of their final moments. This gives the street some of its old-fashioned charm.

**HOW DO I** remember the days? Whenever anyone asks me this, I say—I do not know what day it is. I never do. But I always remember what I sold. And 24 days ago, the thing that I sold was: a red bird.

It was a painted bird, very small. The bird was made from wood. It was carved from several notched pieces that fit together without glue. The style of the bird was this: it was a stylized bird. A bird, for instance, would not recognize it (the antique) as a bird, even were the [painted] bird to be made alive (which, of course, is impossible). The bird was rounder than birds are, and the beak was pointy in a needle-like way. The eyes were large and oval and not as precisely placed as an actual bird's eyes would be. By this I do not suggest that there is a moment wherein someone places an actual bird's eye. I know that no one does that. Case number 53 holds the red bird. The bird is made of wood and covered in paint. What is special about the red bird has to do with the paint. Twenty-four days ago, I sold the red bird to a young man. This is how it went:

a young man entered the store at about one in the morning. I was sitting in the window listening to a radio broadcast on a small table-radio set. The radio broadcast was an afternoon concert in a Moscow home, chamber music. I believe the concert had been held some fifty years ago. The broadcast was exceedingly pleasant and delivered everything one would want from such a broadcast. Occasionally there were interviews in Russian, which were pleasant to the ears of one like myself, who does not speak Russian. Above all, I hate hearing stupid things said in my own language, and so I much prefer to hear people speak languages I do not understand. That way, I can receive their fellowship without noticing their delusions.

In the midst of this fine broadcast, the door opened and shut. There in the shop was a young man in an overcoat. I did not look at him. He went up and down the aisles for some period of time and finally approached me.

He stood near me and I sat, looking fixedly at the table. I did not move my gaze from a small point there, a small point there on the table. It is an old piece of furniture, and there are many pits and cracks. Perhaps two-thirds of the way across, there is a sort of stamped depression, and within the depression, a coin-shaped scratch. That is the place that I often look at when I wait for customers to go far far out of their way in order to get my attention. Although I can't say for sure that I was looking at that spot, I am nearly positive that I was. It is the only spot for a time like that. Perhaps for other employees of the shop there could be a different spot on the table, but for me, no. I discovered that point on the very first day I was employed, and have used it effectively ever since as a sort of stoic cloak that keeps the respectability of the shop unblemished.

Anyway, the young man stood there, and listened to the radio broadcast for a little while. The music stopped, and there were just Russian voices coming out of the little box.

At some point, the voices began to laugh, and the young man laughed too.

Don't you think it's funny? he asked me. That was quite a joke.

Can I help you? I asked this young man. Either it was nonsense—he did not know Russian, or he did. Either he thought the joke was funny, or he did not. Either his remark was, in absolute essence: *I am a person of interest, please believe me*, or it was, *together we share having heard X where X is a joke made by a now-dead musician*. It might as well be accepted as the latter, I suppose. Shouldn't we always enjoy the finest world we can? Even if it is in parts shattered and imaginary?

I would like to look at one of the cabinets. Which one, I said. Any of them, he said. Number fifty-three, I said, holds the red bird. I would like to see it, then. Come with me.



We went down the aisle to number 53. The cabinets are not in order. The first thing one has to do as an attendant in the antique store is to learn the order of the cabinets. Equally, one could say, it is never important to know the order of the cabinets, as that knowledge can never once actually be put to use—or never is. All the same, we attendants like to pride ourselves on knowing the numbers. By that I mean, when I have thought about a conversation that I would have with other attendants, of which there are none (there is only the proprietor and myself), I have often considered little in-jokes and statements that we might make in perfect confederacy of understanding. One of these involves the necessity of understanding the order of the cabinets. I can draw a map at any time of the cabinets and also write out verbatim all the descriptions of the cabinet contents. I can do that not only for the current collective offering of the shop, but for every collective offering that we have made in the last five years. We attendants do not believe this to be a special skill or even notable, and I do not tell you this now in order to brag, but merely in order to be clear about what the job entails, should you consider applying for it, or for another job like it. I say that, but I don't believe there is another job like it. Although I am not vain about myself, I am certainly prideful about the shop. It is simply the greatest antique shop there has ever been. No shop of any sort comes close to it.

Enough about that. Also, I am forced to take back the final part of that paragraph as it breaks the rules of composition. I who have not been in every shop in the world cannot say it truthfully. I will restate: to this poor attendant of an antique shop who has scarcely gone anywhere on the globe, it appears to be an unquestionable fact that the very antique shop in which he labored is the finest in the land.

I led the man to the fifty-third cabinet.

Before I open this cabinet, I must tell you, I said. The bird is non-notable. Please confine your comments and

questions to the paint that has been used to cover the bird.

I opened the cabinet.

Very good, he said. Very, very good. The price is?

Considerable.

I will pay with a check. But first, let me ask you: the paint . . .

My friend, we do not simply sell these objects. You must, of course, in one way or another, *apply to purchase them*. In this case, please, if you don't mind, explain to me why you should like to be the owner of this bird.

A note here about the antique shop: the owner has sufficient wealth to live until his death. He does not require more. The shop is merely a way for him of interacting with the world. As such, he will only permit his goods to go to worthy purchasers. This was impressed upon me thoroughly at the time of my job examination. *What is the ideal customer?* was met with my answer (of which I am rightfully proud):

*The ideal customer is the actual owner of the object, who is chronologically displaced from his ownership. It is our job to bring these time-periods into alignment.*

We, therefore, attempt to investigate the character and rationale of our customers, especially by asking them to speak. As example, I bring the young man's speech from the red-bird sale, which went something like this:

There is a story, said the young man, that is told about me by my grandfather. The story was told by him before I was born, and he continues to tell it to this very day. Here it is:

he says that a child who whistles like a bird is always in danger of being shot, whether in a house or out in the woods. He says that he has both been this child (been shot), and been the one who has shot the child. He says that under no circumstances should children be taught to whistle, and if they are taught to whistle, then they should never never be taught to whistle like a bird. Of course, my grandfather taught me when I was very young how to whistle just like a bird.

The young man made a short sharp whistle. If I hadn't been watching him, I would have suspected a bird had come into the shop. Indeed, even looking at him, it was no longer so clear—was he a bird dressed as a man? Oh, I'm just joking with you now. I know very well that he was just an antique-buyer.

So, he taught you to whistle like a bird?

He did, and then this.

The young man pulled down the collar of his coat to show me a scar that ran across the side of his neck.

I was shot once, while sitting on the lawn of my uncle's house. I was shot while whistling.

We sat there for a moment and I felt that it would be acceptable to sell this young man the red bird.

You ask about the paint, I said. I cannot go on record speaking about the paint, but I will say this about it: such a red paint: were one to imagine how such a paint might be obtained, one would think thusly:

a thief would have to be employed to sneak into cathedrals all throughout Europe and take the long preserved relics of 16 or 17 saints. Those relics would have to be brought to a secret place and ground up along with the rusted metal of a train wheel that had crushed a man. Then the mixture must be laid out on a thin pan for years on a rainless mountain peak where now and again a sovereign lidded cloud passes over failing ever to look down.

If there were such a red color as this, I said, it is in such a way that it might be made. We take no responsibility for the regrettable thefts that have been reported now these many years, and we are sorry to hear that the great cathedrals of Italy have scarcely a relic left to rub between them. Nonetheless, I offer to you this fine red bird. You say you will pay with a check?

I wrapped the bird in a fine white cloth and then in another of thicker silk and then another of wool and finally a coarse canvas.

That was the sale of the red bird. □

# BECOMING A WHITE MAN IN THE THEATER

by P. Carl

**L**AST YEAR, THE online platform *Howlround* I help to run published an article by a group of distinguished women—theater practitioners and scholars—about the inherent bias in criticism in American theater that is primarily written by white men. The article was not a personal attack on any single individual; it states quite clearly: “The complaint is not personal; in other words: it is structural. Individual critics are ‘not the enemy.’” The article then implores, “We need a more expansive and informed notion of how critics come to decide what is ‘good,’ and a more honest conversation about why ‘good’ is often associated with plays by and about white men.”

As someone who was part of the conversation to publish the piece, I didn’t think this was such a radical provocation. We know that the field of

criticism is dominated by white men. This is especially true of the first-line theater critics in many cities and, of course, in New York. Also, the idea that structural bias exists is hardly new. In fact, we have an entire country struggling with this issue right now. Further, that there is a thing called “patriarchy” didn’t seem that radical to me either.

But 252 online comments later, I saw that it was. Many white male commentators responded defensively. Chris Jones, a leading Chicago theater critic, responded in the *Chicago Tribune*, further contemplating the pitfalls of the democratization of the arts, asking ultimately how he and other gatekeepers will get paid if everyone can have an opinion about what is “good”:

*Alas, this new radical democratization threatens critics, just as it*

*does well-paid artistic directors, executive directors, curators and all kinds of other gatekeeper types in the cultural universe, which explains why some say we/they react defensively . . . to any grass-roots rebellion.*

For Jones and others, it is interesting that democratization feels like a form of rebellion rather than a way of being inclusive. When we dare to point out structural bias and to question the professional establishment, we are performing acts of consciousness. When we choose to refer to acts of consciousness as acts of rebellion, the demand for democratization gets too easily reduced to personal attacks, and can be dismissed as lacking empathy. The demand for democratization isn’t rebellious, but rather our responsibility as citizens—to push our field to be



more representative of the America we live in. The “gatekeeper types” have represented a small and exclusive part of our democracy and we must be challenged, and we don’t have to react defensively. Rather, we might have to feel the precariousness that women and trans people and people of color know so very well.

**T**HIS HAS BEEN for me an inexplicable year of seeing the world in a completely different way: I have gone through a gender transition. I joined a club. I became a white man. And, as I like to jokingly say, I picked a really complicated time to become me—despite popular opinion, trans wasn’t a choice for me.

By becoming myself, I entered a world of privilege I knew nothing about, a world I had heard about for sure but one I could have never imagined. Don’t get me wrong, being a trans guy is super complex and filled with a million discriminations—just try navigating the healthcare system for example. And I have news for you: the American theater is really trans-phobic. Landmines of micro-aggressions blow up in every direction, even from open-minded, socially conscious individuals. I have been stunned at the level of discrimination I have faced trying to transition.

One day I was ambiguous to the world, sometimes “he” and sometimes “she” . . . and then one day I was a man. What happened? What is that thin line that makes clarity for us between “he” and “she”?

Once I started to walk through the world as a white man, everything changed in my day-to-day reality. Now, those who encounter me for the first time don’t know I’m trans. Guess what? This white man’s world is a world of incredible daily privileges. It’s a world that I would describe as the opposite of one filled with micro-aggressions; a world where things just get handed to you without even asking. The first weekend I was in New York as a man, I had people waiting on me at the hotel in a way I had never experienced before. A waiter forgot to

bring my orange juice and gave me free breakfast the rest of the week. I went into a store to buy a suit jacket the following week in Boston and had several male employees try to help me. (I have a long history of buying men’s clothes before the transition, and good luck getting anyone to look at you!) When I went to pay, the clerk asked me if the jacket was on sale and I said no. He let me know that it would likely go on sale so he would just give me half off. Other white men treat me in an entirely different way. It’s a strange kind of warmth, a lot of “hey buddy, how’s it going?” And then there is riding around in a Lyft. Who knew men talk a lot? They talk a lot to other men, I guess. They sometimes talk about women in ways that make me cringe, they talk about sports, and cars and politics and culture, but, in general, I notice getting around is more relaxing, less threatening. It’s just easy to get from here to there in a way it never was before. It’s so many small privileges that you would never notice them unless you never had them before. This is called structural bias, and if you’ve benefitted from it you are unlikely to know it because it’s not a privilege you’ve personally asked for, it’s just been handed to you as you move around the world.

Another thing I notice as a guy: men, and not just white men, use their privilege all the time in the theater. Somehow I can see this so much more clearly when I’m not the victim of it. They constantly interrupt women. They generally think their point of view is more informed and they never hesitate to jump in and speak up and let you know this. And white men specifically have no idea the ways in which navigating the world of work in the theater is just easier for them. They don’t think they should experience obstacles and seemed shocked when things that happen to women and people of color all the time, happen to them. The men I’ve seen behave this way aren’t individually bad people, they take advantage of the privilege that has been handed to them but too often they do so unaware, and get defensive when they are called on

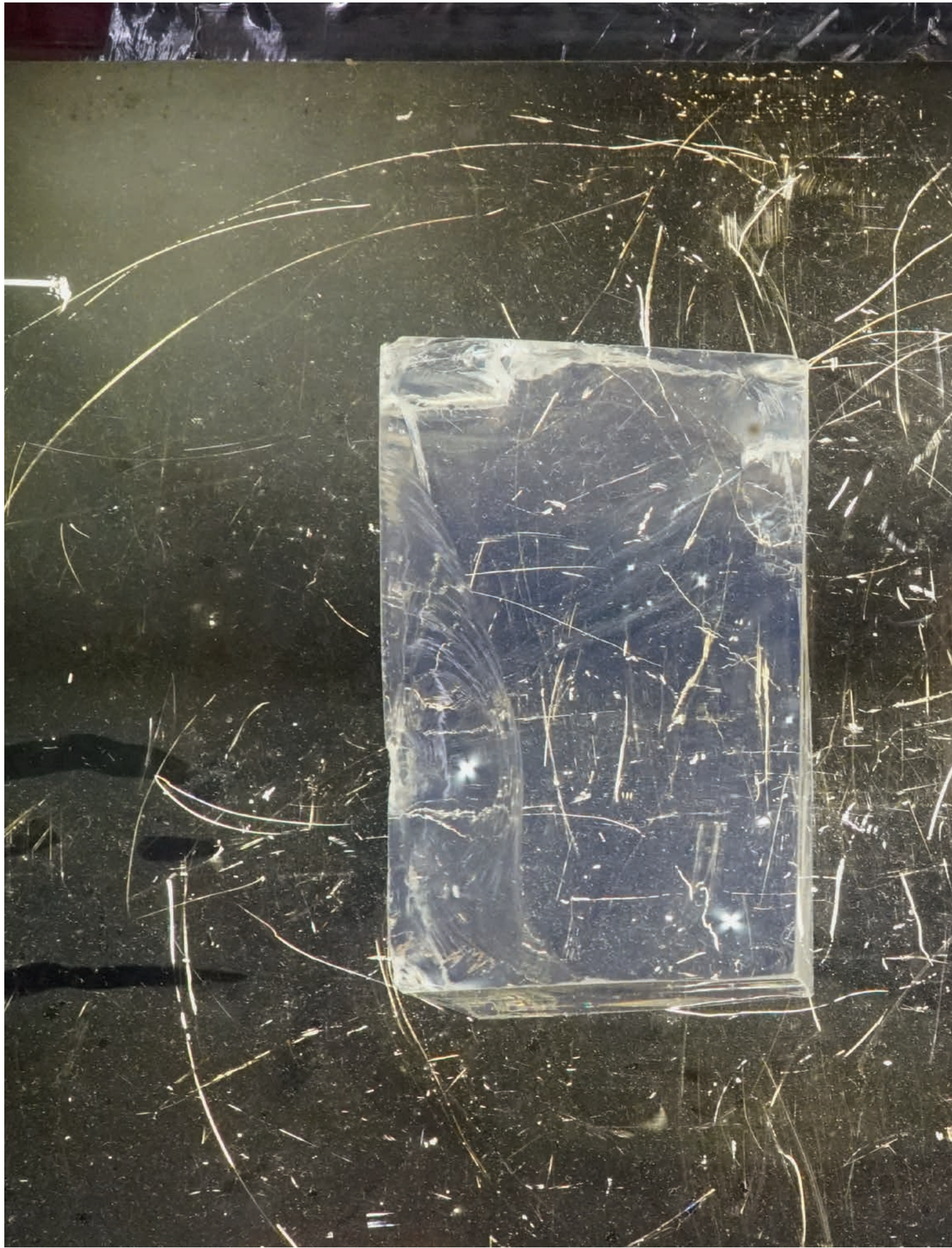
it. In this universe, is it any surprise that white men would step in to lead the way as arbiters of art (as critics and artistic directors)? They so fully trust their point of view, of course they would think it valid and informed and open-minded. This field is filled with misogyny. I couldn’t see this as clearly until I stopped sitting in its way.

**I SEE THE** current mess we’re in—this radical moment where we no longer accept certain truths about art as conveyed to us by the gatekeepers—as an opportunity to lead the way toward a new America. The arts can actually push us forward here because imagination is one of the things we will need to create a new reality in our institutions (artistic and critical) that serves as an invitation to our radically diverse communities. Theater belongs to us all, women and trans people and people of color all belong on Broadway, and we should all get to participate in the economic reality that has been the sole property of white men for too long. Democratization isn’t the death of excellence and professionalism and expertise, it is the evolution of it. It is the beginning of new ways for us to live and experience culture together and to advance the medium we love to new heights.

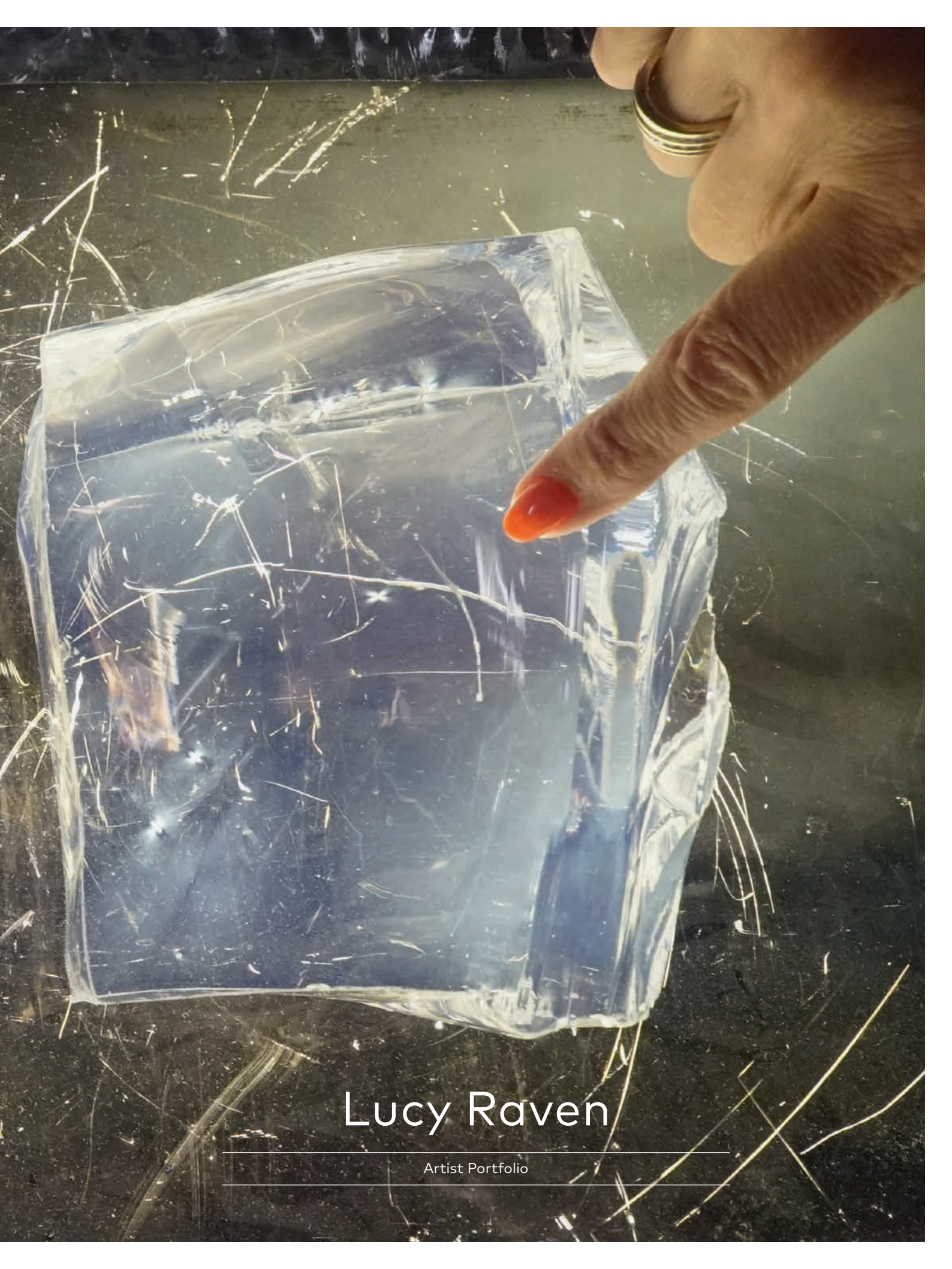
For this shift to occur, those bemoaning inclusion as a potential threat and loss have to gain a new level of self-awareness about how they have benefitted from and wielded their privilege. In the ways that those of us denied privilege for so long have had to adapt to untenable circumstances—well, white guys, we might have to stop interrupting all the time and listen and feel uncomfortable. □

A longer version of this essay was first published in 2017 on Howlround.com, an online platform for theater-makers worldwide. Reprinted with permission.









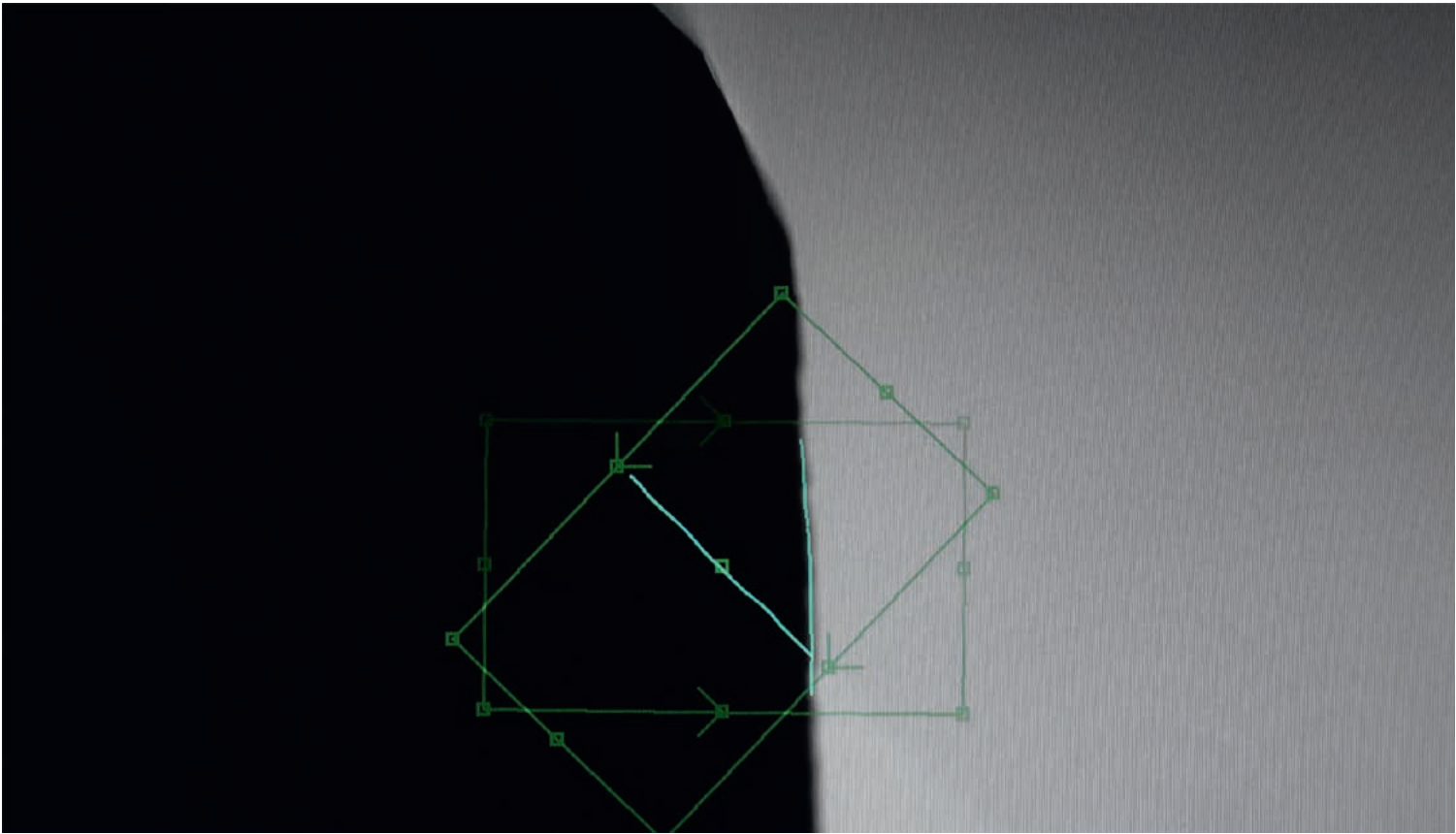
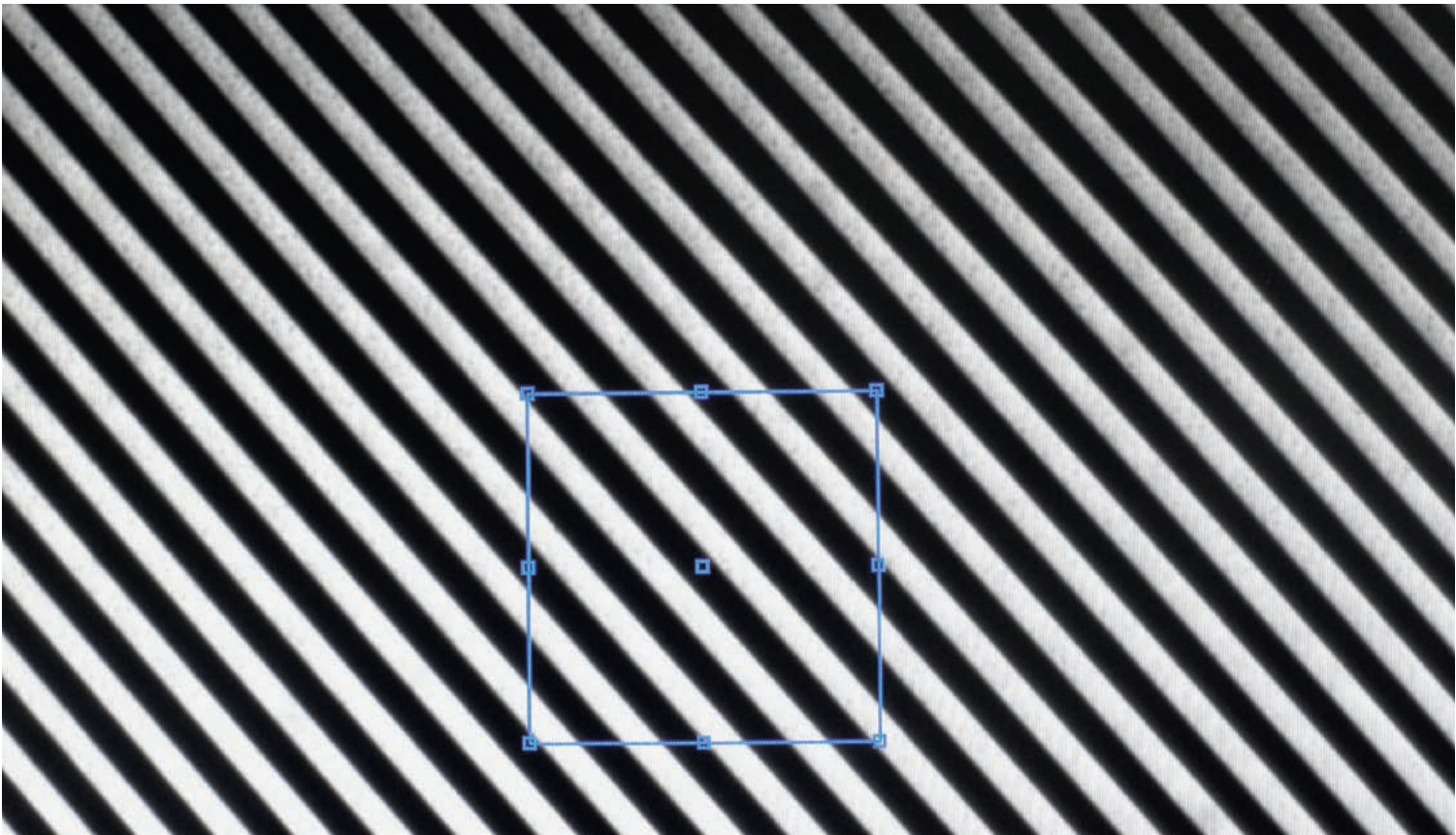
Lucy Raven

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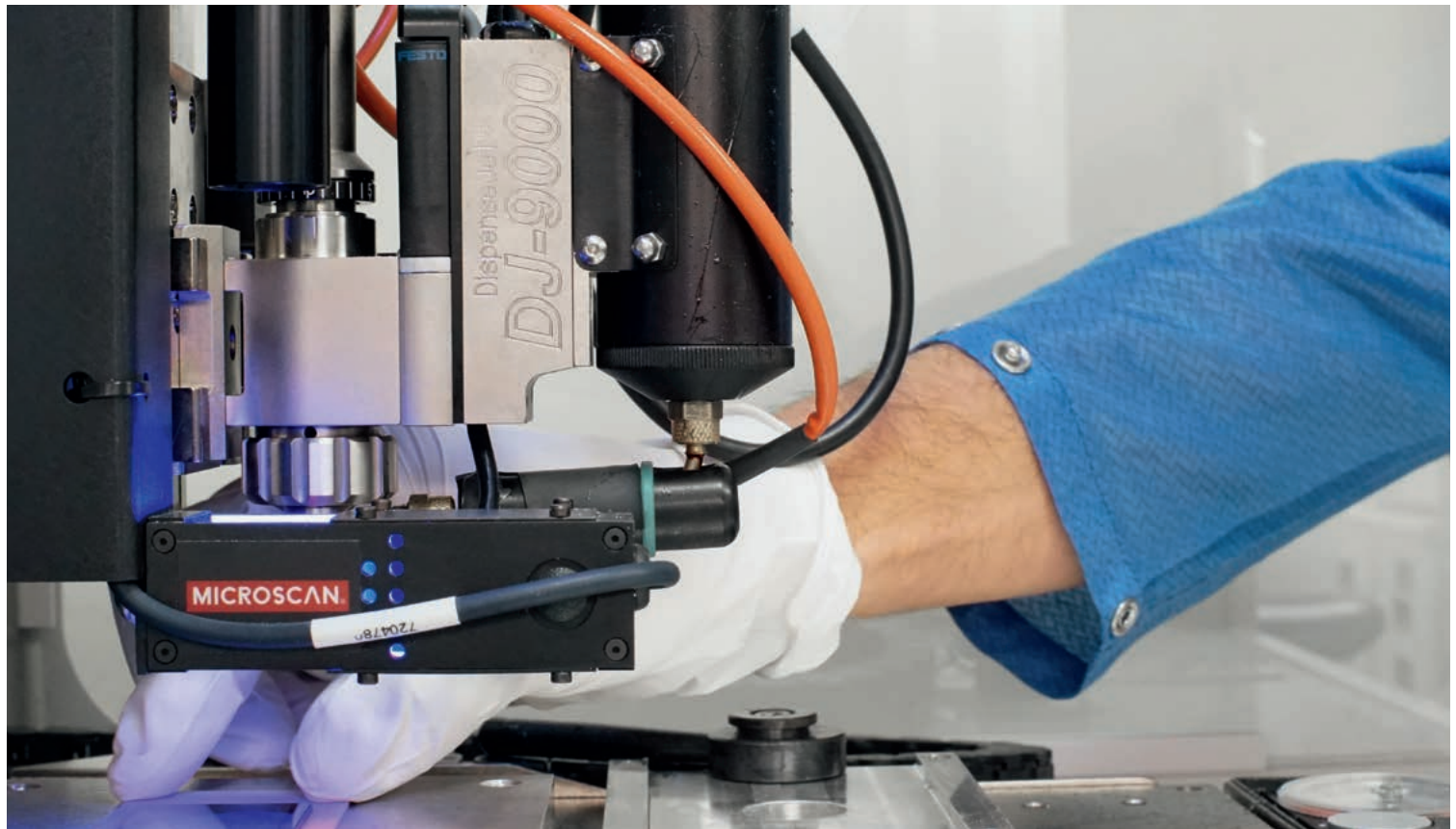
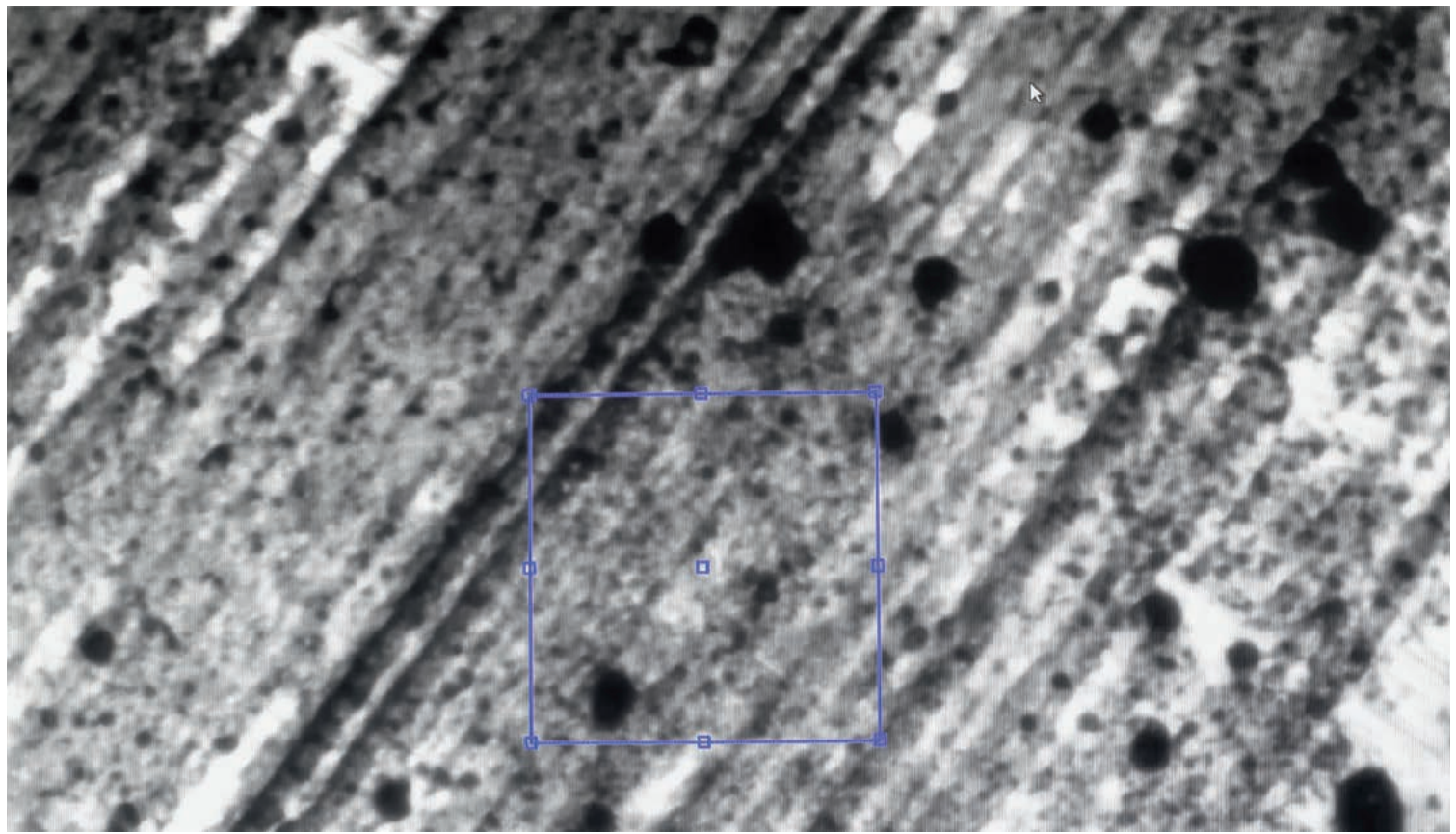
Artist Portfolio

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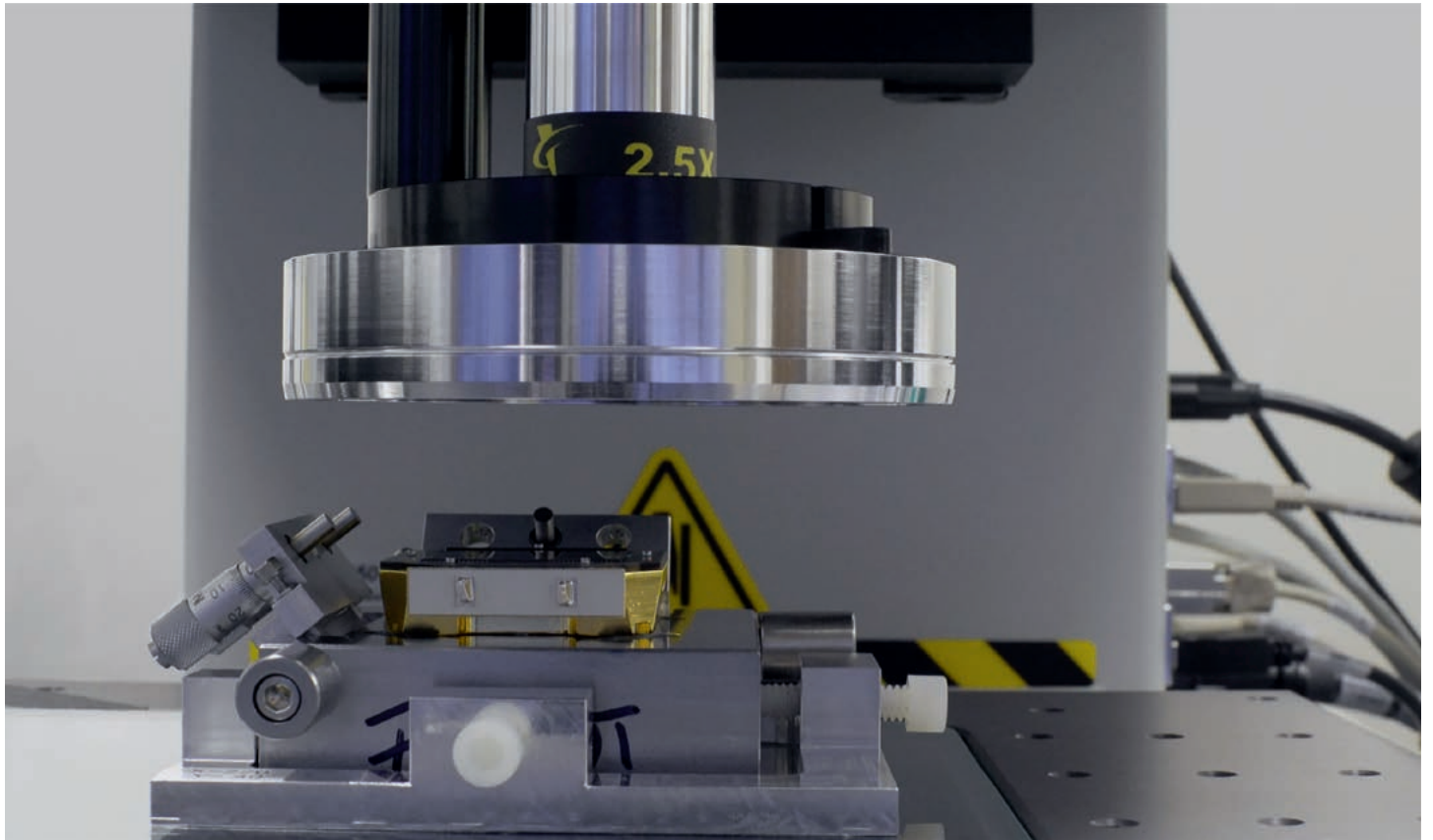














# LUCY RAVEN

A brief introduction  
for the unfamiliar viewer

by Pavel S. Pyš

**REFLECTING ON THE PROBLEM** of documentation, sculptor Carol Bove wrote, in a 2001 *Art Journal* article: "The official photo takes one moment from [the artwork's] life and confers on it a special status." The claim to know an artwork through its photographic reproduction is a dubious one, as all those essential properties—size, scale, texture, color, smell, temperature, and duration—evade the frozen, singular image. In the case of moving-image artists like Lucy Raven, the problem centers on the film still, an elevated, illustrative excerpt deemed to offer maximal insight. I will try to avoid falling into this pesky trap by considering instead some images taken by Raven that, for now, claim the role of "preparatory materials" for AO—a work in progress—to consider broader themes underscoring her practice.

The images reproduced here are either microscopic or simply casual in nature. While they show what appears to be a high-end industrial complex, there are suggestions of the everyday: a bright-red painted fingernail points to shards of glass or lumps of gel, while elsewhere workers are seen in the background chatting and smiling. These originate from the Steward Observatory Mirror Lab, located underneath a football stadium in Tucson, Arizona (incidentally, the artist's city of birth). Sterile and technical, as well as candid and informal, Raven's images show the production of state-of-the-art 27-foot parabolic mirrors manufactured for the world's largest telescopes. The painstaking production process bridges handmade and industrial techniques to yield sophisticated mirrors that allow scientists to capture the most detailed images of our universe.

Throughout her research-driven practice, Raven has repeatedly turned her attention towards the relationships between architectural sites, industrial production processes, and places of labor. Her works address the often-invisible networks or exchanges that facilitate services and products, revealing transnational trade agreements and contemporary global connectedness (though designed in California, do you realize, dear reader, what has gone into the making of *your* iPhone in China?). Raven's photographic animation *China Town* (2009), for example, traces the journey of raw copper ore from a pit mine in Nevada to a Chinese smelter, where it is turned into copper wire, a material used widely as a conductor in the electrification of buildings and telecommunications networks. In *The Deccan Trap* (2015), Raven forges a relationship between imagery of Indian technicians converting outsourced Hollywood films from 2D to 3D in an office in Chennai, and the carved stone reliefs of the Ellora Caves, a temple complex in Maharashtra. Described by the artist as a "sci-fi fable," the video work compares how labor—the shaping of forms out of solid, stone material in a real place, and the molding of pixelated immateriality in virtual space—tricks the eye in the creation of a perspectival illusion of depth.

Why might Raven be so attracted to the Steward Observatory Mirror Lab? Drawing on the history of cinema and animation, her work is rooted in questions of how images are crafted, manipulated, produced, and consumed. Take *RP31* (2012), for example, a stroboscopic montage of 31 Hollywood test patterns—called "recommended practices" by the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers—typically seen solely by a movie-theater technician to adjust focus, aperture, and framing for optimal viewing. With each frame corresponding to one test pattern, Raven points to this typically unseen directive, while also prohibiting its full contemplation due to the work's rapid succession of imagery. In *RP31*, *The Deccan Trap*, as well as other works, Raven turns to acts of looking and seeing to explore the limits of perceptibility and the ways in which technology aids or tricks the human eye.

When considering Raven's interest in telescopic mirrors in Arizona, I am reminded of the painter Vija Celmins, whose work sources images of stars and galaxies. "I've always liked the scientific image," she said, in a recent Tate film about her work, "because it's sort of anonymous, and often the artist for the image has been a machine [. . .] I like the idea that I can relive that image and put it in human context." Raven, much like Celmins, is interested in how the mechanical affects the personal, determining the nature and boundaries of experience.

# THE ORIGINS MYTH

Looking anew at Islam's  
material beginnings

by Fred M. Donner

**The** **FAMOUS FRENCH**  
**HISTORIAN** of  
religions Ernest  
Renan (1823-1892), over a century ago, confidently pronounced that “Islam was born in the full light of history.” He intended this statement to stand in contrast to the uncertainty that surrounds the life of Jesus and the earliest history of Christianity. Renan’s judgment was based on the fact that scholars of his generation were busily discovering and for the first time publishing medieval Islamic chronicles, biographical dictionaries, poetry, and other works in Arabic that provided a rich account of Islam’s origins. Compared with the little we know of Jesus, it seemed as if we could recover countless details about the life

in western Arabia of Islam’s prophet, Muhammad (d. 632).

At last, as Renan’s pronouncement suggests, we could trace with confidence the early history of the first Muslim community Muhammad founded, including its struggles against Muhammad’s former hometown of Mecca. We could reconstruct an overview of the expansion of the community after Muhammad’s death, and its rapid establishment of political control over geographical Syria, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, and areas even farther afield. We could also study the inner divisions of the nascent Muslim or Islamic community, riven by rivalries between earlier and later supporters of the prophet, between Muhammad’s original Arabian followers (and their

descendants) and new converts to Islam from areas outside Arabia, between people from different Arabian tribes, and—perhaps most bitter of all—between different members of the close circle of Muhammad’s initial supporters, who came to compete with each other for political and religious leadership of what had rapidly become a sprawling empire, covering thousands of square kilometers. We could marvel at the successes of the Arabian forces marching under the new banner of Islam as they confronted, and again and again defeated, the armies of the two great powers of the day, the Later Roman (Byzantine) Empire based in Constantinople and the Sasanian Persian Empire, based in Ctesiphon (near modern



Baghdad)—the powers that had, before Islam’s sudden rise, dominated all the lands of the Near East and eastern Mediterranean. There was also the text of the Qur’an, Islam’s sacred scripture, considered a text dating to the time of the prophet Muhammad and containing the substance of the divine revelations he claimed to have received.

Renan’s confidence in information found in this vast corpus of medieval Islamic narrative or literary sources was widely shared by scholars in his day, and continued to be the dominant assumption among scholars of Islam and Islam’s history until quite recently. Some scholars, especially Muslim scholars, continue to accept the reliability of these sources even today. As a result, if one looks into most encyclopedias or introductory world history or world religion textbooks, even those published recently, one finds a description of how Islam began that tracks almost unwaveringly from the narrative constructed by the medieval Islamic community—what we can call the “traditional Islamic origins narrative.”

**THERE CAN BE** no doubt that some, perhaps many, aspects of this traditional Islamic origins narrative may tell us “what actually happened” when Islam arose in the seventh century. But even in the nineteenth century some skeptical voices were raised that cast doubt on the reliability of these traditional sources. The great Hungarian Orientalist Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) demonstrated irrefutably that a number of the sayings attributed to the prophet Muhammad, even those deemed most sound by Muslim tradition, were, in fact, fabrications dating from later centuries and reflecting later religious, political, or social concerns. The Belgian Jesuit Henri (1862-1937) argued that many of the episodes in the *Sīra* or traditional

biography of Muhammad were not true historical reports but rather later inventions designed to provide a plausible context for verses of the Qur’an. The Dutch Orientalist M. J. de Goeje (1836-1909) critiqued the narratives about the rapid expansion of the Islamic community that took place after Muhammad’s death. Yet despite these early expressions of caution, most scholars of Islam—in the West as well as in the Islamic world—accepted the traditional origins narrative with only minor adjustments, dismissing the critiques of their more skeptical colleagues as relevant only to very limited or narrow issues and not applicable to the main body of the sources. The traditional Islamic origins narrative thus reigned supreme through much of the twentieth century, even among scholars of Islam and Islamic history.

Around 1970, however, a more comprehensive and fundamental critique of the sources for Islam’s origins began to take shape, rooted in a growing awareness that most of the traditional sources were not contemporary with the beginnings of Islam but only produced later—a century, and sometimes many centuries, later. Albrecht Noth (1937-1999) produced several studies that suggested that many of the reports about early Islam found in traditional narrative sources were literary constructs with little historical foundation. Günter Lüling (1928-2014) and John Wansbrough (1928-2002) proposed radical reinterpretations of the Qur’an text, completely different from each other but both casting doubt on the traditional view of the nature and origin of the text, and therefore of the whole origins narrative in which it had been situated.

The crucial turning-point was the publication, in 1977, of the book *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, by Patricia Crone (1945-2015)

and Michael Cook (b. 1940), which synthesized the sometimes arcane work of earlier skeptics and their own insistence on sound historical method into a frontal assault on the traditional view of Islam’s origins, and proposed a radically different historical recon-

## The traditional Islamic origins narrative reigned supreme through much of the twentieth century, even among scholars of Islam and Islamic history.

struction based mainly on archaeological, documentary, and non-Islamic sources. After its publication, scholars of early Islam could no longer proceed, as their predecessors had for over a century, simply to mine detailed information from the Arabic narrative sources on the naive assumption that they could in this way reassemble a trustworthy picture of what had happened.

**As** **A RESULT,** RESPONSIBLE scholars who today wish to explore Islam’s origins and its early history do so by pursuing one, or both, of two distinct approaches. On the one hand, one can continue to work with the traditional narrative sources, but rather than merely quoting them uncritically, one must painstakingly pick them apart to understand the motivations of their compilers, and the motivations and

sources of information of the many informants from whom they transmit material, and so to come to some sense of where and how the material transmitted has reached us, and what axes it grinds. This is laborious, and it may seem to some a fool's errand, but despite the fact that these traditional narrative sources are full of later distortions, tendentious elaboration, and sheer fantasy, we should not simply dismiss them because they also contain at times nuggets of sound information.

For example, the chronicles tell us about a figure named Shurayh, who was appointed as judge (*qadi*) by the early caliph 'Umar around 640 CE. He is depicted as an exemplary judge and is said to have served in this post for fifty, sixty, or even seventy(!) years.

## Perhaps the greatest potential source of accurate new information about Islam's origins lies in written documents from the seventh century, the majority written on papyrus.

However, in the extant early documents (e.g. Egyptian papyri) the office of *qadi* is not mentioned until the end of the eighth century. It seems likely therefore that these chronicle reports were invented at that later time in order to legitimize the new office of judge, by providing an apparent precedent for it in the heroic days of the first caliphs, who had by this time come to be viewed as the *rashidun*, those "rightly guided [by God]."

On the other hand, in these same sources we find other reports that find confirmation in early documents. We have, for example, reports, similar in form to those about Shurayh, that

describe how a particular person was appointed governor of, say, Kufa, in Iraq, by an early caliph. We might be inclined to be skeptical about such reports too, but in some cases there exists a coin minted in this place and time in the name of this very governor, confirming the validity of the report in the chronicle. There is, in other words, some sound information in the traditional narrative sources; the problem is to tell which reports are sound and which are not, and it will take a lot of careful work with these sources to separate the wheat from the chaff.

So much for the first approach. The alternative is for scholars to work with actual documents dating from the seventh century, the period of Islam's inception and early development. (This is, in part, what the authors of *Hagarism* had tried to do.) Such documents have the advantage of providing incontrovertible evidence of what was happening during the early years of the new community's existence, before the standard origins narrative was formed, with its back-projections of later concerns and likely distortions and idealizations of the origins period. Given the difficulty of unraveling the later narrative sources, the examination of true documents from the seventh century (inscriptions, coins, architecture and art, and written documents on papyrus, leather, wood, and other media) seems an obvious tactic to adopt.

The challenges here are also daunting, however. For one, there have survived very few actual documentary sources from the seventh century CE, the period before the crystallization of the dogmatic vision of the traditional origins narrative we find enshrined in the narrative sources. We do have a large number of coins issued by the Believers' movement (as I prefer to call the early Islamic community), starting within a few years of Muhammad's death, and a highly dedicated band of numismatists is busily studying this coin evidence, often using mind-bogglingly sophisticated technical methods. This coin evidence, as it becomes increasingly available through publication of the results of numismatic

analysis, is important, but it tends to tell us about a very narrow range of issues. By comparison with coins, inscriptions from the seventh century can inform us about a wider range of subjects, but they are very few in number. Archaeological evidence is an increasingly important source, but often mute on questions such as the ideas and motivations of the people who made them.

Perhaps the greatest potential source of accurate new information about Islam's origins lies in written documents from the seventh century, the majority written on papyrus. Although hundreds of thousands of Arabic papyri from the Islamic centuries survive in museums around the world (including many in Berlin), only a very small fraction of them—perhaps less than one-tenth of one percent—date back to the seventh century. The vast majority date to the eighth, ninth, or tenth centuries (and papyrus was replaced as a writing medium entirely by paper in the eleventh century). The Arabic papyri have the distinct advantage, however, that they include many different kinds of documents: official decrees, tax records and receipts, administrative records and correspondence, private letters, shopping lists, property leases and sales, marriage contracts, etc. They can thus shed light on many aspects of life in the period when Islam, as we now know it, was gradually coalescing as a coherent religion.

The challenge today is to identify every surviving seventh-century Arabic papyrus document or fragment, to collect and study them, and then publish them, so that the potentially revolutionary information they contain can find its way into the work of scholars who study Islam's origins. The evidence they and other seventh-century documents contain will provide the surest way to see behind the dogmatic formulations of the traditional Islamic origins story of the narrative sources, and help us at last to see "what actually happened" in the formative phases of Islamic history. □



# THE ABSENT EPIC

China and the politics  
of narrative

by Haun Saussy

**A**N EPIC, AS everybody knows, is a long tale, usually in chanted verse, telling of heroes and gods who establish the world order—most often by fighting a war, sometimes by undertaking a perilous journey, sometimes both. Both Giambattista Vico and G.W.F. Hegel maintained that epic enables nations to discover their freedom to act in the world, their collective identity, and the limits of their power. Epic founds the “we.” The Greeks knew themselves not only as the descendants of the heroes of the *Iliad*, but also as the people who continually listen to the *Iliad*. History, in the dual sense of the events of the past and of their perpetuation in memory, is often said to begin with the epic. It strikes

us as natural that the earliest documents of many cultures—*Gilgamesh*, *Mahābhārata*, *Beowulf*, *Prince Igor*, *The Nibelungenlied*, and so on—are epics. Periods of imperial expansion, discovery and conquest, likewise prompt the composition of epics (*The Aeneid*, *The Lusiads*, *Paradise Lost*).

But as Hegel asserts, in *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835), “the Chinese have no national epic.” There are certainly long heroic narratives in Chinese literature, but they arise too late in history to have a foundational role. Many concerned people have tried to nominate or synthesize a Chinese epic. The scholar C. H. Wang, for instance, has bundled a series of short poems from the ancient *Book of Odes* to make a connected narrative that he called the

*Weniad*, the story of King Wen’s founding of the Zhou Dynasty, in 1046 BCE. Others have found epic qualities in the first complete history of China, Sima Qian’s *Shiji*, composed before 90 BCE. The problem with these solutions is that they take Hegel’s pronouncement as definitive and try to answer him on his terms. Why indeed would China want to have a national epic, except in order to keep up with the neighbors? What if the Chinese, left to their own devices, were perfectly indifferent to the charms of the epic until the modern period brought them face to face with Western historiography?

Up to now, precisely “indifference” has been my answer to the question. But wider reading in the literatures of Asia in order to get an idea of the

relationships and influences of literature on a continental scale suggests to me a stronger response: active rejection of epic, up to the moment when epic could be exploited for political ends.

**E**PIC TRADITIONS CENTERING upon a hero who unites disparate tribes, defeats enemies, and founds a conquering dynasty are the dominant verbal art-form over a vast range of territory that is today technically within China but not culturally Chinese. The Kyrgyz epic of *Manas*, the Uyghur epic of Oghuz Khan, and the epic of Janggar sung by Mongolians, Kalmyks, and Oirats exemplify this story pattern, but the largest share of scholarly attention has gone to the *Gesar* epic of Tibet.

The epic of King Gesar, according to its translator Robin Kornman, “is generally accepted [as] the longest single piece of literature currently in the world canon, encompassing some 120 volumes and about 20 million words,” and it appears to have arisen in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The epic recounts the birth, ordeals, and military campaigns of King Gesar of Ling, who overcomes adversaries at home, wins a wife, resists the charms of a number of witch-princesses, conquers 18 strategic castles, and subdues the kingdoms of the Four Directions to install a realm of peace and justice. Warrior epic, trickster fables, anecdotes of skill, tales of magic, and acts of spiritual combat combine with events from the history of Eastern Tibet in the twelfth century. The epic circulates in Mongolian, Manchu, Turkic, Tangut, Ladakh, and other versions, though Tibetan versions are considered primary. The divinified Gesar, in fact, is honored in temples throughout Tibet, Central Asia, Manchuria and Mongolia. And so, in terms of literary geography, the epic in full flower was right next door to China, and China was ruled for centuries by peoples who indulged in epic (the Yuan or Mongol dynasty, 1276-1368; the Qing or Manchu dynasty, 1644-1911).

But Chinese literati were having none of it. Literary values in China, it seems, implied not ignorance of epic but an active rejection of it.

Indeed, acquaintance with the epic tradition is a marker of the degree to which the non-Chinese in the Chinese empire shared cultural resources in which the Chinese took no interest. When the Panchen Lama visited Beijing in 1780, his conversation with the Qianlong emperor concerned the factual basis of the *Gesar*; the Lama prepared for this interview by gathering information from a learned colleague, the abbot Sumpa Yeshe Paljor. Epic, like Tibetan Buddhism, provided

**The epic of King Gesar is “the longest single piece of literature currently in the world canon, encompassing some 120 volumes and about 20 million words.”**

a kind of “cultural glue” for uniting the Inner Asian peoples of the Manchu imperium, but it would presumably have been without appeal to the Chinese. *Gesar*, the Janggar epic, and the epic of Oghuz Khan were never translated into Chinese until the late twentieth century. The Manchus knew the low regard Chinese had for steppe peoples and nomads (the very people among whom epic has traditionally flourished) and did not seek to spread Manchurian cultural practices among the people they ruled.

The origins of these *Gesar*, Janggar, and *Manas* epics are multiple. They arose in a variety of milieux that encouraged cultural mixing: the pan-Asian migrations of Mongol armies, the wanderings of Turkic peoples, the commercial oases of the Silk Road, and the passages between India, Tibet, and Central Asia. One of the formative influences on the *Gesar* epic was the *Ramayana*, available in a condensed Tibetan version from at least the eleventh century. Among the components

of the *Gesar* are a characteristically Central Asian mix of “foreign themes transported by Buddhist missionaries, Sogdian merchants, Muslim travelers, obscure marketplace singers and other vagabonds,” wrote the late Sinologist Rolf Stein, “combined with and superimposed on indigenous Tibetan stories, particularly those from the Amdo region.” An oral epic accumulates and digests any material that is seen as valuable for developing its themes. Ironically, since epics are supposed to be foundation-legends of national uniqueness, Asian nomad epics in particular are extremes of hybridity.

A Mongol text of the *Gesar* epic was printed in Beijing in 1716. The Chinese label on the outside attests to a misunderstanding: it reads *Sanguo zhi*, “Romance of the Three Kingdoms.” Taking the *Three Kingdoms*—a Chinese historical novel from the 1300s dealing with the period 160-280 CE—for the *Gesar* is a bit like mistaking Goethe’s *Faust* for the *Iliad* because Helen of Troy appears in both. There is, however, a connection, though weak. One of the heroes of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is the loyal general Guan Yu, deified under the name of Guandi. Temples dedicated to Gesar in the Tibetan, Central Asian, and North Asian areas were known to Chinese-speaking settlers as “temples of Guandi.” But anyone who had taken a good look at the legends, paintings, or statues concerning Gesar would quickly understand that here was a different hero, a Buddhist wonder-working warrior-king whose efforts at uniting three Tibetan kingdoms came a thousand years after the division of China into the three kingdoms fought over by Guan Yu and his rivals. Perhaps the misunderstanding was just “good enough” to do what it was meant to do: find a library pigeonhole for a book that no Chinese scholar was going to read anyway.

**AS A CULTURAL** practice, an oral epic lives only as long as it is remembered by speakers and listeners. Its survival depends on its retaining appeal and relevance. When conditions change, the text is bound to change too, or



else be forgotten, in whole or in part. Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev, in their 1929 study of oral folklore, call this dependence on the public “preventative censorship by the community.” Put differently, this principle means that an oral epic relies on external social conditions if it is to be kept in memory and passed on.

The *Gesar* epic was supported by the institutions of Lamaist Buddhism, the state religion of two Chinese dynasties. The poem was traditionally recited in a trance by bards who claimed to be possessed by the spirit of King Gesar himself, solving both problems endemic to oral epic: fidelity and authority. Printed editions were sponsored in the nineteenth century by learned Lamaist clergy, most notably the influential Jamgön Ju Mipham (1846-1912). Other warrior epics lived on as means for communities to retain their history and identity. Their appropriation for the aims of a multiethnic empire must have resulted in adaptations to the new circumstance, for even more than written texts, oral texts express their conditions of production. When new passages were added to the epic, these were often explained not as innovations but, in traditional Tibetan fashion, as the “discovery” of hidden wisdom treasures (*termas*). One would expect an orally recited text to be updated in perpetuity, but specialists in a text copied and archived by doctrinally fastidious clergy, as the *Gesar* has been for hundreds of years, must also account for any differences that are introduced. Interpretation is another form of adaptation to changing circumstances. Gyurmed Thubten Jamyang Dragpa’s late nineteenth-century recension actually closes with a defense of the epic genre:

Although there are some so-called scholars who object

To the accounts of the biography of Gesar Norbu Dradül

Claiming they are a string of lies;

In that case, if asked to write the true account, they will have no clear source or answer,

Like one who, beholding the face of a friend,

Arrogantly denies that he recognized him.

\*\*\*

Those who do not see the true nature of what is being shown

Are nihilists who only believe in material relative phenomena.

\*\*\*

Moreover, there are those who claim that this subject gives rise to attachment and aversion

And thus this epic contradicts the dharma.

If so, wouldn't one also have to claim that the philosophical texts, Buddhist and non-Buddhist histories alike,

Are also not the dharma?

**I**N 2003 THE *Gesar* epic was added to UNESCO’s list of items of Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the Chinese government laid out a nine-year action plan for archiving recitations, training young performers, and building performance venues across Tibet, Central Asia, and Inner Mongolia. It may be that by endowing these national minorities’ heroic tales with an infrastructure, the multiethnic modern Chinese state is seeking to defuse their autonomist potential. After all, the heroes of the epic led uprisings against rival groups and conquered their neighbors, including, in some instances, China. One report from the *Indian Defence Review* (the standpoint of which should be obvious) views the celebration of the nomadic epic tradition as Machiavellian, suggesting that episodes of the Oghuz Khan epic focusing on Chinese treachery are being revised away and that statements about the relative dating of the *Manas* and Oghuz Khan epics are to be read not as mere philological disputes, but as an aspect of the contest between Khyrgyzes and Uyghurs for cultural pre-eminence in the region.

In the traditional Chinese imagination of geography and culture, wild and barbaric peoples were drawn to the Central Regions in search of the civilizing benefits of rites, music, and governance. That cultural goods could come from outside the Chinese domain was unthinkable. Even when China was ruled by “barbarian” dynasties, the realm of culture was, at least in theory, an undiluted heritage of the Chinese sages.

Present-day China has inherited the boundaries set by the Qing emperors, who established a protectorate over Tibet, conquered the Muslim principalities that now make up Xinjiang, and retained their old base in the steppes of Mongolia and Manchuria. But ruling as a centralized state with an overwhelming Han Chinese majority, China has had to develop cultural policies distinct from the Manchu practice of cultural distinctiveness, and has worked out a position on ethnic minorities and national cultural heritage reminiscent of the Soviet “nationalities question.”

So now, in his closing speech to the National People’s Congress in March 2018, Xi Jinping can claim the *Gesar* and the other epics for “China”: “The Chinese people have always been industrious and creative; our motherland produced Laozi, Confucius, Zhuangzi . . . and other world-renowned creative thinkers . . . she inherited the soul-shaking great epics of King Gesar, *Manas*, and *Janggar*.” But Xi mispronounced “Gesar” as “Sage’er,” suggesting that he didn’t know anything about this “national treasure.” When people on Twitter called him out, the state media went back and edited the recording to switch the syllables around. Indeed the repackaging of these epics as part of Chinese cultural inheritance serves political ends, however much it departs from the epics’ history, language, and content. The Chinese “inheritance” of these epics makes them another venue for the “One Belt One Road” initiative—one certainly less costly than high-speed rail, airports, harbors, and foreign investment. □

# WORLD LITERATURE

The curious history of a  
German-American idea

by Martin Puchner

**O**N THE AFTERNOON of January 31, 1827, Johann Peter Eckermann, faithful secretary to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, went over to his master's house, as he had done hundreds of times in the past three and a half years. Goethe reported on what he had done since they last talked. Apparently, he had been reading a Chinese novel. "Really? That must have been rather strange!" Eckermann exclaimed. "No, much less so than one thinks," Goethe replied. Eckermann was surprised and vented that surely this Chinese novel must be quite strange, the exception

to the rule. Wrong again. The master's voice was stern: "Nothing could be further from the truth. The Chinese have thousands of them, and had them when our ancestors were still living in the woods." Eckermann was confused, but Goethe wasn't done yet and reached for the term that would truly stun his secretary: "The era of world literature is at hand, and everyone must contribute to accelerating it." World literature—the idea of world literature—was born.

It is rare that we can pinpoint the birth of an idea. Usually, ideas pop up in different places under different names, only dimly known even to

their originators, before they emerge with increasingly clarity over time. World literature is different. We know exactly when it was born, because Eckermann recorded his conversations with Goethe, and because he published them afterwards.<sup>1</sup>

The story of how this publication came to pass illustrates an important feature of world literature: that it relies on a literary marketplace. In

<sup>1</sup> Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*, volumes 1 and 2 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1837). Goethe's quotes are from this source, pages 322 and 325.





Johann Joseph Schmeller, *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe* (1838). Oil on canvas, 36cm x 44.3cm.  
Copyright: bpk/Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin/Ruth Schacht

1827, Goethe was at the height of his fame, and widely regarded as the greatest writer of his age (Ralph Waldo Emerson singled him out as “the writer” among his six representative men). In order to serve Goethe, Eckermann had given up on his studies in law, at the University of Göttingen, in 1822. He was too poor to afford a coach, so had walked to Weimar, which took him three weeks, to offer his services as secretary and all-purpose assistant to the famous writer. Goethe happily accepted, though he paid Eckermann almost nothing. Eckermann had grown

*German writers were looking for an alternative source of inspiration, and many found it by studying, for the first time, German traditions and folkways.*

up in abject poverty and was used to getting by with very little, but he was barely making ends meet. Casting about for ways to better his lot, he realized that a book containing his conversations with Goethe could bring in additional funds. Goethe allowed the scheme to go forward, but demanded that the book be published only after his death.

Thanks to Eckermann, we know when and where world literature was born, but not why. Why did this idea emerge in the provincial town of Weimar, which barely numbered seven thousand inhabitants, and not, as one might expect, in one of the metropolitan centers such as London or Paris? Those centers, it turned out, bred their own brand of provincialism. Writers in London and Paris knew themselves to be at the center of the cultural world, which meant that their works were being translated and exported everywhere. These writers didn’t need to look elsewhere for inspiration. They felt secure in

their status and in their traditions, and tended to look down on everyone else.

The situation in a provincial Germany was very different. Weimar was at the receiving end of cultural trade, imitating Parisian fashion, manners, and literature. In reaction to this dependency, German writers were looking for an alternative source of inspiration, and many found it by studying, for the first time, German traditions and folkways.

Goethe didn’t like being on the receiving end of French culture either, but he was skeptical about the obsession with German folk art that was happening all around him. Instead, he looked farther afield. While most of his associates were either consuming the literature exported from France or looking to German folk traditions, Goethe sensed that a new era was at hand, the era of world literature. This era was shaped by a single, integrated market in which both ancient and more recent works circulated in translation. (The idea was taken up by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*.) The world market in literature allowed Goethe to read not only Chinese novels, but also the Sanskrit drama *Shakuntala* (which influenced his *Faust*), as well as Persian and Arabic poetry (which inspired his poetry collection *West-Eastern Divan*).

The new market in literature was shaped, in no small manner, by European colonial empires, which were forcing different parts of the world into closer contact. One of the few Chinese novels Goethe was able to get his hands on, for example, was *Hau Kiou Choaan*, or *The Pleasing History*, translated by Bishop Thomas Percy, a representative of the East India Company, the vehicle through which Britain exploited its colonies in the east. Germany, of course, didn’t have colonies, which meant that Goethe didn’t have to reckon with European colonialism directly. Nor was he prone to the feeling of Western cultural superiority bred by colonialism. He was able to profit from the colonialism of others, enjoying world literature translated into English and

Portuguese and other colonial languages, without succumbing to some of the prejudices prevalent in colonizing cultures.

At first, Goethe was ridiculed—including by the Grimm brothers, Wilhelm and Jacob—for his interest in world literature, but the idea slowly caught on. One of its appeals was that it could be used to circumvent the dominant export cultures of England and France. This was particularly important for small literatures that were hoping to gain more prominence—not least among them Yiddish, which would be an essential chapter in the American contribution to world literature, via the wealth of literary knowledge brought by German émigrés.

Here, we’ll leave Goethe and jump into Yiddish in the next century—and into my family’s own curious literary entanglements.

**I**N THE EARLY twentieth century, Yiddish was in a difficult position. As the Germanic language spoken by Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, it was mostly seen as a spoken dialect. Assimilated Jews looked down on it and chose German or Russian as the language in which to produce serious works of literature and thought. At the same time, Zionists advocated for a return to Palestine, which also meant that they regarded Yiddish as the language of exile that should be replaced by Hebrew.

Besides those internal enemies of Yiddish, there were countless other detractors. These were, above all, anti-Semites who saw Yiddish as a bowdlerized form of German, and feared that it would sully the purity of the German tongue—much the way intermarriage sullied the purity of German blood.

Despite these formidable opponents, there existed a vocal group of writers and intellectuals who wanted to elevate Yiddish from the status of a spoken dialect to that of a real language. How might they achieve this lofty goal? The Yiddish scholar Max Weinreich famously quipped



that the difference between a dialect and a language was merely one of power: “A language is a dialect with an army and a navy.” The promoters of Yiddish didn’t start manufacturing ships and weapons, however. Instead, they sought to regularize the language by codifying its spelling and grammar. Above all, they promoted Yiddish literature. They had already translated the Hebrew Bible and were now hoping for a high-status contemporary literature in Yiddish to emerge as well.

In this situation, world literature became a rallying cry. The cry was led in 1939 by Melech Ravich, who called for a Yiddish *velt literatur* (וועלט־ליטעראַטור). By this he meant that Yiddish was a literature written in different parts of the world, from Eastern Europe to the United States. But he also meant that it was something to aspire to: Yiddish writers should be able to gain a place in world literature even though they were being ignored by the majority export cultures of Europe. World literature promised a path to literary prominence outside the metropolitan centers of cultural power.

By 1939, promoters of Yiddish had other problems. Due to the rise of Nazism and the early stages of World War II, there was a mass exodus of writers and scholars from Germany and German-occupied Europe. The Jewish scholars Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach, both advocates of world literature, were among them. They fled to Istanbul, which became a node in the world literature network. Their experiences in Istanbul were varied. While Spitzer undertook the study of Turkish in order to connect with the cultural traditions of his host country, Auerbach sought to save the vestiges of Western civilization—and complained that he didn’t have a good library to do so.

Both Spitzer and Auerbach soon left Istanbul and immigrated to the United States, along with many other European writers and intellectuals, taking the idea of world literature with them. The American chapter in the story of world literature had begun.

**S**URPRISINGLY, WORLD literature took hold in postwar America. One reason was the expansion of universities in the aftermath of World War II, fueled by the GI Bill. Large numbers of returning soldiers flocked to colleges and universities, causing an unprecedented expansion of higher education. These new populations had to be educated in new ways, since colleges could not presume that they had all been exposed to the same classics in high school. In response, universities invested in new types of general education and survey courses with titles such as *Masterpieces of Western Literature* or *Masterpieces of World Literature*.

These courses created a new, specialized market in world literature: world literature anthologies. Among them was the *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. By the time I inherited this anthology as a general editor, half a century later, it had grown to six volumes and changed its name to *Norton Anthology of World Literature*. It had also changed its selection in response to the so-called canon wars of the 1980s and ’90s, including more texts by women as well as a wider range of non-Western literature.

Today, the *Norton Anthology* is used in over a thousand colleges, universities, and high schools, a testament to the fact that world literature is thriving in the United States. Almost half of its adopters are located in the South, somewhat in contrast to the region’s alleged provincialism. Or perhaps the American South is continuing the tradition begun with Goethe: using world literature as a defense against the export culture of metropolitan centers. Be that as it may, no other country I know has embraced world literature, and instituted it in higher education, as fully as the United States.

**I FIRST ENCOUNTERED** world literature through a more unusual source: my uncle, Günter Puchner. A writer and composer, he became fascinated by an underground language called Rotwelsch, a thieves’ cant spoken in

Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. The language was a strange mixture of German, Yiddish, and Hebrew, and it was kept secret to allow vagrants, beggars, and thieves to communicate in private. Rotwelsch was a purely spoken language, and by the time my uncle came across it, it was dying out.

He decided to rescue it by locating the few remaining speakers, and by collecting sources and dictionaries. But in order to turn Rotwelsch into a legitimate language, he took inspiration from Ravich’s *velt literatur* and planned to create a world literature

*Rotwelsch . . . was a strange mixture of German, Yiddish, and Hebrew, and it was kept secret to allow vagrants, beggars, and thieves to communicate in private.*

out of Rotwelsch. To this end, he undertook a massive project, translating into Rotwelsch parts of the Bible (both the Old and the New Testaments) as well as excerpts from other works of world literature.

Günter Puchner died in his forties, of a brain aneurism, his project unfinished. I inherited his archive, his field notes, his dictionaries, and his library, and have been carrying around this trove for twenty years, always thinking that, one day, I would continue this ancestral inheritance that has entangled my family for three generations.

And so, at last, in spring 2018, I am diving into this long-overdue endeavor. As I do so in Berlin, I cannot help but take inspiration from the proximity to the place where world literature began almost two hundred years ago. □

# MOBILIZING FEAR

## Propagandizing German–Ottoman conflict

by Carina L. Johnson

**A**T THE END of the twentieth century, German public discussion about Turkey focused on its relationship to Europe. This topic lay at the heart of two complex political and social questions: first, what should become of the Turkish guest workers and their families who had been living in central Europe for decades or, in the case of their children, for their entire lives? Second, should Turkey be welcomed into the European Union? Each debate raised deeper questions about the legacies of Europe's Christian past, of citizenship rights determined by descent, and of cultural plurality in German and Austrian society. Voices for and against Turkish integration drew on the lessons of history to support their positions.

Today, critiques of Turkish integration have become ever more entangled with anti-Islamic rhetoric in the wake of terrorist attacks, proclamations of Europe's essential Christian identity by prominent figures, and the crisis of refugees fleeing violent conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Although Germany did create a path to citizen-

ship by birthright in 1999, the public controversy surrounding soccer player Mesut Özil's resignation from the German national team, in July 2018, highlights how fraught German identity continues to be for people of Turkish descent. And Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's shift away from earlier pro-democracy policies has only encouraged some opponents of Turkey's membership in the EU to continue defining Turks as unas-similable because they are Muslims.

European and US press and academics increasingly refer to this repudiative rhetoric as part of a broader Islamophobia, also applied to Arab and South Asian Muslims. Such an encompassing approach facilitates a Europe-wide view, and anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic rhetoric are undeniably entangled. Yet while Islamophobia is deployed in the public sphere for political ends, the very term identifies a religion, Islam, rather than a racialized group or ethnicity as the locus of fear and concern. Efforts to subsume the "Turkish question" within discussions of the place of Islam in Europe ignore a long history

of the Ottoman polyreligious state by presuming that all Turks are and have always been Muslim. An examination of anti- and pro-Turkish rhetoric reveals its non-Islam focus. It has, instead, been directed toward a people and polity—first the Ottoman Empire and then its largest successor state, Turkey.

THE PAST HAS often been invoked in contemporary anti-Turkish rhetoric, implicitly proposing that the cultural memory of longstanding German–Ottoman conflict and antipathy justifies a position of exclusionary gatekeeping. This, however, is a selective recollection of the past. At the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, the new nation state of Turkey was the object of admiration, of Turcophilia. For German observers struggling to forge new states after the collapse of their own German and Austro-Hungarian empires, Turkey was heralded as a triumph of secular modernization, offering a model for a new German nation state. Rather than revealing centuries of unrelenting antipathy, the history of German Turcophobia illustrates the extent to which the "fear of the Turk"





*Magni Turcarum Dominatoris Imperium.* A map of the Ottoman Empire, circa 1730, by Matthäus Seutter (1678-1757)

has been selectively mobilized across history in the service of political aims. It is no accident that in the history of German sentiments about “the Turk”—whether a metaphor for the subjects of the Ottoman state or a reference to their ruler—the episodes of Turkish aggression are the best known.

The milestone military conflicts that have been deployed for political purposes include the conquest of Constantinople and the fall of the Byzantine Empire (1453), the First Siege of Vienna (1529), the Long War (1593-1606), and the Second Siege of Vienna (1683). Some of these uses were successful, some less so, but the events and their politicized memories continue to be invoked in the present day.

The first of these instances was Sultan Mehmed II’s conquest of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, in 1453. The papacy reacted by redoubling its efforts to galvanize Latin Christendom into a military response. These calls for a new crusade were largely ignored. Imperial officials also sought support for a large-scale armed response to the expanding Ottoman Empire. Holy Roman Emperors

Friedrich III and Maximilian I had some success mobilizing Austrian and Tyrolian troops to fight in Hungary, in the continuation of their ongoing dynastic conflicts with the Hungarian crown and in response to Turkish raids in eastern Austrian lands. Yet repeated appeals to the imperial estates were met with little enthusiasm.

In the 1520s, under Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and his brother, Ferdinand, German lands remained unresponsive to Habsburg and Hungarian warnings about the Turkish threat, even after Louis II of Hungary was killed, in the 1526 Battle of Mohács, between Ottoman and Hungarian forces. Only with the Siege of Vienna in October 1529 did the Turkish threat become tangible to many in the Holy Roman Empire. News of the siege was sent out in an urgent appeal for help, carrying with it stories of violence and destruction wreaked by the Ottoman army as it marched up the Danube. In response, cities and princes ceased delaying and rushed to send troops to liberate Vienna. With winter coming, the Ottoman army departed Austria in November, but many in the Holy

Roman Empire expected a repeat offensive in the near future. During the next two years, the Habsburgs worked to negotiate an agreement with the newly Protestant estates: a guaranteed, limited-time toleration of evangelically reformed worship in exchange for contributions of money, materiel, and manpower for the Turkish wars.

Even as these points were being negotiated, Nuremberg printers produced an unprecedented number of woodcuts and pamphlets about the siege, creating the first large-scale print-era propaganda campaign to rely on the Turkish threat. Through words and images, the prints emphasized the frighteningly swift advance of the Ottoman forces and portrayed scenes of violence and cruelty against civilians. Alongside litanies of suffering and lurid details of captivity, the presses also exhaustively discussed the terrifying discipline and fighting prowess of the Turkish troops, which made them undefeatable. An important attribute of these troops’ success was, according to the pamphleteers, the Christian origin of the janissaries. Well over a hundred pamphlets and

woodcuts were produced between 1529-1530. That they were made by new-technology entrepreneurs without any known state support suggests their popularity and profitability. Among the results of this media blitz about Christian suffering at the hands of the Ottomans was the 1532 Peace of Nuremberg. With this agreement in place, many imperial cities mustered their citizens to serve alongside princely troops for the 1532 and subsequent campaigns.

Through this second mobilization of fear in commercially popular print and an array of imperial efforts, inflammatory rhetoric against the Turks proliferated. Along with speeches delivered at the imperial diets and recess promulgations, the imperial state also mandated prayers and processions seeking divine intervention and mercy for the German targets of the Ottoman threat. Over time, the state mandated church alms boxes for soldiers and civilians who had borne the brunt of Turkish military violence. The heightened antipathy toward the Ottomans made it possible for Habsburg rulers to gain broad public support for their Turkish policies during the subsequent decades.

The Habsburg court sponsored skilled personnel to produce and disseminate knowledge about the Ottoman military host and Ottoman society more broadly. The tradition of gathering information from those with first hand experience of Turkish domination, in particular through captivity, dated back to the second half of the fifteenth century. Ferdinand's chief Turkish translator for over thirty years was a former captive. Urban Sagstetter, orphaned during the First Siege of Vienna, became court preacher and eventually Bishop of Gurk. Hugo Blotius's first inventory of the Austrian National Library in the 1570s identified all the volumes on the Ottoman Empire so that military planners could access knowledge about their enemy systematically.

Important historical studies by Winfried Schulze, *Reich und Türkengefahr im späten 16. Jahrhundert* [Empire and the Turkish Threat in the

late sixteenth century] (1978) and Karl Vöckel, *Die Politische Propaganda Kaiser Rudolfs II* [The Political Propaganda of Emperor Rudolf II] (1981) reveal the close links between the imperial political agendas and anti-Turkish propaganda. The empire imposed a larger, more regularized Turkish tax across all of the Holy Roman Empire, in order to fund the construction of a fortress system running along the southeastern border between Habsburg and Ottoman territory. The accompanying rhetoric (over 400 works were produced during the reign of Emperor Rudolph II alone) served to inspire payment of the tax. It unified the Holy Roman Empire by allowing its subjects to transcend the divisive topic of religious reform within "the Christian republic" and focus on what was now known as the hereditary enemy (*Erbfeind*), the Turk. The tax would also fund troops and material during various short hot wars and the Long War from 1593 to 1606.

With the close of the Long War, the Habsburgs and Ottomans settled into cold-war hostilities, until conflict again flared into open warfare in the 1680s. The 1683 Siege of Vienna ended quite differently from that of 1529. In 1683, the Ottomans were not the terrifyingly undefeatable enemy. Instead, the Ottoman siege was broken, and the Austrian military began pressing eastward, in a slow but heartening series of victories across eastern Europe. In that climate, fear of the Turks could be set aside for moral explorations of Turkish difference.

**Y**ET EVEN AS Turkish fear in the public sphere was promoted by printers looking for surefire best-sellers, and imperial authorities seeking material support for their antagonistic policies against the Ottomans, another strand of thought towards the Ottomans existed in works authored by humanists and religious reformers. Some notable figures, in fact, praised the empire's religious tolerance and diversity. A powerful response to the 1453 fall of Constantinople, for example, was composed by no less

than Nicholas of Cusa. A German-born humanist who spent the bulk of his career in Rome, he wrote *On the Peace of Faith* in 1454. It called for religious peace and the tolerance of diversity, grounded in the idea that the divine Creator had sent many different teachers to the peoples of the world before the birth of Christ, thereby producing the different religions of the world. This strand of religious relativism was shared by other humanists in the second half of the fifteenth century. In less rarefied circles, a 1456 Nuremberg carnival play written by Hans Rosenplüt also playfully presented the Ottoman Emperor's wisdom and virtue in contrast to corrupt officials and authorities in the Holy Roman Empire. Desiderius Erasmus advocated for religious peace, publishing essays in 1515 and in 1530 that held up Turks as virtuous foils for the many Christians who failed to live up to their faith's moral demands. In Martin Luther's 1518 explication of his "Ninety-Five Theses," he argued against papal calls for a Turkish crusade, as part of his attack on papal remittance of sins. With the Siege of Vienna, Luther shifted his position to advocate for resistance to the "Turk." This exhortation to resistance was paired with another calling for resistance to the papacy: while Luther has been held up as a strong promoter of antipathy toward the Turks, he did so in the service of another aim, the reform of the Latin Christian church.

Popular anonymous pamphlets also praised the religious tolerance of the Ottoman empire, suggesting that it was possible to find greater religious freedom to practice true Christianity there. While these pamphlets are often dismissed as satirical, in the mid-sixteenth century, a community of anti-Trinitarians who had fled the Holy Roman Empire in search of religious toleration formed in the Ottoman capital.

THE QUESTIONS THAT history asks about German-Turkish interactions are, of course, shaped by the public debates and questions swirling around the historians as they conduct their



research. Winfried Schulze, for example, undertook research for his foundational 1971-74 study just as guest-worker recruitment was ending, and the number of Turkish nationals choosing to remain in Germany began to visibly outstrip those of any other nationalities. More broadly, archives are catalogued according to the priorities of the time that they were organized; their categories reflect, with good reason, the institutions and structures that produced the records. Thus, there is often a section in archives on the state administration of the Turkish tax, a topic of great institutional interest to local authorities—who sought to account for their responsible payment of these financial obligations—and to imperial authorities, who sought to prevent tax evasion. There is no corresponding section for quotidian experiences of non-elites.

In 2018, there are more nontraditional resources available to scholars. Their research no longer needs to rest exclusively on official discourses of the past, whether speeches and promulgated recesses of the imperial diets, sermons and publications by clerics and other writers endorsed by the state, or the print and manuscript texts of the humanists and reformers who shaped so much of the print discourses. Archival researchers can now uncover non-official histories with increasing success by utilizing the techniques developed by social and cultural historians to study women and colonized people. These methods underscore the importance of archival preservation and access to historical records, so that historians can investigate questions that have become freshly relevant. The evidence is fragmentary: the alms for a returning captive German or a captive Turk, a paid laundry bill, a salary list, a court case, a baptismal entry, a margin note in a printed book, a memento of a journey tucked into a manuscript, an ink sketch, or an inventory of death goods. These, in the end, are the quotidian traces that allow historians to move beyond official production and uses of the Turkish threat to uncover other histories of German-Turkish engagements across the centuries. □

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# THE LAWS OF WAR

From the Lieber Code  
to the Brussels  
Conference

by Peter Holquist

**THE** INTELLECTUAL lineage for the law of war dates back at least to Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and to several peace agreements dating from 1648 (Peace of Westphalia) and 1713 (Treaty of Utrecht), and several in between. While these treaties established peace agreements throughout Europe following a century of bloodshed, they did not establish laws for war itself. In fact, it was only from the mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth century that the law of war as we know it today—such as the criteria for distinguishing “legal combatants” from “illegal combatants”—crystallized into formal codes defining the “laws of war.” These codes emerged specifically from a series

of international conferences and agreements—most notably, the 1874 Brussels Conference and the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907—which addressed military conduct between armies but also covered the relations between armies and civilian populations.

Perhaps surprising in light of today’s geopolitics, it was not a liberal Western European power but rather the Russian empire that played the most prominent role in extending the codification of these laws and customs of war. So much so, in fact, that the concepts of lawful warfare crafted by the Russian empire during the last third of the nineteenth century continue to serve as the framework for international humanitarian law today.



Imperial Russia's precocious role involved drafting all the preparatory materials for both the 1874 Brussels Conference (the first attempt to codify the "laws and customs of land warfare"—although the Brussels Code went unratified) and the 1899 Hague Conference, which largely confirmed the guidelines developed but not ratified in 1874. Prior, in the 1868 St. Petersburg Declaration, it was Imperial Russia that invoked the "laws of humanity" to justify limits on weapon technologies. And it was again Imperial Russia in 1915, in the "Entente Note to the Ottoman Empire," regarding the Armenian genocide, that introduced the term "crimes against humanity" in a penal sense and proposed prosecution of state officials for such crimes.

What drove these advanced Russian initiatives? What were their intellectual origins? Oddly enough, they were sets of regulations created for armies during the United States Civil War at the behest of Abraham Lincoln's War Department, known as the Lieber Code. The following brief history explains the interaction of several cosmopolitan figures that helped to bring the Lieber Code from New York City to Brussels and lay the foundation for the modern laws of war.

**I**N EARLY 1870, a 24-year-old Russian student of international law, fresh from the defense of his *Magister* thesis at St. Petersburg University, attended the lectures of the Swiss-born scholar Johann Caspar Bluntschli (1808-1881), at Heidelberg University. The Russian Ministry of Education had dispatched the young Baltic-born scholar, Fedor Martens (1845-1909)—later known through German and French translations of his work as "Friedrich Fromhold von Martens" and "Frédéric Frommhold de Martens"—on an

extended study tour, taking him to Vienna and Heidelberg. As fate would have it, he would find himself on the border between the North German Confederation and France during the early stages of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Before too long, however, he returned unscathed to Russia to take up the chair of international law at St. Petersburg University.

Just a few years later, Martens had a chance to see Bluntschli again. When the Russian government convened the first conference to discuss a draft code for the laws of land warfare at Brussels

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in 1874, he and Bluntschli found themselves sitting across from one another at the conference table. The Swiss Bluntschli was the legal advisor to the German delegation, and Martens—an orphan who had risen as a scholarship student—was legal advisor to the status-conscious Russian delegation. Their participation in these meetings likely represented the first instance of legal scholars actually contributing to the drafting of international codes rather than simply commenting on them after the fact.

This was so because though the nineteenth century was a nationalizing age, it also remained an age of empires, which saw cosmopolitan and multiethnic elites, such as Martens and Bluntschli, circulating among the echelons of power. The Russian empire's foreign ministry was home to so many non-Russians at the time, in

fact, that the patriotic press came to term it "the almost-foreign ministry" or "the ministry of foreign names." And the age was also Victorian, an era of specialists, self-improvement, and emerging academic disciplines such as international law and political science.

There were three proximate causes for the 1874 Russia-convened Brussels Conference that brought Mertens and Bluntschli together. The first was the Russian government's sense of mission in the realm of the laws of war, carrying over from its achievement in securing the 1868 Petersburg Convention, the first treaty to ban a specific weapons technology, exploding bullets, on the grounds of "the laws of humanity." The second reason was the reaction of European governments, militaries, and societies to the vicious conduct of the Franco-Prussian War, with French use of *franc-tireurs*—or "free shooters," irregular military formations operating as detached militias—and the German recourse to reprisals and collective punishment of civilians.

But there was also a third factor. It was one thing for people to decry the violations by the French and German forces, but what could actually be done about it? Martens, in his 1872 letter to Russian war minister Dmitrii Miliutin proposing a conference to address precisely this question, drew attention to a possible solution: a code or handbook of the laws and customs of land warfare. Indeed there was a general thrust for codification in international law in the nineteenth century, and Russian political and legal culture particularly favored this approach to law. But there was a more immediate precedent, and a surprising one at that: Martens insisted that the type of code he was proposing could indeed be feasible in war, because something like it had recently been tried and proved viable in practice: the United States government's General

Order 100, or “Instructions for the Government of United States Armies in the Field,” introduced in April 1863 for Union forces in the US Civil War—a document more commonly known, after its author, as the Lieber Code.

**THE** LIEBER CODE WAS composed by a German émigré and university professor named Francis (Franz) Lieber. Born in Prussia in 1798 or 1800 (records are unclear), he had enrolled in the fight for his country’s liberation from Napoleon and took part in the 1815 Waterloo campaign, where he was wounded in the neck and left for dead. Once recovered, he was accepted into the University of Berlin but denied entry because of his membership in an anti-Prussian fraternity (*Berliner Burschenschaft*) and instead attended the University of Jena, where, in 1820, he graduated with a doctorate in mathematics. In 1821, he traveled to Greece to fight for Greek independence. A committed progressive (Prussian authorities jailed him for four months in 1819 and again for eight months in 1824–25), Lieber emigrated from Germany and made a life in the United States, becoming a professor of political science and history, first at the University of South Carolina, and then at Columbia University, in New York City. Aside from editing the *Encyclopedia America*, and writing books and pamphlets, he also served as confidante and assistant to Alexis de Tocqueville, as the Frenchman was compiling what would become *Democracy in America*.

When the US Civil War erupted, in 1861, Lieber drafted several codes and guidelines for the US War Department, then run by Edwin M. Stanton. It was irregular warfare—detached militias, snipers, un-uniformed soldiers, sabotage—that inspired much of Lieber’s

work, and Union armies confronted widespread guerilla warfare by Confederate supporters in the territories they occupied. (One of Lieber’s sons fought and died for the South, two others fought for the North). In the summer of 1862, Lieber’s acquaintance Henry Halleck was appointed General-in-Chief of the Union armies, and he commissioned Lieber to prepare a formal memorandum about the conduct of war, which he wrote as a long essay entitled “Guerilla Parties Considered with Reference to the Laws and Usages of War.” Halleck had the text printed and distributed to the Union armies, so that it “would help guide Union policy toward irregular fighters until the end of the war.” The following year, Lieber drafted General Orders 100, a set of instructions for the Union Army on the laws of war—thereafter known as the Lieber Code and now widely considered to be the first written recital of the customary laws of war.

The Lieber Code demanded that armies at war respect the humane, ethical treatment of populations in areas they occupied. It codified law that expressly forbade the killing of prisoners of war, except in cases when the survival of the unit holding them was threatened. It also forbade the use of poisons, holding that the use of such agents puts any military force outside the conduct of the civilized nations and peoples. Section 16 of the Code expressly prohibits this kind of cruelty:

Military necessity does not admit of cruelty—that is, the infliction of suffering for the sake of suffering or for revenge, nor of maiming or wounding except in fight, nor of torture to extort confessions. It does not admit of the use of poison in any way, nor of the wanton devastation of a district. It admits

of deception, but disclaims acts of perfidy; and, in general, military necessity does not include any act of hostility which makes the return to peace unnecessarily difficult.

In its entirety, the Lieber Code spells out the rights and duties of prisoners of war and of capturing forces. It also describes the state and ends of war, the state of occupied territories, and the permissible and impermissible means to attain those ends. And addressing some of the most pressing international geopolitical developments of the time, it discussed the nature of states and sovereignties, of insurrections, rebellions, and wars.

European states generally paid little attention to the Lieber Code, but some legal scholars did—among them Lieber’s friend Johann-Caspar Bluntschli, who translated the Code into German and included it in his 1866 *Das modern Kriegsrecht der civilisirten Staaten als Rechtsbuch dargestellt*, which appeared just prior to the 1866 Austro-Prussian War. In his 1868 master’s thesis, about the rights of private property in wartime, the young Martens extensively discussed the Lieber Code, citing it from Bluntschli’s 1868 *Das moderne Völkerrecht*, where it was included as an appendix in the complete English original. Four years later, in his 1872 letter to Russian war minister Dmitrii Miliutin and in an 1873 newspaper article proposing an international conference, Martens explicitly invoked Lieber’s General Orders 100 and praised the US government for being the first government to introduce a formal code for conduct based on the laws and customs of war for its armed forces. He regretted that, hitherto, European states had failed to follow this excellent example. That, he averred, would now be left to Russia. □



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Gulag Perm-36 (Kuchino near Chusovoi, Russia). Postbox on the camp wall. Photo: Wulfstan.

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# PERM-36

An encounter with Russia's unfinished past

by Joshua Yaffa

**IN** THE LATER YEARS of the Soviet Union, Perm-36—a prison camp located in the forests outside of Perm, an industrial city just east of the Ural Mountains—held political prisoners and individuals convicted of transgressions against the Soviet state. After the Soviet collapse, it became a unique historical museum. The brainchild of a group of local historians and enthusiasts, this memorial complex and civic platform became a forum for discussing not only the history of the Gulag and political repressions, but also the lessons and implications of those events for the present day.

On the day of my visit to Perm-36, on a gray and windy day in the spring of last year, a film of melting ice covered the center of town. But as I drove out of Perm itself, toward the site of the onetime prison, that slush gave way to forested slopes covered in the clean white snow of midwinter.

The monotony of the Russian countryside can be disorienting, but in the hypnotic, even calming sense of deep meditation: the snow, the trees, the wooden houses with wisps of black smoke snaking their way to a heavy sky, could have placed me anywhere in the thousands of miles of expanse between Smolensk and Khabarovsk.

I entered the museum—or, just as fair to say, the prison—as visitors did in the 1970s and 1980s: through a heavy door that leads to a corridor walled off with iron bars, where guards would inspect people coming and going. Having made my way through the passageway of metal gates, I walked out into the prison yard, an open expanse of low-slung buildings encircled by a series of perimeter fences. A shabby wooden fence, topped with a ring of rusted barbed wire, stood before a taller, much more solid metal one. (As museum guides always mention, there was not a single

successful escape at Perm-36.) An empty guard-tower watched over the grounds, covered in a knee-high casing of snow.

As I walked around Perm-36, I couldn't help but reflect on the experience of postwar Germany, where questions of historical guilt, responsibility, and memory have long since become defining aspects of the national culture. A comparison with one of the Nazi regime's concentration camps, now remade as a memorial and museum, felt inevitable. Both Perm-36 and a place like Dachau, or Auschwitz,

lessons from the recent past, Perm-36 was more discordant—it stuck out to me because of its rarity. It was not one among many such sites in Russia; it did not slot into nationwide educational and civic programs on the subject of repressions, because such programs did not exist. Perm-36 was an anomaly, and, set in a forest several hours from the nearest city, a hidden one, at that.

## THE EXPERIENCES OF how postwar Germany and

post-Soviet Russia have confronted and tried to exorcise—or not—the demons of their respective histories could not be more opposed. The reasons are multitude, and, in a way, obvious. Much less time has passed since the fall of the Soviet Union than the end of the Nazi regime, which, of course, was much shorter-lived than Soviet rule. Postwar Germany had been defeated militarily and was under foreign occupation—which made possible many of the prosecutions of former Nazi officials accountable for mass crimes. No outside force administered Russia in its transition, and no legal processes were ever held to sort through the responsibility of officials from the Communist Party, KGB, and other organs. Nor did such attempts at making sense of collective guilt and shared trauma take place in society itself, at least not in a coherent way, recognized by all.

But perhaps the most important factor was the nature of Soviet repressions: they were directed at enemies within, whether supposed traitors and spies within the Communist Party or would-be saboteurs and “wreckers” on the factory floor. “If the Nazi Holocaust exterminated the Other, the Soviet terror was suicidal,” writes Alexander Etkind, a professor at Cambridge

University, in *Warped Mourning* (2013), his probing work on how modern Russia remains haunted by its unfinished examination of the past. This dynamic, of the Soviet terror's cannibalistic quality, reached its absurd culmination in 1992, during the one attempt, which ultimately failed, to denote the Communist Party a criminal organization. As part of the trial, its lawyers argued that since party members disproportionately suffered from repressions, the party had already been punished. Party members were both executioners and victims in the same historical process, the argument seemed to go, so let's just call it a draw. Etkind describes how the “self-inflicted” nature of Soviet terror complicates the impulses that usually appear after violent societal catastrophe: striving to understand the calamity, mourning for its victims, and yearning for justice.

Making such catharsis even more difficult is that in the Soviet Union people were killed or imprisoned for reasons that did not comport with observable reality, thus making understanding all the more illusory. As Etkind notes, a Jew caught in the Holocaust understood himself as a Jew; he recognized the category and his belonging to it, even if he obviously did not find this a reason to exterminate him. But who was a kulak? An enemy of the people? A counterrevolutionary element? These were paranoid fictions that did not exist in a person's actual life, yet carried deadly meaning. Historian Mikhail Geller writes, “The difference is that in Hitler's camps, the victims knew why they were killed.” Those who perished in the Gulag, however, “died bewildered.” It is that bewilderment, that inability to explain—except for pure chance—who lived and who died, meant that all those who took part in the Soviet project were in some way implicated. Just as the victim could not be seen as

## People were killed or imprisoned for reasons that did not comport with observable reality, thus making understanding all the more illusory.

in Poland, function as memorial complexes and museums, set on the immediate site of camps set up and run by totalitarian regimes. The ultimate function of Auschwitz, of course, was the murder of its prisoners; Perm-36 was meant to isolate and punish those the state considered its enemies, but, unlike the Soviet camps of the 1930s, did not seek their physical destruction.

For the purposes of historical memory, the more meaningful distinction is that, whereas today's Auschwitz is representative of a broader societal consensus in Europe, part of a collective effort to remember and draw



the Other, neither could his executioner. In 1956, after Stalin's death and the emptying of the Gulag, the poet Anna Akhmatova observed: "Now two Russias are eyeball to eyeball. Those who were in prison and those who put them there."

**WHEN** I WAS IN Perm, I heard a story of how, in the mid-1990s, a group of German university students came to Perm-36 as volunteers, to help with repair and construction projects. They were a motivated, enthusiastic bunch, full of well-intentioned notions of memory and historical justice. A former political prisoner turned human-rights activist named Sergey Kovalev was there, too—he came often to work through ideas with the museum's founders and offer up old memories. The German students began to ask him about his time as a prisoner at Perm-36, and he told them stories of how he was sent to the punishment cell for an unfastened shirt button. Kovalev called over someone else who worked at the museum, Ivan Kukushkin, a bearded and lumbering man in his fifties. The two shook hands warmly. "Tell them, Kukushkin," Kovalev said.

As Kovalev explained, Kukushkin was a former guard at Perm-36, and had watched over Kovalev during his years as a prisoner, and had even ordered him to the punishment cell more than a few times. He still lived in the village near Perm-36, and had reinvented himself as the museum's security guard, and did some odd jobs around the property. He helped reconstruct the room where prisoners were inspected for contraband and forbidden materials. Kukushkin was honest, and a hard worker, and had the respect of the museum's founders,

even Kovalev. He answered Kovalev's question by saying he only sent him to the punishment cell for good cause, which he went on to explain was "discipline." It wasn't that Kovalev had necessarily done anything wrong—or maybe he had; that wasn't important—but the camp bosses said he should be sent off to the punishment cell and so that's what Kukushkin did.

The German students were stupefied. They seemed deeply upset, and wanted to leave Perm-36 immediately. It wasn't the story of Kukushkin following orders that so disturbed them, but the handshake the two men shared, their bonhomie. Kovalev tried to explain that Kukushkin was not a sadist or a torturer, or a guard at Auschwitz. "He didn't chase people to their deaths in gas chambers or shoot them in the middle of the prison yard," he said. Kukushkin, rather, was back then a young guy trapped by circumstance and zombified by Soviet propaganda. If anything, Kovalev empathized with him. When you think about it, Kovalev went on, "his status wasn't much higher than ours, he was not really a free man, but captive to the same whims of the camp administration." He lived in barracks that weren't much different from those housing prisoners, and, for the most part, ate the same lousy food on which nearly everyone in the Soviet Union subsisted at the time. "In a certain sense we shared a common fate." The Germans were not convinced; they were bound by strict, categorical norms, an ethical prism born of Germany's admirable—if often inflexible—attitude to totalitarianism and those who serve it. A political prisoner and his guard should not shake hands, and from that flows a whole way of seeing the world.

Kovalev tried one last argument. He told the German students of the time, before his arrest, when he was a

researcher at a biophysics institute in Moscow. He depended on the institute's in-house workshop to make him microelectrodes, detailed parts that he needed for his experiments. There was always a long wait, months that could stretch on to infinity—which could be circumvented if you gave the guys at the workshop a bit of booze. So Kovalev would fill out procurement orders with descriptions of experiments he had no plans to ever carry out, but which required several liters of laboratory-grade spirit. He'd pour it into smaller bottles

**A political prisoner and his guard should not shake hands, and from that flows a whole way of seeing the world.**

and bring them to the workshop as a bribe to get the parts he actually did need. "If life is arranged this way, if I can't carry out my scientific work without theft, then how can I judge Kukushkin?" Kovalev asked the Germans. "I can't look at him from on high when I'm part of the same system. I'm just as implicated in lies."

The German students nodded, but Kovalev wasn't sure they understood. □

# SECULAR SACRED GROVES

Ancient trees in  
modern times

by Jared Farmer





**W**HAT IS THE world's oldest tree?" is a very old question. Theophrastus and, later, Pliny, Pausanias, and Josephus each made investigations. Their antique lists were mythological as much as botanical. The plants in question had associations with gods, heroes, oracles, prophets, and sanctuaries. The oldest trees of the classical world grew in haunts, not in the wilds.

Today, Guinness World Records maintains a list of oldest things, including trees. The latest oldest tree, approaching 5,000 years, is a contorted specimen of Great Basin bristlecone pine (*Pinus longaeva*) on the desolate slopes of the White Mountains in eastern California. Guinness does not invoke the authority of any deity but rather that of Dr. Edmund Schulman (1908–1958), the dendrochronologist who discovered the specimen in the 1950s.

Schulman's main tool for discerning a tree's age was a "Swedish increment borer," which should have been called a "German increment borer" because the invention had been perfected by Max Robert Preßler (1815–1886), of Dresden. His *Zuwachsbohrer* was an elegant instrument that allowed extraction of a pencil-thin core sample without damage to the organism. Nineteenth-century German foresters used coring tools to conduct arboreal censuses.

Even as Germans like Preßler made inventories of forests, they took note of *merkwürdige Bäume* (remarkable trees) to be preserved, not felled with the others at optimal rotation age. Honoring individual trees resolved a cultural contradiction, for Germans celebrated both their

modern brand of rational forestry and the primordial bond between the forest and the *Volk*.

The category *merkwürdige Bäume* originated in the early modern period, when it suggested freak forms of vegetal growth worthy of cabinets of curiosity. By the time of German unification, in 1871, "remarkable trees" grew to include legendary plants endowed with historical associations (e.g., the Luther-Ulme in Pfifflogheim), often situated romantically near spas and hiking paths. Under the influence of Prussian botanist Hugo Conwentz (1855–1922), German provinces designated old trees as *Naturdenkmäler* (natural monuments) in the opening years of the twentieth century. Natural history associations published regional tree guides, or *Baumbücher*.

Across the Atlantic, in the United States, contemporaries of Conwentz made their own nationalist compilations of remarkable and historic trees (e.g., the Washington Elm in Cambridge). These American dendrophiles operated on the assumption that the nation's "ancient trees" existed only in remote mountainous areas of the Far West. The distribution of giant sequoia—singular to the Sierra Nevada—and the establishment of dendrochronology—unique to the University of Arizona—strengthened that (incorrect) assumption.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Edmund Schulman, of Tucson, took many western field trips, bumping over dirt roads, coring old conifers, and compiling a database of tree-rings that allowed him, without computers, to deduce multi-millennial climatic changes in the American Southwest. Writing for *National Geographic* in 1957, he revealed the location of the "oldest

known living thing." This bristlecone pine quickly became known as "Methuselah." After the announcement, the US Forest Service set aside the surrounding land, and named the reserve after Schulman, who died of heart failure as his article went to press.

Schulman Grove is a "grove" only in the attenuated sense of a Greek "sacred grove," a cultural inheritance passed down by Roman poets. It remains to be seen if science and statute, without religion or literature, can sanctify a grove in perpetuity. In the White Mountains, there is no altar. The oracles from Arizona have left with their extracted data. Compared to sacred trees in the Levant (tied off with rags), or South Asia (wrapped in cotton string), or Japan (cordoned with rice straw rope), old bristlecones bear instrumental signs of devotion: aluminum tags stamped with alphanumeric identifiers.

The hiking path called Methuselah Walk is something ancient made anew—a secular sacred grove, a scientific pilgrimage site. It inspires the *denken* in *Naturdenkmal*. But thinking with non-visible tree-rings may be too abstract for would-be pilgrims. In the absence of sacred rites, visitors follow the rituals of tourism. Photographers in pursuit of sharable images trample the soil around gnarled bristlecones that visibly possess *Merkwürdigkeit*.

The search for meaning in ancient trees continues as long as people care about—and care for—old things. In an unwise future that is no longer unimaginable, *Homo sapiens* may bring forth a world so new that oldness loses its significance. Then, effectively, the latest oldest tree would become the last. □

Photo: Jared Farmer, 2018. / This photo was taken at the edge of the Forest Service parking lot at the Schulman Grove, very close to where the scientist pitched his summer camp in the 1950s. The aluminum tag was originally placed by Edmund Schulman's successor, Wes Ferguson. "TRL" stands for Tree-Ring Lab, the short name for the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research, at the University of Arizona. This particular tag fell off the tree a few years ago. A forest ranger found it, took it home, soldered it to a cut piece of aluminum from a can (to give it more sturdiness), and nailed it back in place. I know this because the ranger showed me. Most visitors never notice this bristlecone—even though they drive right past it, or park beneath it—because it's not on the official trail.

# THE HOLBROOKE FORUM

## Digital Diplomacy

From tactics to  
strategy

by Corneliu Bjola

*And it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new.*

– Machiavelli

Contrary to Machiavelli's prediction that innovation is always difficult to implement, the first stage of the digital transformation of diplomacy has been an astonishing success. For a profession with an inbuilt propensity for cultivating tradition, defending institutional hierarchy, and resisting change, the rise of digital diplomacy has been nothing short of a revolution. Within less than a decade since the launch of the first social media networks, 90 percent of all UN member states have established a Twitter presence, and 88 percent have opened a Facebook account, with a combined audience of 325 million and 255 million, respectively, of followers and users. Driven by the opportunity to engage with millions of people, in real time, and at minimal costs, Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs), embassies, and diplomats have developed a constellation of new tools and methods in support of their activities. They range from the use of dedicated platforms for engaging with diaspora communities and foreign publics, communication with nationals in times of international crises, to the development of consular application for smartphones.

Digital diplomacy—that is, the use of digital technologies in support of diplomatic objectives—is therefore no longer an inchoate field of expertise trying to find its balance in a world challenged and disrupted by the advance of social media technologies. At the same time, Machiavelli might still have a point, as organizational structures in general, those of MFAs in particular, are notoriously difficult to change, and early successes might thus fail to translate into long-term results. To do this, digital diplomacy would need to demonstrate that it holds not only tactical value for communicating MFA positions and interests, but also strategic significance as an element of statecraft by understanding how technology impacts relationships between states, and developing the capabilities to respond to those opportunities. In other words, for digital diplomacy to boost its institutional profile inside MFAs, it must escape the temptation of staying within the confines of public communication and demonstrate its strategic value in advancing foreign policy goals.



The paper will approach this question in two steps: first, by addressing four misconceptions about the role of digital diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy; and, second, by explaining how digital diplomacy can move from tactics to strategy. It will be thus argued that the “Machiavelli trap” is hardly inevitable in this case, and that the innovative thrust of digital diplomacy can be enhanced by better understanding what digital diplomacy can do, what it cannot do, and by not blurring the lines between the two.

## MISCONCEPTIONS

The first and surprisingly common misconception about digital diplomacy is the *Superman Myth*, which claims that digital technologies can grant extraordinary powers to those using them, and in so doing, it can help them increase their diplomatic clout to levels they might otherwise not be able to reach. It is largely for this reason that small and medium-sized states (e.g., Sweden, the Netherlands, Mexico, Israel, and Australia) have proved so keen adopters of digital diplomacy, as the latter presented itself to them as a great opportunity to “punch” diplomatically above their political or economic weight. It is thus assumed that by being able to directly reach and engage millions of people, MFAs and their network of embassies could positively shape the views of the global public about the country of origin, and, in so doing, increase the diplomatic standing of the country in bilateral or multilateral contexts. The argument has a seductive logic, not least because of the scope, scale, and reach that digital diplomacy affords MFAs to pursue. At the same time, it suffers from a structural flaw: namely, that digital technologies constitute a distinct source of power, which, if properly harnessed, can offset deficiencies in hard or soft power. In fact, the way in which digital technologies operate is by creating a platform through which other forms of power can be projected in support of certain foreign-policy objectives. In short, the

digital cannot give MFAs Superman strength, but it can help them channel the strength they already have more efficiently and productively.

The second and fairly entrenched misconception is the *Walk in the Park Myth*, which supports the view that “going digital” is easy and MFAs can successfully pursue their digital diplomatic ambitions with relatively modest investments in training and resources. The speed by which the global public has migrated to the digital medium reinforces the idea of accessibility of social media platforms and the notion that anyone with basic technical skills can take part in, shape, and influence online conversations. What this view neglects to acknowledge, however, is that with no clear direction or strategic compass, the tactical, trial-and-error methods by

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which MFAs seek to build their digital profile and maximize the impact of their online presence cannot demonstrate their value beyond message dissemination. In other words, the adoption of digital tools without an overarching strategy of how they should be used in support of certain foreign-policy objectives runs the risk of digital diplomacy becoming decoupled from foreign policy. The strategic use of digital platforms imposes order on digital activities through the

definition of measurable goals, target audiences, and parameters for evaluation. The goals determine the target audience, which in turn determines the platforms, methods, and metrics to be used. This implies that training cannot be limited to the art of crafting messages, but must rather professionalize itself and focus on developing skills by which digital diplomats can strategically harness the power of digital platforms towards achieving predefined and measurable goals.

The third and growing misconception is the *Extinction Myth*, according to which digital diplomacy will gradually replace or make redundant traditional forms of diplomacy. On the weaker side of the myth, there exists a perception that digital technologies have the capacity to fundamentally change how diplomats perform their traditional functions of representation, communication, and negotiation to the point that they may even put an “end to diplomacy,” as Lord Palmerstone similarly quipped when the telegraph arrived. Stronger versions of the myth go a step further and acknowledge the possibility of having physical embassies and even diplomats replaced at some point by virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI). While digital technologies have demonstrated clear potential for revolutionizing how diplomats conduct public diplomacy, deliver consular services, or manage crises, one should nevertheless be mindful of the fact that the core function of diplomacy, that is, relationship building and management, cannot be accomplished without close and sustained human contact. The myth may thus be right about the fact that by increasing efficiency, digital technologies would likely reduce the number of diplomats required to perform certain routine functions. At the same time, the “extinction” hypothesis is hardly credible; the negotiation of human values and interests cannot be delegated to machines, and the amount of trust and mutual understanding that makes the wheels of diplomacy turn cannot be built without humans.

The fourth, and rather dark, misconception about digital diplomacy is the *Darth Vader Myth*, which sees the positive potential of digital platforms for engagement and cooperation at risk of being hijacked by the “dark side” of technology and redirected for propagandistic use. The digital disinformation campaigns attributed to the Russian government, which has allegedly been seeking to disrupt electoral processes in Europe and the United States in recent years, offer credible evidence in support of this view. More worryingly, how the digital medium operates makes it an easy target for use in propaganda. Algorithmic dissemination of content and the circumvention of traditional media filters and opinion-information gatekeepers makes disinformation spread faster, reach deeper, become more emotionally charged, and, most importantly, become more resilient due to the confirmation bias that online echo-chambers enable and reinforce.

That being said, one should be mindful that any technology faces the problem of double use, as the case of nuclear energy clearly illustrates. Trends are also important to consider: with 3.02 billion people or 38 percent of the world population expected to be on social media by 2021, a fast growing rate of global mobile penetration and the anticipated launch of the 5G technology in the next few years, the potential for positive and meaningful digital diplomatic engagement is strong and substantial. As long as the prospective benefits of digital diplomacy outweigh the risks, the pollution of the online medium by the “dark side” would likely stay contained, although its pernicious effects might not be completely eliminated.

## GETTING IT RIGHT

In an effort to move beyond these misconceptions, MFAs have started to shift their policy priority from merely

conducting digital diplomacy to the more ambitious objective of “getting it right.” “Diplometrics,” the new term coined by MFAs for measuring digital impact, seeks, for instance, to identify quantitative combinations of factors (measurable objectives, progress indicators, engagement ratios, etc.) that can best track and shape the impact of digital policies and campaigns in real time. At the same time, getting digital diplomacy right cannot be reduced to an exercise of fine-tuning quantitative metrics of message dissemination. It must also involve a qualitative approach by which to capture whether digital engagement can shape the views of the target audience and whether it can generate online relationships of relevance for offline diplomatic activity.

Against this background, there is now a growing understanding that “getting it right” cannot result from merely “copying and pasting” methods and strategies from political communication or business marketing. It requires instead a closer understanding of the intrinsic characteristics of the digital medium. MFAs must therefore move beyond the current focus on the public-facing, “front-end” of digital diplomacy (message dissemination and engagement) and think carefully about how to design the “back-end” architecture supporting their digital strategies and operations (data analysis and network development). In other words, without a good understanding of the processes by which data is shared online, of the way in which communities form and evolve online, and of the connection between the two, MFAs will not be able to move up to the next level of professionalization of digital diplomacy.

Three key objectives should guide MFAs’ efforts in this direction: a) How to minimize the perception gap between the audience and the MFA’s self-image (perception convergence); b) How to ensure that online networks support and enhance the MFA’s

strategic objectives (productive networking) c) How to adapt and upgrade the repertoire of skills necessary for addressing (a) and (b) (i.e. training).

From a communication perspective, algorithms, visuals, and emotions are key features of the digital medium as they inform, shape, and define how well MFAs’ messages travel online. More specifically, they structure the framework of interaction between MFAs and their intended audiences by tailoring messages to individual preferences, defining cognitive frames of interpretation, and managing expectations, respectively. Trial-and-error methods seeking to align these factors into suitable combinations work normally well when the audience is generally sympathetic to the messenger as the perception gap is relatively small and hence, easy to bridge. The situation becomes much more complicated when the audience has unstructured preferences or even negative perceptions of the MFA’s policies. The solution in this case rests with using analytical tools that can accurately reveal the preferences of the audience (data analysis), capture the breadth of the perception gap (sentiment analysis), and then combine these insights into alternative models (prescriptive analysis) with good foresight power, on the basis of which an action plan can be then selected and pursued. For example, if the strategic objective set by the MFA is to increase the level of remittances sent back home by the diaspora, the views of the intended audience on the topic first need to be aggregated and examined; a set of narratives must then be designed and tailored to the digital profile of the intended audience; the returns on investment value of alternative digital strategies need to be compared and assessed; and, finally, an action plan has to be developed for implementing and monitoring the online and offline impact of the agreed digital strategy.



From an engagement perspective, the type, size, and reach of the “network of networks” that MFAs (or embassies) build and manage online can make a significant difference for their ability to amplify and protect their digital influence. The more diverse, larger, and more connected

The innovation potential of digital diplomacy remains largely untapped, but in order to access it, it is important to understand what digital diplomacy can do, what it cannot do, and to avoid blurring the lines between the two.

these networks are, the stronger their ability to extend themselves in multiple configurations and, by extension, the greater the digital influence of the MFA. Building digital networks is, however, a delicate matter. It cannot be reduced to an effort of attracting followers indiscriminately; it must take aim at creating online communities with a strategic compass so that they can support and enhance the MFA's foreign-policy objectives. Five questions are particularly important to consider when building the “networks of networks” (NN): What type of NN is most suitable for advancing the MFA's goals? How should one activate NN in support of the MFA's policies? How should one avoid the “preaching to the choir” trap? How to ensure NN is not used by adversaries against the MFA itself? How

to convert NN digital influence into “offline” influence?

The first and second considerations speak to the issue of effectiveness. It is important for MFAs to make sure that their online community of influencers includes a good combination of policymakers, journalists, academics, diplomats, and diaspora leaders, who take an active interest in MFAs' policies. The third and fourth considerations highlight the risks that digital networks may pose to MFAs' activity. More specifically, MFAs need to make sure their messages reach beyond the immediate layer of sympathetic audiences, and that their network has sufficient fail-safe solutions (e.g., algorithms and/or counter-narratives) to prevent or deflect potential hijacking attempts by rival groups. Finally, the connection between the MFA and its online network should be sufficiently strong so that it could lead to offline results of relevance for the MFA (e.g., research input from academics, media reports from journalists, partnership initiatives from other diplomats, etc.).

Finally, from a skill-development perspective, MFAs need to review the spectrum of skills that diplomats require in order to be successful in their work in the digital age. More specifically, they need to identify what traditional skills are less relevant, or no longer relevant, what skills are still relevant but need to be updated, and what new skills are required for mainstreaming digital technologies into MFAs' activities. One would expect, for instance, that digitization could be of great use in consular services, for example, by reducing workload around inquiry, announcement, and document processing. Skills related to communication, reporting, and cultural engagement will remain relevant, but they need to demonstrate proficiency for the digital medium as well. New skills such as data analytics, visual reasoning, and adaptive thinking would be particularly valuable for reading patterns of online behavior,

projecting messages effectively, and reacting successfully to online events in real time. The changing repertoire of skills would prompt, by necessity, a rethinking of the training methods and delivery platforms that diplomatic academies currently use in their work. From knowledge-dissemination systems centered on offline lectures and seminars, diplomatic training in the digital age would need to embrace knowledge-generation models delivered on multiple online platforms and focused on data-driven simulation, scenario building, and social network analysis.

To conclude, the innovation potential of digital diplomacy remains largely untapped, but in order to access it, it is important to understand what digital diplomacy can do, what it cannot do, and to avoid blurring the lines between the two. While the main focus of MFA attention has thus far been the public-facing “front-end” of digital diplomacy (message dissemination and engagement), the next step needs to involve a more active role in establishing the “back-end” architecture supporting MFAs' digital strategies and operations (data analysis and network development). This way, the gap between digital diplomacy and foreign policy opened up by the tactical use of digital diplomacy can be reduced and minimized via a strategic approach that connects foreign-policy goals to target audiences, engagement methods, skill development, and online/offline influence. □

This article first appeared online as part of the Richard C. Holbrooke Forum's publication series. For article references, please see: [americanacademy.de/digital-diplomacy-tactics-strategy/](http://americanacademy.de/digital-diplomacy-tactics-strategy/)



# NOTEBOOK







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Photo: Ralph K. Penno



## CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF FELLOWSHIPS

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To commemorate twenty years of the American Academy in Berlin's fellowship program, the *Berlin Journal* asked a number of former fellows to contribute a short piece about their residencies. We also asked a few benefactors and trustees about why they support the Academy's fellowships and programming. What follows are their responses.

By Michael Kellen, Marina Kellen French, Andrew Gundlach, and Nina von Maltzahn

Back in 1994, Stephen M. and Anna-Maria Kellen—our mother and father, aunt and uncle, grandfather and grandmother—saw the value in Richard C. Holbrooke's idea of establishing a lasting American presence in Berlin, following the departure of the Berlin Brigade. They also felt the personal value in having such a presence housed in the Wannsee villa where they first met and courted, and where Anna-Maria spent some of her most formative childhood years.

It is for this reason that Stephen and Anna-Maria bequeathed the Academy its founding gift, in 1995, which enabled Anna-Maria's childhood Wannsee home to be transformed into the Hans Arnhold Center, named after her and her sister, Ellen Maria's, father: the great German banker Hans Arnhold.

Hans and Ludmilla Arnhold's Wannsee residence served as a salon for many of Weimar Berlin's lovers of art and culture. "So many of my parents' friends who visited here were writers, artists, and musicians,"

Anna-Maria said, at the Academy's ceremonial opening, in November 1998, "and so, in a very real sense, this house has always been a cultural center."

Today, as we look back on twenty years of fellowships founded to deepen intellectual and cultural understanding between Americans and Germans, we are humbled by the hundreds of alumni who have made the Arnhold family home their own home for a semester. These impressive scholars, writers, artists, and composers have enjoyed the villa as a place of study, reflection, and conversation—not just with German peers but also, perhaps even foremost, among themselves, forging discussions that cross disciplines otherwise not trespassed: historians, legal scholars, fiction writers, and painters talking with journalists, political scientists, anthropologists, and philosophers. It is precisely this mix, and in what has become one of the most vibrant cities in the world, that propels the American Academy in Berlin forward, giving Germans—and specifically residents of Berlin—a view into the diversity, vibrancy, and immense creativity of American cultural and intellectual life.

Indeed, these are the qualities that Stephen and Anna-Maria Kellen experienced firsthand in the America they came to in 1936 and 1939, respectively—qualities they sought to promote in their public and private lives, and in their wide-ranging, decades-long philanthropic activity. "It is amazing what one can experience in one lifetime, if one lives long enough," Stephen used to say. For us, his family, it is amazing to continue to support the legacy of the Academy's fellowship program he helped to make possible.

Though Stephen and Anna-Maria are no longer with us, it is particularly moving to see the arc of history bend back even further, to their parents: the Wannsee villa that has, over the last twenty years, hosted the Academy's artists, writers, and scholars was once animated by exactly the same kind of cultural and intellectual life when it was Hans and Ludmilla Arnhold's residence at Lake Wannsee. This is why, for our family, in many ways, the American Academy in Berlin and its wonderful fellows complete a circle once broken and now again made whole.

*Deswegen: weiter so!*



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**W.J.T. Mitchell**

*Art Historian,  
University of Chicago  
Berlin Prize Fellow,  
Spring 2002*

**I WILL CARRY** memories forever of spring 2002, as a Berlin Prize Fellow at the American Academy. First, there was simply Berlin itself, which for the first time opened itself to me as the trauma capital of the twentieth century, veering impossibly through its phases of wild Weimar democracy, fascist horror, and the long twilight of communism. I learned the secrets of the villa at Wannsee, descending into the bunker after evening cocktails to discuss its evolution from the home of Hitler's finance minister to the American officer's club. With the amazing Evonne Levy, I went in search of National Socialist traces in architectural style and ornament, and Jesuit propaganda in the forms of the Baroque. Derek Chollet and I argued over the Bush-Cheney run-up to the invasion of Iraq, which was so clearly on the horizon. People were still talking about Susan Sontag's fall 2001 stay at the Academy, where she wrote her famous *New Yorker* essay on 9-11, and I began to plan a book about the imagery of the misbegotten "War on Terror." And then there was Reinold's welcoming kitchen, where I learned how to cook polenta to go with my green-chilli stew for the annual potluck. Let me know when I can come back for a visit!

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**Wallis Miller**

*Architectural Historian,  
University of Kentucky  
Berlin Prize Fellow,  
Spring 2003*

**MY TIME AT** the Academy allowed me to embark on a long term and a previously under-researched project on German exhibitions of

architecture, providing me with all of the access decisive for the project's success. The work that I started during my time in Berlin has produced articles, lectures, and a book manuscript that covers more than a century of architectural history.

But as much as the opportunity has enabled me to pursue significant disciplinary questions, it also demanded that I confront my position as an academic working in a foreign context. I was at the Academy during the spring semester in 2003, and my lecture was to be the first presentation after the start of the second Gulf War. All of a sudden, the fellows had 24-hour protection, and my position as an academic, one that, for me, had been circumscribed by professional interests, became public. Many Germans, including intellectuals, protested America's intervention and, as a result, many of them refused to attend the lecture. But many did. Beyond supporting my and the Academy's decision to give the lecture, their presence underscored the urgent need for academic openness in the face of intense political controversy. A straightforward lesson in principle, but, on the ground, more potent, especially since I carried it back to the University of Kentucky. Here, the issues I have since confronted may not be significant at a global scale, but, in an environment where so much is divisive, the academic model of openness has been as important as the architecture we talk about in class.

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**Adam Garfinkle**

*Editor,  
The American Interest  
Bosch Fellow in Public  
Policy, Spring 2003*

**I WAS FORTUNATE** enough to spend several weeks at the American Academy during

the early spring of 2003, on a Bosch fellowship. This happened to be the time when the Iraq War began, and the coincidence—which was not entirely coincidental, to be truthful, since I had an idea what was about to happen—enabled me to watch German political culture in action, up close and personal. I observed a lot, and learned something. It led to me writing an essay entitled "Germany in the Springtime," which in harmonic confabulation with other events led to me being asked to serve as principal speechwriter to Secretary of State Colin Powell. That, in turn, in a way, led to my becoming founding editor of *The American Interest*. You just never know how one thing may lead to another.

As a second example of the same phenomenon, or mystery: it happened that my wife and three children stayed with me during part of my fellowship. We were in the gardener's house, out by the main gate, which was truly a magnificent experience. We did

a lot of traveling around the country, but we also experienced several speaking events and the general ambience of the Academy. As it happened, my then-16-year-old daughter first heard of Kenyon College during a conversation in the library with some of the other fellows. That is where she ended up going to college—a marvelous choice for her and everyone concerned. So, you see what I mean.

I have only fond memories of the American Academy in Berlin these 15 years since my stay, and I remain grateful to everyone who helped make it happen. I only regret that my fellowship was so brief.

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**Rosanna Warren**

*Poet and Scholar,  
University of Chicago  
Ellen Maria Gorrisen  
Fellow, Spring 2006*

**MY TIME AT** the Academy was an idyll, offering a paradoxical mixture of solitude and

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**FORGING ESSENTIAL BONDS**

Relations between countries do not exist, per se. Only the bonds between the people, their beliefs, their customs, the trade of the material and the immaterial is what constructs relations. With time, these result first in threads and then in ties based on common understanding. The fellowship program of the American Academy in Berlin has, over many years, proved its power to forge these essential bonds between the United States and Germany, living from the strength of intellectual freedom, unconditional hospitality, and the belief in the good. It offers the very best academics, writers, and artists a unique opportunity to enrich the world we live in, with their views, their insights, their debates, and their presence in situ. It guarantees that we do not forget how our democracies and our relationships came into existence, and how precious our values are, especially in an age of peace and unrest, of challenges and progress.

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**Stefan von Holtzbrinck, CEO, Holtzbrinck  
Publishing Group**

sociability. Hours alone in the studio each day opened into rich reverie: poems grew, like seeds randomly carried and deposited by the wind, and with another kind of discipline, the magical library service, and the cooperation of the willful intellect, I was able to finish the book of literary criticism I'd been mulling for several years.

On the other hand, breakfasts, and even more, the evening dinners plunged us into camaraderie. At the nucleus, the little clan of fellows

constituted something like the population in a boarding house in a Balzac novel, and suggested all sorts of fictive possibilities. Those patterns were constantly rearranged by the appearance of short-term guests who popped in for a few days at time, bringing new ideas, new arguments; they were further rearranged by the evenings when an exotic flock of ambassadors, former prime ministers, bankers, and newspaper magnates fluttered in for some special lecture and lavish dinner,

awing the shabby humanists with a glimpse of How the World Really Works.

But the greatest gift was the chance to explore Berlin. Magnificent, tattered, in constant upheaval, the city wears its scar tissue openly. To walk its streets and examine its museums is to trace the saga of modernity, a sobering text. And still unfinished. The Academy is now part of that story.

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#### David E. Barclay

*Executive Director,  
German Studies Association  
George H.W. Bush/Axel  
Springer Fellow,  
Spring 2007*

**ONE MORNING IN** Wannsee, I was moping alone over a late breakfast. Nothing could dispel my dark mood, not even the splendid view of the lake, or knowing that I was privileged to have my cup of coffee next to an Anselm Kiefer painting. I was working on a deadline for an article, and I simply could not figure out an appropriate opening. I'd been wrestling with it for hours. Then Tom Powers showed up and joined me. I complained to him about my problem, and within a few minutes, his suggestions had solved my dilemma. Where else could I mope over breakfast, only to have a Pulitzer Prize winner join me and help me over a writing hurdle?

One has many such moments at the American Academy, and the best are serendipitous and unplanned: side conversations at dinner or late-night discussions in the library, all in an ambience that positively invites intellectual and personal enrichment.

I was not a Berlin novice when I lived at the Academy, and I already had many contacts in the city, but the intellectual intensity of my experience at the Academy was incomparable; the Berlin

contacts I made were enduring; and the opportunity to pursue focused and uninterrupted work, while at the same time benefitting from the insights and experiences of people working in entirely different fields, was unforgettable. I spent my entire career teaching at a small liberal-arts institution, and my time at the Academy represented the best high-octane refresher course in the liberal arts *sans frontières* that one could imagine.

At a time when the transatlantic relationship has become increasingly fraught, institutions like the American Academy are more essential than ever. We hear a lot these days about *gemeinsame Werte*. The American Academy embodies them every single day. Long may it do so, for another twenty years, another fifty years, another century.

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#### Mitch Epstein

*Photographer and Artist  
Guna S. Mundheim  
Fellow in the Visual Arts,  
Spring 2008*

**I THINK THE** greatest benefit as an artist—and as an American—was to have a six-month period where I was removed from my normal routines and way of seeing things in the States. I came to Berlin while I was working on *American Power*, my series about the production and consumption of energy in the United States. It was useful to step back and look at the US from the European vantage.

For *American Power*, I had tremendous difficulty getting access to sites in the US, so when I had the idea to look at Berlin's twentieth-century history, as it was manifest in the present, I was afraid I'd run into similar obstacles. But the Academy put in calls for me to restricted sites, and never took "no" for an answer. That was so rewarding—whether I wanted to go to some of

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## AN ENDURING MISSION

In 1994, when Richard Holbrooke was the US ambassador to Germany, he attended a dinner in Berlin at a conference to honor the American Berlin Brigade, which was leaving the now-reunited city for the last time. I attended that dinner, and, in the midst of it, he took some of us aside to ask us to join the board of a yet to be formed "American Academy in Berlin"—to celebrate the continuing closeness of the United States and Berlin.

Since Richard Holbrooke was a US government official, he could not personally lead the organization at that time. Instead, it fell to Thomas Farmer, an eminent Washington lawyer, to become the institution's founding chairman, joined later by honorary chairmen Henry Kissinger and Richard von Weizsäcker. As a trustee from the outset, I can testify that the mission of the Academy as envisioned by Richard Holbrooke has been pursued successfully beyond anything that could then be hoped for.

Throughout its history, the Academy has played a key role in participating in the dialogue about global issues—through visiting political scholars, the Kissinger Prize, and the Holbrooke Forum—always maintaining its political independence.

But the heart of the Academy's efforts remains its fellowship program. Hundreds of scholars and artists have worked there and interacted with their German peers. The Academy is entirely financed by private sources and relies on the generosity of US and German donors, who feel passionate about its mission. Without constantly validating the expectations of its supporters through ever-greater excellence, the Academy could not survive. But today it is healthy in every respect and looking forward to a great future.

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**Karl von der Heyden, Chairman Emeritus,  
American Academy in Berlin**



the embassies that dated back to the Nazi era, or to the German Ministry of Finance building, which was once the headquarters for the German Ministry of Aviation—all these doors were opened for me. For me, a big part of being an artist is to walk into something not knowing where it is going to go. I had begun my Berlin series not knowing exactly where it would lead me, and controversial government locations became crucial to the work. It was very meaningful to get into these places, especially as an outsider. The Academy facilitated all of that.

Living in Berlin was very special in itself. The Academy was a vehicle to meet and get to know German artists and artists from other countries, because Berlin is truly an international city. What felt distinctly different in Berlin was that there was much more of an open dialogue among artists. It's not as cutthroat as New York, which is so commercialized, so fast.

The American Academy is such a rich opportunity. I will always look back on my time there as having helped shape who I am as an artist.

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**Richard Deming**  
*Director of Creative Writing,*  
 Yale University  
 John P. Birkelund Fellow  
 in the Humanities,  
 Spring 2012

**I CAME THINKING** that the American Academy would be an ideal place to get some work done. What I found, however, was something more than that—experiences, encounters, and exchanges, which have continued to shape my thinking and my sense of the world ever since.

Weaving myself into the city's cultural and intellectual life, I met artists, writers, philosophers, and scholars, all of whom offered me compelling new perspectives and ideas

that challenged my assumptions. I could take nothing for granted. My experiences ranged from hearing jazz concerts at a small club with a world-renowned German artist (whom I had just met through the Academy) to drinking coffee in small cafés with brilliant philosophers, to walking the streets late at night, taking in all the sights and sounds of that most vibrant of cities.

The situation at the Academy's villa itself is superb. Its luxuries of food, drink, comfortable rooms, excellent espresso, and an unmatched view are entirely persuasive. Yet, for me, the interaction with the other fellows was the real boon. Night after night, conversations were true exchanges, not just serial monologues, which so often can be the case with academic gatherings. The topics veered from economics to the best theater in Berlin to quantum physics. The range, depth, and vitality of these conversations—building and evolving, moving across disciplines and concerns—quickened my own thinking in ways I cannot begin to describe. I often found myself racing up to my room after dinner to write because the discussions had been so generative and provocative.

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**Annie Gosfield**  
*Composer*  
 Berlin Prize Fellow in Music  
 Composition,  
 Spring 2012

**IN 2010, AFTER** multiple rejections, I acted against my instincts and applied for the Berlin Prize in Music Composition one more time. The American Academy in Berlin had an almost mythical reputation for great facilities, fascinating fellows, and wonderful food, so it was worth the gamble. A few days before the deadline, I ran

into Matthias Osterwold, an important figure in Berlin's new-music community. He told me how the Academy went to great lengths for their fellows' research, but he wondered why the composition fellows didn't take advantage of the excellent resources. Our conversation inspired me to apply to conduct research into one of my favorite subjects: jammed radio signals in World War II and the Cold War.

Wannsee was just a stone's throw from Babelsberg, where I listened to archived broadcasts during my 2012 fellowship, an experience that shaped my

work in the years to come. I incorporated the sounds and techniques of jammed radio signals in compositions for violin, string quartet, and a piano duet. In 2017, when I composed an opera based on Orson Welles's radio drama *War of the Worlds*, my research at the Academy took on an even greater significance. *War of the Worlds* was a multi-site opera performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and narrated by Sigourney Weaver. It was broadcast live from Walt Disney Concert Hall onto the streets of Los Angeles, via three World War II-era air raid sirens that were retrofitted

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## BUILDING SUSTAINABLE NETWORKS

Over the past two decades of cooperation with the American Academy, the Robert Bosch Stiftung has supported sixty Bosch Public Policy Fellows. The Academy selected exceptional individuals, who have filled the term "public policy" with meaning, covering a broad range of topics that reflect relevant issues in the transatlantic debate: migration, digitalization, and the future of journalism, among others, as well as less obvious challenges, such as gene patents and drug abuse in rural areas.

Part of our strategy is to carry the spirit of international understanding beyond the political centers on both sides of the pond. To this end, we have been delighted to host American Academy fellows to engage with the wider public in Stuttgart, through the event series "Head to Head."

Through its fellowships, the American Academy has woven hundreds of threads across the Atlantic to form a robust and sustainable network in the academic, cultural, political, and corporate communities of Germany and the United States. The importance of strengthening these bonds increases as forces of isolationism and fragmentation are gaining traction worldwide. We are proud to have joined forces with the American Academy in this endeavor, as fostering transatlantic relations has been a key concern of the Robert Bosch Stiftung's international activities for over 35 years.

With great appreciation for the work of the American Academy to foster and elevate the transatlantic dialogue, we congratulate them on the twentieth anniversary of the fellowship program.

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**Robert Bosch Stiftung**

with new speakers. Five years after my fellowship, those jammed radio sounds found a perfect home, adding depth, menace, and a unique sonic layer to my first opera. I snuck

static, noise, and 1938-era radio signals into the mix, where they commingled with an orchestra and seven opera singers. I used my library of wild radio sounds to evoke

earthly broadcasts mixed with faraway Martian atmosphere, shifting back and forth in character and timbre, like a radio drifting between stations.

My time in Berlin wasn't only about jammed radio signals, though. My fellow fellows were the most brilliant, curious, and challenging group of people I've ever known. Dinner at an old spy haunt with Gary Smith, Calvin Trillin, my partner Roger Kleier, and John and Helen Kornblum stands out in my memory, and seeing great opera with Pamela Rosenberg was an education in itself. I came for the food and the jammed radios, but left with great friends, meaningful knowledge, and a higher standard of discourse.

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#### Andrew Nathan

*China and Human Rights Scholar  
Columbia University  
Axel Springer Fellow,  
Spring 2013*

**I CAME TO** the American Academy in the fall of 2013 to study German and European attitudes toward the international human rights regime, part of a slow-cooking book called *The Struggle over Human Rights: Norm Creation and Norm Change in the International System*. Thanks to the hospitality and openness of German colleagues, I made excellent progress on that goal, meeting officials at the Chancellery and Federal Foreign Office, scholars at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik (in whose journal I was privileged to publish an article), several universities, and civil society activists at the European Center on Constitutional and Human Rights, German Amnesty, and Human Rights Watch, among others. Questions of human rights policy are naturally

connected to the question of policy toward China (my primary area of expertise), and on this subject I met officials, scholars, think-tank staff, and activists, from whom I learned a great deal.

But these were only the focal, professional activities of my stay. Perhaps even more valuable was the chance to learn about German history, society, and culture, by reading, casual interaction, language tutorials, travel, and, in my case, intensive museum viewing. This benefit applied not only to me, but to my wife and two middle- and high-school-aged children. The experience was like a semester of liberal education, mind-stretching in many dimensions, leaving a permanent trace of new information, insights, and interests. The experience was intoxicating. And the Academy was always a home to come back to, get help if needed, share experiences, and enjoy camaraderie and great food.

As a China specialist, my view of the world spans the Pacific, but I know far less than I should about the Atlantic world. It is a blind spot attributable not to willful neglect but to a lack of opportunity. The experience at the Academy was an intensive corrective, leaving me still far behind where I would like to be, but immeasurably enriched.

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#### Susie Linfield

*Journalist and Critic  
New York University  
Holtzbrinck Fellow,  
Spring 2013*

**MY STAY AT** the American Academy in Berlin was probably as close to heaven as I'll ever get. It gave me the time, space, freedom, and relaxation to begin researching my book on Zionism and the Western Left. The Academy's librarian and staff were terrific, and I was amazed at the capaciousness of the

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## FOSTERING DIVERSITY, DEFENDING VALUES

What do the iconic artworks of the Soviet avant-garde, the codification of the law of war, and the effects of new technologies on social structures have in common? They are all topics of projects by Axel Springer Fellows at the American Academy—that is, projects that Axel Springer has either funded in the past or will fund in the future. And they couldn't be more diverse.

This is exactly what makes the Academy's fellowship program stand out. It is not only the obvious, the mainstream that is being funded. Rather, this program is remarkable for its openness and the breadth, as well as depth, of its support. This is also what makes it so important: the diversity of the fellowship program reflects the complexity of transatlantic relations.

Transatlantic relations have grown over the course of many years. They are strong and multifaceted. And they are based on shared values, cultural as well as political. They are flourishing because they are growing on fertile ground—certainly in good times, but also in bad. Axel Springer stands for the same liberal values that form the core of the transatlantic relationship. These values are written into the company's "constitution," the Essentials. This is another reason why Axel Springer feels a special bond with the American Academy.

The world is experiencing dramatic upheavals. Digitization is changing not only the way we work, but also our societies. And it is accelerating, as well as fortifying, China's rise to power. China will soon be leading the field of artificial intelligence. In the midst of these changes, transatlantic relations remain an anchor. Governments come and go, the political climate changes, but the transatlantic friendship endures. It is essential for defending our values in a changing world.

To foster and cultivate transatlantic relations is a meaningful task. I'm thankful that the American Academy has devoted itself to this endeavor, and for everything it has and continues to achieve. In the name of Axel Springer, but also personally, I'm glad we are part of it.

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**Mathias Döpfner, CEO, Axel Springer AG**



German libraries' collection of Jewish-oriented books (including some extremely obscure ones). The irony of researching Zionism in Berlin did not escape me, yet there was also something very fitting about it: the histories of Jews and Germans, even before the Shoah, cannot be disentangled.

My forthcoming book *The Lions' Den: Zionism and the Left from Arendt to Chomsky* will be published next year by Yale University Press. Yes, it's taken me a few years to complete, but I don't think I could have written it without the Academy's initial, and crucial, support.

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## AN INTELLECTUAL FORCE

Keeping American thought and culture alive and well in Germany is vital for sustaining the relationship between the two countries. The American Academy in Berlin as an institution should help ensure that they thrive.

This was also the opinion of Richard Holbrooke, who led me through the building on Am Sandwerder in the early days of the American Academy. It was important to him that intellectual America had a forum in Germany, the country he knew well and appreciated from his time as US ambassador there. And that's why he founded the American Academy.

This goal can best be achieved through concrete projects that give interested parties from both countries the opportunity to meet, triggering engaging discussions and conveying new ideas. The American Academy in Berlin's fellowship program does an excellent job of fostering such exchange. Through this program, American intellectuals from all walks of life not only spend several months working on compelling academic or creative projects in Germany, but also present and discuss their specialist knowledge with German audiences at public events.

Over the past twenty years, the American Academy's fellows have dealt with an incredibly wide array of topics: reflections on recent German history, including problems faced after the end of World War II in 1945 and during the reconstruction of Germany; the art of writing; the impact of American theater; and the influence of architecture on the sensitivity of a country, to name just a few examples.

Our support of the American Academy in Berlin makes it possible for us to continue to engage in dialogue with the intellectual America at a time when we look toward the United States with some concern.

One thing has been made patently clear through the Academy's fellows: intellectual forces are the ones that change the world.

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**Prof. Dr. techn. Dr.-Ing. E. h. Berthold Leibinger,  
Founder, Berthold Leibinger Stiftung**

There are many mornings when I wake up and say to myself: I wish I were back in Berlin!

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## Jonathan Lethem

Writer  
Pomona College  
Mary Ellen von der Heyden  
Fellow in Fiction,  
Spring 2014

**LOOKING BACK FROM** this distance, the particular miracle of my 2014 spring in Berlin—along with the mercy the winter provided that year, after such dire warnings!—was how distinctly it served both as a productive retreat and, improbably, a re-immersion in the best kind of cosmopolitan urbanity. I credit the unique properties of the Academy with this unlikely balancing act. We came as a family, one with young children; it was my first sabbatical after taking, for the first time, a richly absorbing, but also demanding, college teaching job. I needed to start a novel, and, as a former resident at Yaddo and other American arts colonies, was intent on using the Academy as a place to woodshed with my work. I did, with great success. What I hadn't accounted for, and am so astoundingly grateful for—and which seems to me unlikely as I begin to enumerate it—is that in five months in Berlin, I attended the amazing Komische Oper production of Mozart's *Magic Flute*, an equally amazing Schaubühne production of *Hamlet*, an avant-garde musical installation at the Berghain, screenings at the Berlin Film Festival, visited the Stasi Museum, gave readings in seven or eight other German cities, saw Vienna, where I discovered the Museum of Globes, and attended so many astoundingly rich presentations by my fellow fellows. The boggling implications of all this cultural absorption are still trickling out through

my pores, and onto the pages of my writing. I can barely express my gratitude.

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## Linda Dalrymple Henderson

Art Historian  
University of Texas at Austin  
Ellen Maria Gorrisen  
Fellow,  
Spring 2014

**MY FELLOWSHIP AT** the American Academy, in spring 2014, had a truly transformative effect on my scholarship. I came to the Academy to work on a book project, "The Energies of Modernism: Art, Science, and Occultism in the Early Twentieth Century," which seeks to recover the scientific and occult contexts for early twentieth-century artists, ranging from art in Paris (Cubism, Marcel Duchamp) and Italian Futurism to the development of abstract painting by the Russian Kazimir Malevich and German Expressionist Wassily Kandinsky.

In Berlin, I was able to work with library resources that were new to me, including those of the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, where I held a courtesy appointment made possible by the Academy. The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris no longer allows physical consultation of journals that have been digitized, but at the Institute I was able to work carefully through volumes of the *Revue Scientifique* (1905–1914) transferred from the Staatsbibliothek. While Paris had traditionally been my research destination, my time at the Academy in Berlin changed that. I have twice returned to Berlin for further research in the Staatsbibliothek and the Humboldt University library to consult copies of the German-language books and periodicals owned by Kandinsky, opening up a new reading of his art and theory. And, of course, my interactions with German scholars and with German culture more broadly

confirm the critical role the American Academy plays in fostering understanding and interchange between Germans and Americans—a connection more vital today than ever.

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**Mary Cappello**

*Writer*  
University of Rhode Island  
Holtzbrinck Fellow,  
Fall 2015

**THE AMERICAN ACADEMY** in Berlin is unrivaled in the particulars of the atmosphere it cultivates, the colloquy it

invites, and the intersections it arranges. Imagine this dream: to be seated at a table around which are gathered specialists in the abstruse and the mundane, the beautiful and the true; each person fine tunes her listening so as to begin to understand the new language of the person to her left or to her right. Sometimes the conversation reduces to two, locked arm in arm; other times, it rises like a chorus. The basic tenet of interest—in the world, in things, in ideas, in the other—brings the group together, and trails them long after they've parted in ways they can never predict.

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**HOLBROOKE'S VISION**

Richard Holbrooke was one of my very good friends, and I became involved with the Academy because of him. My family spent a few days with him in Bonn and Berlin, when he was US Ambassador to Germany. During our times together there, Richard talked often of his ideas for strengthening the bonds between the US and Germany, and particularly how an organization like the Academy could play a vibrant and essential role in promoting this objective.

I personally supported Richard's vision for creating the Academy as an important center that brings together scholars and experts who can discuss the important and challenging issues confronting political leaders and diplomats in today's world. Typically, Richard was very focused on making sure that the Academy's work should have a practical impact.

Richard would be delighted to know how much the Academy has achieved in its twenty years and what a positive impact it has had in promoting a high-quality dialogue on a range of issues, including deepening the important relations between the US and Germany.

In view of the unilateral and unpredictable approach of the current US administration, the Academy's role in promoting policy and cultural dialogue and friendships between thought-leaders in the US and Germany, based on our deep shared values, is more important than ever today. Richard Holbrooke would have been exhorting us to do even more than we are doing if he were still with us.

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**Vincent Mai, Founder and Chairman,  
Cranemere**

What the Academy staff experienced and executed as its "normal," to me, always reached into the echelons of the supra-normal or para-normal. I was continuously surprised by the presence of this visionary, or that genius, and the regular, daily appearance of such: there we are nibbling on a butter-filled pretzel together, making plans for the course of a common language.

All the while, there is the discovery of a city impossible to get to the end of in any one lifetime. Still, Berlin met me in this way: here were entire institutes devoted to the sort of things I pondered solo in my attic study back home. I've tried to bring some of those people, their modes of inquiry or of composing art, their eschewal of stance and pursuance of stroll, to meet the communities where I work and live. Therein lies the "fellowship."

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**Sean Wilentz**

*Historian*  
Princeton University  
Siemens Fellow,  
Spring 2015

**THE BOUNTIES OF** the Academy are many—and I barely tasted them! In 2014-15, various conflicts seemed to preclude my being able to take up a fellowship, which I'd been deeply honored to receive, but I was permitted to take up a month's residence in May. It was the best time of year to appreciate Wannsee, but that turned out to be almost incidental.

Thanks to the Academy's hospitality and care, I enjoyed one of the most intense and productive four weeks I can remember. I finished off a book manuscript I'd been fussing with for a year, and got started on another one, all the while building lasting friendships with an extraordinary group of fellows, ranging from poets and musicians

to fellow historians. Every moment, I felt wonderfully connected, whether it be in receiving (speedily!) hard-to-find books and articles from Berlin's libraries or enjoying spring evenings with colleagues and staff overlooking the grounds, anticipating yet another extraordinary meal. Even though my stay was perforce truncated, I never felt gypped, as a month at the Academy gave me as much as I could have expected from a much longer stay anywhere else.

Part of the place's secret is that the Academy thoroughly respects individual fellows' need for extended, quiet solitude. There are no perfunctory distractions or obligatory gabfests. Another part, though, is the sumptuousness of all that the place offers the rest of the time, not least easy access to the musical glories of Berlin. I have nothing but wonderful memories of my brief stay—and hope to return and forge new ones down the road.

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**Elliott Sharp**

*Musician and Composer*  
Inga Maren Otto Fellow in Music Composition,  
Spring 2015

**EXPERIENCING THE** memories of my fellowship at the Academy, I'm struck by how many positive factors converged to provide the catalyst for creative ferment within an extremely congenial environment, often a rarity in such residency programs. Our dinners together were the launch pad, the catalyst for discussions that might extend way beyond the meal itself, with no topic ever considered off-topic. Talk might focus with laser-like intensity on one item in the news or common aspects in our work. It might just as well veer off in a series of oblique and provocative digressions, ever stimulating.



Returning to the Chauffeur's House, where I was staying with my family, I would be buzzed with ideas. Our fellows presentations were much more than academic exercises; they were public windows into our thoughts and actions, amplified and reflected by the active participation of the community of Berliners.

Wannsee might have been a touch remote, but we felt hooked into the intellectual and artistic life of the city, whether it ventured out to us or invited us in to homes and venues. I was there to develop concepts for my opera *Substance*, and being placed in such a pleasurable bubble had the desired effect—not in a finished product but in the opening up of avenues of possibility within the work itself. While pressure may be an important factor in productivity, the ability to take a deep breath or a walk on the lake, to step back from the work, were equally valuable.

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### Steven Hill

Journalist  
Holtzbrinck Fellow,  
Spring 2016

**I WAS A** Holtzbrinck Fellow at the American Academy in spring 2016. I soon melted into the placid setting along Lake Wannsee, amidst the ferries, boats, and waterfowl of all colors, stripes, and denominations. It was an idyllic, picturesque haven for doing my work.

But it was tough to ignore that from the vantage of my bedroom window loomed a number of reminders that things were quite different here in the years 1940 to 1945. Across the water I could spy the elegant villa with the sinister name—the Wannsee *Konferenzhaus*, where the Nazis' Final Solution was planned. Post-1945, the Wannsee was transformed by the alchemy of politics

into a liquid border, a rip in the German ideological fabric between East and West, between communism and democracy, and between freedom and walled-in utopianism. It was a watery segment of the "No Man's Land," the deadly strip between hostile warring machines, stitched together near Potsdam by the Glienicke Bridge of spies.

Back then, my father, a young GI, guarded the dark, mourning mansions that hugged the waterfront, including the Arnhold villa which now houses the American Academy. A few times he fell asleep on guard duty, which resulted in his commanding officer threatening him with a firing squad. He later told me he thought he heard the low moan of ghosts inside the haunted villas, especially on long winter nights, when it was bitter cold and he could hear the creaking ice sheaves on the river. As he marched like a marionette, he entertained himself by counting the icy puff breaths steaming from his nostrils. I am proud that he turned his back while some of the postwar, still-interned Jews slipped away to the promise of their faraway Promised Land, and that he gave his GI chocolate bars to the starving Berlin *Kinder*. But I am ashamed that, when one boy stole his precious chocolate, my father chased the youngster down and drew his revolver, pointing it between the eyes of the petrified youth. But, seeing the begging fear, he threw away the pearl-handled beauty for which he had swapped a lifetime of cigarettes and well-placed favors, but which now scalded his humanity.

Recently, during a phone call from Berlin to my now 90-year-old father, he began reminiscing about his former days here as a young soldier. I was shocked as he suddenly began to speak German—whole sentences and coherent phrases. No one in my family

had ever heard him speak German before; I didn't even know he could. His crinkled, demented brain could barely recall what he had for breakfast that morning, or how to drive to his doctors appointments, but his passable German was now bubbling up from some buried source that was seeded seventy years ago. "*Fräulein schön!*" and "*Wirst du mit mir ausgehen?*" He told me that he wanted to marry his German girlfriend, but his mother did not approve. Love between two people does not always speak the same

language, especially during wartime and its aftermath, and so the soldier-mama's boy eventually sailed home, wifeless. Our family's history was altered before it even began. Who knew?

As I gazed out my bedroom window at the sun setting over the Wannsee, I was grateful that the American Academy had provided me an opportunity to be plunged into the middle of this riveting context, in which my family's story and the great tides of history once had intersected.

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## MEETING TRANSATLANTIC CHALLENGES

At its inception, the American Academy in Berlin was designed to transition post-unification concerns into a necessary framework for advancing ideas, culture, and diplomacy between the United States and Germany. I believe that US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke's expansive experience, traversing the dichotomy between the US Foreign Service and Wall Street, was key in establishing the Academy as a platform for exchange between nations with overlapping and intrinsic values.

Perhaps at no other time in recent memory has the need for the Academy to fulfill its mission become more blatantly clear, to frame these intrinsic values for today's context in a way that can strengthen the value-framework in order to meet evolving transatlantic challenges.

The Academy's world-class fellowship has created—and will continue to create—a thought-leadership model that exemplifies the value, exchange, and diverse viewpoints necessary to meet the transatlantic challenges of today and into the future. I believe that the Academy's next twenty years will have an opportunity to participate in what may be one of the greatest periods in modern human history.

As our transatlantic societies begin answering the difficult questions around the digitalization of healthcare, such as artificial intelligence (AI), and as we begin to meet the societal demands that come with the Western world's aging populations, humanity will be compelled to organize and mobilize its collective intellect—and this is where the Academy will play a major role in creating transatlantic awareness through leading global dialogue.

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**Dieter Weinand, Member of the Board of Management, Bayer AG**

**Esra Akcan**

*Architectural Historian  
Cornell University  
Ellen Maria Gorrisen  
Fellow,  
Fall 2016*

**I CANNOT THINK** of a better place to finalize my book *Open Architecture: Migration, Citizenship and the Urban Renewal of Berlin-Kreuzberg by IBA-1984/87* than the American Academy in Berlin. Not only was it a rare luxury to reach one's topic with a 20-minute public-transportation ride, but it was also extremely reassuring to be surrounded by fellows and Academy

staff, who were united for the advancement of ideas, research, literature, and the arts. How often is one gifted with the extensive time for a couple of months to pursue research and writing without worrying about other daily activities? And as an architect, I cannot help but additionally mention the pleasures of working in the Fellows Pavilion, located in the large garden with a lake view.

We live in a world where the humanities are fast declining in the university, and intellectuals are increasingly silenced and trivialized in public discourse. In such a

world, an institution like the American Academy, which gives financial and moral support to academics so they can freely and independently advance their studies, is nothing short of an oasis.

Finally, I should mention that it was a challenge to stay appropriately critical of the historical immigration policies and contemporary refugee phenomenon in such a scholar's paradise, but it was a challenge I was honored to take.

**Tom Franklin**

*Writer  
University of Mississippi  
Mary Ellen von der Heyden  
Fellow in Fiction,  
Fall 2016*

**IN AUGUST OF 2016**, our family arrived at the American Academy in Berlin. I'm a fiction writer, and was set to work on a screenplay and a new novel. My wife, Beth Ann Fennelly, is also a writer, and her plans were to finish one book and begin another. We brought our three kids, a daughter, 15, and two sons, 5 and 10. We were given the Chauffeur House, which couldn't have been nicer. We put our kids into schools, and began our time in Germany.

It couldn't have been better—Berlin itself is a magnificent city, full of green spaces, great bars and restaurants, museums and an amazing public transportation system. We jumped into Academy life, walking the grounds, gazing at the lake, meeting our fellow fellows. A highlight was the meals, the spectacular three-course dinners—and I have to confess that I had arrived in Berlin at a sveltish 193 and left a pudgy 217. It wasn't just the food—the beer was so good and cheap that it ruined me for USA beer.

We were there during the Trump election and watched our country begin to disintegrate from afar. We

threatened our conservative parents that, if Trump won, we'd stay in Berlin. I wish we had. I'd rather be 217 pounds of Tom Franklin walking around Berlin drinking that delicious beer, in a country where I admire its leader, than 193 pounds of Tom Franklin drinking Bud Light and watching our "president" rip apart all I hold dear.

Can I, um, come back? Maybe those automatic grass-cutting machines will have a mysterious accident, and I can be your lawn guy? Please?

**Mark A. Pottinger**

*Musicologist and Cultural Historian  
Manhattan College  
Nina Maria Gorrisen  
Fellow of History,  
Spring 2017*

**MY SIX-MONTH** residency at the American Academy in Berlin was truly extraordinary. I was able to complete chapters of my book manuscript; present lectures and scholarly talks at the US Consulate General in Hamburg; meet journalists, visual artists, music professionals, fellow academics, and patrons of the arts; serve as an interview respondent on a Berlin radio program; attend the opening of the new Pierre Boulez Saal of the Barenboim-Said Academy; mentor American graduate students who were studying at Berlin-based universities; and attend several performances at the Deutsche Oper, Staatsoper, and Berlin Philharmonie.

It was an amazing adventure, and one that convinced me that now, more than ever, my true academic calling is to situate my scholastic work and political ideals in the present and not just in a distant historical reality. The opportunity to associate with so many diverse scholars while in Germany and yet still to connect with current

**BRINGING FELLOWS  
TO FRANKFURT**

White & Case has been privileged to work with the American Academy's fellowship program for nearly five years—co-organizing lectures and discussions in Frankfurt/Main, and providing fellows with a platform in the Rhein-Main area to share their work and discuss their thinking with the international business community.

Without exception, we and our audiences are fascinated and impressed by the outstanding academic quality of all fellows, whose research and lectures touch relevant themes for the transatlantic partnership between Germany and the US, including topics such as digitalization, the future of work, the lessons to be learned from economic history, foreign policy, and changes in the postwar world order.

By selecting and bringing together impressive groups of sophisticated and diverse personalities, and by enabling audiences in Germany to engage and exchange their views with such leading thinkers in their field, the American Academy's fellowship program is truly unique and outstanding. In this way, the American Academy enables and multiplies cross-border dialogue in order to foster US-German relations.

White & Case very much appreciates and looks forward to continuing our cooperation with the American Academy by hosting its fellows in Frankfurt and by further supporting the goals of the American Academy and its founders.

**Markus Hauptmann and Andreas Stilcken,  
Partners, White & Case LLP**



political realities facing us today was truly the successful summation of what was achieved in my residency at the Hans Arnhold Center. I am grateful for being given the necessary time to write, research, and think about my work and its potential to shape not only the future of my career but also the academic community at large.

### Thessia Machado

*Sound Artist and Composer*  
Inga Maren Otto Fellow  
in Music Composition,  
Spring 2017

**OVER A YEAR** has elapsed since my time in Berlin. The bits of life that have accumulated since color the experience with a slightly dreamlike quality. Images and impressions come in bursts: the light on the trees, the sound of pebbles on the frozen lake, conversations, the funky music venues in Neukölln, the pattern on the seats of the S7 train. But the repercussions and ramifications, the impact from that experience, is still palpable and quite real. The

people I met, the work I made, these are still solid.

I had never really had such an uninterrupted period to pursue my work without the relentless demands of subsistence. On the shores of the Wannsee, I had the freedom to do exploratory research, play with new materials and components. From those results and insights emerged a whole new body of work—and with legs to go far.

The American Academy in Berlin is generous not only with material support (which is all sorts of glorious), but also with support that comes from the fundamental understanding of the importance of the arts in the world. And they treat their artists like they mean it! It is a place where people, both staff and guests, take the long view, and see the arc of this cultural conversation across a much longer time scale.

While still engaged and very actively participating in the affairs of the world, the Academy was able to provide an oasis of sanity and peace during very turbulent and confusing times.

That, and ping-pong on the porch!

### Peter Schmelz

*Musicologist*  
Arizona State University  
Anna-Maria Kellen Fellow,  
Fall 2017

**MY STAY AT** the American Academy in Berlin was a high point of my personal and professional life. The Hans Arnhold Center, in Wannsee, was a welcoming home-base as my family and I explored and took advantage of the vibrant sounds and sights of the great modern city that is Berlin—from the Philharmonic to the Science Center Spectrum, from the Tiergarten to the Kolle 37 adventure playground, as well as many favorite bookstores and music stores, restaurants, and cafes. I built and strengthened contacts with German academic friends and colleagues, and expanded my knowledge of German musical life in the 1960s, immersing myself in the local archives and libraries. And I made full use of the Academy facilities, its wonderful library, and Fellows Pavilion.

During my residency, I made strong headway on my book about the intimate histories of Cold War musical exchanges between the Russian

SSR, Ukrainian SSR, and West Germany. As I did so, I found the intimate relations fostered in and around the Academy to be of crucial importance, as were the stimulating conversations and colloquia among the policymakers, humanists, artists, and social scientists in my invigorating cohort, who proved to be a useful sounding board and a constant reminder to focus on the broader impact of our research and inquiry.

The American Academy in Berlin nurtures a type of crucial—and nearly unique—public diplomacy that maintains connections, even as traditional international relations suffer new stresses and strains. □

## THE SMART SET

**I**n 2018-19, the American Academy's library service team will be dashing about in a dark gray **smart forfour** to get to and from Berlin's extensive network of libraries and archives. They drive the **smart** to obtain the hundreds of books and archival materials requested by the Academy's residential fellows for their individual research

projects. For this driving convenience, we have Daimler AG to thank. Since 2012, their support has contributed to the success of many research endeavors—from scholarly monographs and novels to biographies and historical works. The Academy remains grateful to Daimler for this sustained and meaningful commitment. □



René Ahlborn, Berit Ebert, Bertram Johnne



Amy Wilkinson at the BMW Representative Office, June 19, 2018.

## WEST COAST INITIATIVE

The American Academy's newly established West Coast Initiative brings together entrepreneurs, scholars, and cultural leaders to discuss the impact of new technologies, educational models, corporate governance norms, and entrepreneurship on the practices of German and American professionals. Through this program, the Academy brings thought-leaders from the US West Coast to Berlin—and the Academy's fellows and visitors to the West Coast—for a spirited exchange across a range of fields that are being affected by dynamic technological change.

The West Coast Initiative was inaugurated in Berlin on October 10, 2017, with a talk on “How to Build a High Performance Board of Directors,” by Academy trustee Pascal Levensohn, founder of Levensohn Venture Partners, and managing director of Dolby Family Ventures. An audience of two dozen Berlin-based corporate and finance leaders then discussed board dynamics and practical approaches to improving board governance. A few months later in Berlin, on February 7, 2018, the former vice chairman of Time, Inc. and current executive

editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, Norman Pearlstine, joined Mathias Döpfner, CEO of Axel Springer, for a conversation on “The Internet: Content, Commercialization, Security, and Privacy.”

The first US-based event of the West Coast Initiative, “Managing Disruption: How to Ensure that Society Benefits from Technology and Innovation,” was held in San Francisco on March 15, 2018. Journalist Steven Hill, a spring 2016 Academy alumnus and author of *The Start-Up Illusion* (2017) and *Raw Deal* (2015), and Jens Wohltorf, co-founder and CEO of Blacklane, a Berlin-based limousine service and mobile app, debated the impact of new technologies on labor markets and social security systems, as well as their consequences for education and training. The evening was hosted by the Bay Area Council Economic Institute.

Back in Berlin, on June 19, 2018, Amy Wilkinson, the California-based founder and CEO of Ingenuity, bestselling author of *The Creator's Code*, and Stephen M. Kellen Distinguished Visitor at the American Academy, spoke at a luncheon at the BMW Representative Office about “The Six Essential Skills of

Extraordinary Entrepreneurs.” Wilkinson then discussed how to foster successful innovation in today's fast-paced, globalized economy with executives from German and international startups as well as major corporations.

Rounding out this year, on October 4, 2018, the West Coast Initiative brought Dieter Weinand, a member of the board and Head of Pharmaceuticals of Bayer AG, to Palo Alto to speak with Pascal Levensohn about the “Implications of Applying

Artificial Intelligence to Drug Discovery and Diagnostics” at the offices of the law firm White & Case.

The American Academy in Berlin is grateful to Bayer AG, BMW Group, Pascal Levensohn, Alfred Möckel, and Pfizer Pharma GmbH for generously supporting the West Coast Initiative, as well as to the Bay Area Council Economic Institute, BMW Group, Axel Springer SE, and White & Case for their generous hosting of events. □

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## SILICON VALLEY-BERLIN

As a venture capitalist and corporate director living in the San Francisco Bay Area, I have learned first-hand that good ideas are generated from all corners of the earth, but that few regions offer a complete portfolio of innovation “infrastructure” and the human capital necessary to optimally bring good ideas to maturity.

In this spirit, I am immensely proud to support the Academy's West Coast Initiative, which aims to more intimately connect Berlin's innovation ecosystem with Silicon Valley, through fostering meaningful discussion between thought-leaders and influencers. Our work with this initiative drives engaged dialogue on relevant innovation topics among select academics, entrepreneurs, and corporate executives active in Silicon Valley and Berlin. My goal is to have these interactions lead to important collaborations that would simply not have occurred otherwise; the American Academy can become a key partner in this process. I strongly believe that doing so will both further the vision of its founders and cement the special role of the American Academy in Berlin for generations to come.

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**Pascal Levensohn, Founder, Levensohn Venture Partners**





Harry Liebersohn



Nina Bernstein

Photos: Brian Byllesby

## ALUMNI SEMINARS

Since the American Academy in Berlin's fellowship program began, in fall 1998, over 450 scholars, writers, artists, and composers have come to the Hans Arnhold Center for a semester of independent research and creative work—from academic monographs and essays to new novels, paintings, and compositions. We remain grateful for the continued support of our alumni, who spread the word about our fellowship program and help in our selection process,

serving as peer reviewers and referring colleagues and friends as potential fellows. It is because of our alumni that the American Academy's transatlantic network of scholars, writers, and artists has become ever stronger over the years.

In the spirit of this network, the American Academy in Berlin held the first in a new series of Alumni Seminars on April 5, 2018, at The New School for Social Research, in New York City. Chaired by spring 2017

fellows Harry Liebersohn and Virág Molnár, the seminar convened panelists drawn from Academy alumni and New School faculty—sociologists, historians, and political scientists—to discuss “New Populisms and Nationalisms: Transatlantic Perspectives.” In two panels, this distinguished group of scholars spoke to recent challenges to democratic norms in the United States and Western Europe—in Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands—in Eastern European countries such as Hungary and Poland, as well as in India, Turkey, and Russia.

The next alumni seminar will be held on November 15, 2018, at Stanford University. Spring 2016 Distinguished Visitor Francis Fukuyama will deliver a talk entitled “Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment,” moderated by former American Academy and Stanford president Gerhard Casper. Part two of the seminar will feature a panel discussion on “Culture and the Politics of Movement,” with alumni Josh Kun (spring 2018) and Daniel Joseph Martinez (fall 2016), historian of Latin America Ana Raquel Minian, and spring 2018 Distinguished Visitor Tricia Rose. □

## JOHN MCCAIN RECEIVES 2018 KISSINGER PRIZE

In late August, the American Academy mourned the passing of Senator John McCain, a friend of the Academy, who embodied the best of the transatlantic tradition. In this spirit, on May 3, McCain received the Academy's 2018 Henry A. Kissinger Prize, in a private ceremony in Washington, DC. The prize recognized McCain for his principled leadership throughout six decades of public service, his unwavering political courage, and his persistent ability to rally colleagues to bipartisan solutions.

On the world stage, McCain had long advocated a strong European Union, NATO, and transatlantic alliance.

The outpouring of heartfelt sentiment upon Senator McCain's passing further underscored the impact he had upon the positive image of America abroad—and accentuated the high-minded principles and values for which he stood. The Academy is proud to recognize McCain with its highest transatlantic honor, and to include him in the distinguished roster of previous Kissinger



John McCain at the American Academy, June 10, 2013.

Photo: Annette Hornischer

Prize recipients: Helmut Schmidt (2007); George H.W. Bush (2008); Richard von Weizsäcker (2009); Michael R. Bloomberg (2010); Helmut Kohl (2011); George P. Shultz (2012); Ewald-Heinrich

von Kleist (2013); James A. Baker, III (2014); Giorgio Napolitano and Hans-Dietrich Genscher (2015); Samantha Power (2016); and Wolfgang Schäuble (2017). □



## WELCOMING NEW TRUSTEES

At the fall 2017 and spring 2018 board meetings, the trustees of the American Academy in Berlin elected three new members: Anthony Vidler, Leah Joy Zell, and Klaus Biesenbach.

**ANTHONY VIDLER** is a historian and critic of modern and contemporary architecture, specializing in European architecture from the Enlightenment to the present. He has served four terms as chair of the Academy's Fellows Selection Committee, and, prior, two years as a peer reviewer.

Vidler was a member of the Princeton University School of Architecture faculty from 1965–93, during which time he served as the chair of the PhD committee and director of the program in European cultural studies. In 1990, he was appointed William R. Kenan Jr. Chair of Architecture. In 1993, Vidler moved to UCLA, where he was a professor and chair of the department of art history,

with a joint appointment, beginning in 1997, in the School of Architecture. In 2001, Vidler was appointed acting dean of the Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture at The Cooper Union, where he served as dean of from 2002 to 2013. The author of several acclaimed books of architecture, he has received awards from the Guggenheim Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, and is a fellow of the National Academy of Arts and Sciences. Vidler currently teaches in the fall at The Cooper Union and the spring at Yale University.

**LEAH JOY ZELL** is the founder of Lizard Investors, an asset management business based in Chicago, and lead portfolio manager of the Lizard International Fund, a limited partnership that invests in international small-cap equities. From 1992 to 2005,

she was a co-founding partner and portfolio manager at Wanger Asset Management, a global small-mid-cap equity specialist, serving as head of the international equities team, lead portfolio manager of the Acorn International Fund, and portfolio manager of the Wanger European Smaller Companies Fund.

A member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Aspen Strategy Group, Zell is also co-chair of the board of trustees of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, of which she was treasurer and on whose board she has served since 1998. She is also on the Global Advisory Council of Harvard University, from which she graduated, magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa, in 1971. In 1979, she received her PhD from Harvard in modern social and economic history. Previously, Zell served on the Harvard University Board of Overseers and the Board of Trustees of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

**KLAUS BIESENBACH** is the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles. Prior, he was director of MoMA PS1 and chief curator at-large at the Museum of Modern Art, in New York City. He is also the founding director of Kunst-Werke (KW) Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin (1990) and the Berlin Biennale (1996). In 2006, Biesenbach was named founding chief curator of MoMA's newly formed department of media, which in 2009 he broadened to the department of media and performance art. Biesenbach received International Association of Art Critics (AIICA) awards for the exhibitions "Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present" (2010), "Pipilotti Rist: Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)" (2008), and "Fassbinder: Berlin Alexanderplatz." He also received AICA awards for co-curating the exhibitions "Kenneth Anger, 100 Years" (version #2, ps1, 2009), and "Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective." In 2016, Biesenbach was awarded the *Bundesverdienstkreuz* from the Federal Republic of Germany. □



## THE ANDREW W. MELLON FELLOWSHIP IN THE HUMANITIES

The American Academy in Berlin has been awarded a grant of \$1.4 million from the New York-based Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This grant has established the Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship in the Humanities, which funds two residential fellows per academic year for an initial period of three years. The inaugural fellows for 2018-19 are Rosalind C. Morris, of Columbia University, and Ronald Radano, of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The projects of the Andrew W. Mellon Fellows in the Humanities will focus on key themes the American Academy has identified for transatlantic exploration: migration and integration, race in comparative perspective, and exile and return. To this end, the grant also covers a biannual workshop for scholars based in both the US and Germany, to be convened at the American Academy in Berlin by the Mellon Fellow at the conclusion of his or her fellowship.

Given current challenges to the transatlantic relationship, the Academy is especially honored by the Mellon's support of its fellowship program, which fosters intellectual exchange between the United States and Germany. Mellon's funding underscores a shared commitment to vigorous transatlantic scholarship and recognizes the American Academy in Berlin's ongoing contribution to American arts and letters.

Founded in 1969, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation endeavors to strengthen, promote, and, where necessary, defend the contributions of the humanities and the arts to human flourishing and to the well-being of diverse and democratic societies by supporting exemplary institutions of higher education and culture as they renew and provide access to an invaluable heritage of ambitious, path-breaking work. □

THE  
ANDREW W.  
**MELLON**  
FOUNDATION

## A HIGHER LOYALTY

On Tuesday, June 19, 2018, former director of the FBI James Comey joined *Die Zeit*'s investigative desk chief

Holger Stark in Berlin for a conversation about Comey's new book, *A Higher Loyalty: Truth, Lies, and Leadership* (MacMillan)—released in

German as *Großer als das Amt* (Droemer). Comey and Stark spoke for roughly two hours, and took questions from the audience.

Comey's book details his experiences from two decades in the highest levels of American government: from his positions as US attorney for the Southern District of New York and deputy US attorney general under President George W. Bush, to taking the helm of the FBI under President Obama, in 2013, where he oversaw investigations into both Hillary Clinton's email use at the State Department and allegations of ties between the Trump campaign and Russia—a position from which he was unexpectedly dismissed in 2017. *A Higher Loyalty* also offers a model of what comprises ethical leadership, and how that leadership drives sound decisions appropriate to mature democratic governance. "American institutions are stronger than one person," Comey said, noting that the Trump presidency was awakening a generation to the importance of democratic engagement.

The event was a cooperation among *Die Zeit*, Droemer Verlag, and the American Academy in Berlin. □



Photo: Phil Dera / DIE ZEIT

# PROFILES IN SCHOLARSHIP

## ANDREW W. MELLON FELLOWS IN THE HUMANITIES

**Rosalind C. Morris (Fall 2018)**  
*Professor of Anthropology,  
Columbia University*

Morris's project analyzes transformations in the social worlds of South African gold mining from 1994, when Apartheid ended, up until the present global migration crisis. Through collaborative filmmaking with undocumented migrants and itinerant miners, Morris has created a growing archive of subterranean life in the mines that can help forge more humane, informed responses to the rising nationalisms caused by migration.

**Ronald Radano (Spring 2019)**  
*Professor of African Cultural  
Studies and Music, University  
of Wisconsin-Madison*

Radano undertakes a close analysis of the colonial-era African recordings of the Phonogram Archive at Berlin's Ethnographic Museum, combining through roughly 2,500 phonographic cylinders of African performances produced in Africa and in Berlin prior to 1918. By critically observing these sources in the context of European-African colonial relations and against the background of Western ideas of race, Radano aims to rethink the history of black music as a transnational concept.

## ANNA-MARIA KELLEN FELLOWS

**Priscilla Layne (Fall 2018)**  
*Assistant Professor of German,  
University of North Carolina at  
Chapel Hill*

Layne is working on her second book, *Out of this World: Afro-German Afrofuturism*, under contract with Northwestern University Press, which focuses on Afro-German authors' use of Afrofuturist concepts in literature and theater. Layne argues that Afro-German artists have

increasingly engaged with Afrofuturism in order to critique Eurocentricism, uncover German racism, rewrite the past, and imagine a more positive future for black peoples.

**Jared Farmer (Spring 2019)**  
*Professor, Department of  
History, Stony Brook University*

In his project *The Latest Oldest Tree: Survival Stories for a Time of Extinction*, under contract with Basic Books, Farmer brings together the history of trees and the science of longevity to contemplate the ethics of longterm thinking in the Anthropocene. Climate change, he argues, requires caring far beyond the present moment. For all recorded history, trees have helped people think in such ways.

**AXEL SPRINGER FELLOWS**  
**Alexander Galloway (Fall 2018)**  
*Professor of Media, Culture,  
and Communication, New  
York University*

In his project "The Crystalline Medium: Computation and Its Consequences," Galloway looks at the history and culture of computation, broadening the historical focus to include lesser-known nineteenth- and twentieth-century media such as the curious multi-lens cameras of chronophotographer Albert Londe, the algorithms of mathematician Nils Aall Barricelli, and the table-top war game developed by filmmaker and philosopher Guy Debord.

**Peter Holquist (Spring 2019)**  
*Ronald S. Lauder Endowed  
Term Associate Professor  
of History, University of  
Pennsylvania*

Holquist explores the emergence and consolidation of the international law of war in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, focusing on the key role played by Imperial Russia. His project traces how international law emerged there

as a discipline, and measures the extent to which its normative principles shaped actual policy, based on three case studies: Bulgaria and Anatolia (1877-78); the Boxer Rebellion in Manchuria (1900-01); and Galicia and Armenia during World War I.

## BERTHOLD LEIBINGER FELLOW

**Jennifer Allen (Spring 2019)**  
*Assistant Professor, Department  
of History, Yale University*

Allen is examining the range of possible global catastrophes that captivated imaginations in both East and West Germany during and after the Cold War. She then explores the different approaches each country took to hedge against these disasters by archiving materials and data. By tracing the evolution and gradual cross-pollination of these two projects, Allen sheds light on the question of how contemporary Germany aimed to salvage humanity after global destruction.

## BOSCH FELLOWS IN PUBLIC POLICY

**Joshua Yaffa (Fall 2018)**  
*Moscow Correspondent, The  
New Yorker*

Many think of today's Russia as a country held captive by Vladimir Putin, but Yaffa argues that the authoritarian system Putin controls is, in fact, made possible by the business and political compromises Russian citizens actually make. His book about Russia in the Putin age, featuring a range of Russian voices, is under contract with Tim Duggan Books.

**Herman Mark Schwartz (Spring 2019)**  
*Professor, Department of  
Politics, University of Virginia*  
Schwartz is looking at the economic reasons behind increased ethno-nationalist, anti-immigrant, anti-system

parties in wealthy OECD countries. He argues that increased inequality and decreased job opportunity are predicated on new strategies of corporate profiteering: purchasing intellectual property rights (IPRs) and splitting production chains into subfirms. Schwartz's analysis aims to inform policy solutions for better, faster, fairer growth.

**Perna Singh (Spring 2019)**  
*Mahatma Gandhi Associate  
Professor of Political Science  
and International Public  
Affairs, Brown University*  
Singh is working on a book that explores why polities with similar epidemiological, socioeconomic, and demographic conditions have been characterized by different levels of effectiveness in countering equivalently severe challenges posed by disease. She argues that health interventions are more likely to elicit popular support if they are as aligned with prevailing cultural etiologies, rituals, and treatments; embedded in appeals such as nationalism; and communicated to local populations by authoritative institutions.

## DAIMLER FELLOW

**Emily Apter (Spring 2019)**  
*Silver Professor of French and  
Comparative Literature, New  
York University*  
Apter's project is both a political theory of translation and an investigation into what a "just" translation is. She seeks to define "translational injustice" by exploring contemporary cases with political resonance: the problematic translation of "unsafe spaces," gender violence across languages in the communication of the 2015 New Year's Eve sexual assault case in Cologne, the untranslatability of "refugee" and "migrant," and the political philology of the word "settlement."



**DIRK IPPEN FELLOW****Tung-Hui Hu (Fall 2018)**

Associate Professor of English, University of Michigan  
Hu's Academy project, "Lethargy and the Art of Being Unfit," investigates the ambivalence of being caught inside digital systems of surveillance and algorithmic control. He terms this feeling "lethargy," which captures both the user's disengagement from digital systems and the sense that one can never entirely disconnect. Hu considers digital artworks labeled by some critics as passive, boring, or apolitical, in the context of recent developments in media theory and history.

**ELLEN MARIA GORRISSEN FELLOWS****Gyula Gazdag (Fall 2018)**

Director of Film, Theater and Television; and Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus, University of California, Los Angeles  
Gazdag is continuing the work on his screenplay "Tourist Trip to Hell," which features a party of young men and women who go on a journey to Verdun and the Somme in 1921. After their car gets stuck, they spend the night on the battlefield, and soldiers of the German, French, and British empires rise from the dead. In the morning, the tourists return to their hotel—yet none of them remember the previous night's journey.

**Lucy Raven (Spring 2019)**

Artist, New York, NY  
Raven's multidisciplinary practice focuses on images of work and image production. Using animation, the moving image, still photography, installation, sound, and performative lecture, she encourages the viewer to "slow down the process of looking," and interrogates global industrial systems and technologies.

**HOLTZBRINCK FELLOWS****P. Carl (Fall 2018)**

Writer; and Distinguished Artist-in-Residence, Emerson College  
P. Carl became a white man in 2017, after living half a century as a woman, twenty

years of which as an artist and essayist in theater. In Berlin, Carl is working on his book project, *Becoming a White Man*, under contract with Simon & Schuster, which explores what it means to become a "good man" in an America where art and politics are dominated by white masculinity.

**Paul La Farge (Spring 2019)**

Writer, Red Hook, NY  
La Farge is writing "Way Out," a collection of short stories linked by themes of confinement and escape. The book also looks at Carl Hagenbeck's invention of the modern zoo—the likely impetus behind Kafka's story "A Report to an Academy," which inspired La Farge's own musings for this collection.

**INGA MAREN OTTO FELLOW IN MUSIC COMPOSITION****Wang Lu (Spring 2019)**

Composer and Pianist; Assistant Professor of Music, Brown University  
Wang is working on a multi-movement composition inspired by the replicas of iconic European landmarks—the Eiffel Tower, French boulevards, Venetian canals, Dutch windmills—that have been erected in the suburbs of large Chinese cities. The piece reflects the sonic simula-lacra of Europe and East Asia by fusing sounds of Venetian gondola songs and Korean pop, Shanghai nightclub music and alphorns, Parisian soundscapes and local Chinese opera.

**JOHN P. BIRKELUND****FELLOWS IN THE HUMANITIES****Haun Saussy (Fall 2018)**

University Professor, Comparative Literature, Committee on Social Thought, and East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago  
Saussy's book project, "The Nine Relays: Laying the Ground for a Comparative History of East Asian Literatures," focuses on the overlapping literary worlds of East Asia before 1800. It will serve as a single-author prologue to a multi-author,

multi-volume study of historical relationships among pre-modern East Asia's languages, literatures, and cultures.

**Martin Puchner (Spring 2019)**

Byron and Anita Wien Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Harvard University  
Puchner is writing a history of Rotwelsch, a thieves' argot spoken in Central Europe from the late Middle Ages to the early twentieth century. Admired by Franz Kafka as an extreme version of Yiddish, Rotwelsch persisted underground for five hundred years, at the intersection of vagrancy and the state. Puchner's project is personal: his uncle bequeathed to him an archive of literary works he was translating into Rotwelsch, and his grandfather was a Nazi historian railing against the "subversive" dialect.

**MARY ELLEN VON DER HEYDEN FELLOWS IN FICTION****Yaa Gyasi (Fall 2018)**

Writer, Brooklyn, NY  
Gyasi is working on her second novel, in which she explores the psychic costs of immigration on a Ghanaian-American family. In the book, she also delves into the social stigmas surrounding addiction and mental health among Ghanaians and Americans.

**Jesse Ball (Spring 2019)**

Writer; and Professor, Creative Writing Program, School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
Ball is continuing work on his next novel, "The Children VI," about a world in which all people older than twelve have died, which is set right after this mass death has occurred. The narrative follows the actions of a boy and his blind sister as they travel through a city trying to find their way to safety.

**NINA MARIA GORRISSEN FELLOWS IN HISTORY****Carina L. Johnson (Fall 2018)**

Professor of History, Pitzer College  
Johnson is working on a book entitled "Homefront Experiences of the Habsburg-Ottoman Wars, 1470-1620:

Engaging the Hereditary Enemy." Through the histories of soldiers, refugees, and homefront communities, she explores the complex social and cultural consequences of the Holy Roman Empire's long conflict with the Ottoman Empire.

**Fred M. Donner (Spring 2019)**

Peter B. Ritzma Professor of Near Eastern History, The Oriental Institute and Department for Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago  
Donner is working with seventh-century CE papyri in the collection of the National Museums in Berlin, and early-Arabic papyrus fragments from the Austrian National Library. His findings will contribute to a more vivid historical reconstruction of the earliest origins of Islam.

**RICHARD C. HOLBROOKE FELLOW****George T. Frampton (Spring 2019)**

Co-Founder and CEO, Partnership for Responsible Growth

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Fall 2018 Distinguished Visitors and Guest Lecturers

**AIRBUS DISTINGUISHED VISITOR****Elizabeth Kolbert**

Journalist and Author; Staff Writer, The New Yorker

**JOHN W. KLUGE DISTINGUISHED VISITOR****Masha Gessen**

Author; and Staff Writer, The New Yorker

**LLOYD CUTLER DISTINGUISHED VISITOR****Roberta Cooper Ramo**

Attorney; and Former President, American Law Institute and American Bar Association

**MARINA KELLEN FRENCH DISTINGUISHED VISITOR****Ai Weiwei**

Artist

**RICHARD VON WEIZSÄCKER DISTINGUISHED VISITOR****Frances FitzGerald**

Journalist and Historian

## BOOK REVIEWS



## BERLIN ALEXANDERPLATZ BY ALFRED DÖBLIN

Translated by Michael Hofmann  
New York Review Books  
March 2018, 458 pages

A review by John Rockwell

For nearly a century, Berlin during the Weimar Republic has exerted an irresistible fascination. An aura of mordant decadence and grim poverty illuminated by creative brilliance epitomized the brief life of the first German republic, especially between 1927 and 1931, after postwar inflation had eased and before economic decline and political violence foreshadowed Adolf Hitler.

*The Threepenny Opera* is the best-known artistic product of that time and place, along with Christopher Isherwood's stories and their offshoot, the musical *Cabaret*. But there was so much more: the art of Otto Dix and George Grosz; the literature, above all Bertolt Brecht's poems and plays and

other collaborations with Kurt Weill; the films, most emerging from the famed UFA studio in Babelsberg (the directors Ernst Lubitsch, Fritz Lang, and G. W. Pabst; actors like Louise Brooks and Peter Lorre); theater and music (Max Reinhardt, Otto Klemperer, Bruno Walter, Wilhelm Furtwängler, and Arnold Schönberg)—all immortalized in Harry Kessler's memoir *Berlin in Lights*. And now we have the ongoing German television series *Babylon Berlin*, which offers an extraordinarily accurate recreation of the city in 1929, built around a detective story set amid rising political turmoil, frank sex, and creepy glamour.

Less well-known today but quintessentially exemplifying this efflorescence was Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), which has led a troubled afterlife, at least among Anglophones. It was translated into English in 1931 by Eugene Jolas, a friend of James Joyce. But it wasn't exactly English: Jolas proudly proclaimed it as American, and his use of American slang led to its disparagement by many British critics. Their disdain spread to the book itself, its reputation further damaged by Nazi hostility. Döblin's book languished in relative obscurity until 1980, with the telecast of Rainer Maria Fassbinder's 15-hour, 14-part series. Now Döblin's epic novel has, at last, appeared in a new English translation, by Michael Hofmann, courtesy in the United States of New York Review Books. Its pervasive Cockney slang may prove problematic for some American readers, but its attendant publicity may kindle new attention to Döblin's book itself.

To his lifelong frustration, Döblin (1878-1957) was the archetypal one-hit wonder. But what a hit! Instead of Berlin's romanticized glitter, Döblin gave us the wormy undersurface—not bitterly witty, like Brecht and Weill,

but brutal and implacable. Yet this dark tale sold in the millions, was translated into myriad languages, and made into a radio show and film before the Nazis came along.

Subtitled in German as "The Story of Franz Biberkopf," it chronicles the misadventures of the hapless yet strangely sympathetic hero (Biberkopf means "beaverhead"), from his release from prison after killing his wife to his rape of her sister to odd jobs to petty crime to his further relations with women, most of whom he pimps out, to the murder by an evil "friend" of his one true love to the final dregs of his empty life.

It could be depressing—it should be depressing—but there is so much more. Fassbinder, constrained by budget, the smaller television screens of thirty years ago, and technical limitations (no CGI), concentrated on the characters and shot them mostly in interiors. He had wonderful actors, with Günter Lamprecht as Franz and Barbara Sukova as the murdered girl and the too-glamorous but extraordinary Hanna Schygulla as his friend and sometime lover Eva. But *Babylon Berlin* and Döblin go beyond character to give us the complexity and chaos of the city itself.

No space here to chronicle all the early twentieth-century efforts to come to terms with the modern city, German and otherwise. From Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* to the Lettrists' *dérives* (walking about a city like a philosophical flâneur) to the social realist novels of Theodore Dreiser and John dos Passos to James Joyce's *Dublin* and Joseph Conrad's *London*, writers struggled to reconcile the individual with the metropolitan mass. In the films of Weimar Berlin, there were Walther Ruttmann's extraordinary documentary *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* and Lang's *Metropolis*, both released in 1927.



Döblin is an honored member of that fraternity, with his precisely rendered descriptions of people and places and ample Berlin dialect. Döblin worked as a doctor in poor Berlin neighborhoods, and knew the milieu cold. Joyce was more a parallel than a direct inspiration. Döblin's book has so much detail, more than Fassbinder could hope to capture, despite his evident devotion to its source.

Alexanderplatz is a large square in the heart of Berlin, lovingly depicted in *Babylon Berlin*. After the war, in which bombs crushed it and everything around it, the square sat forlornly in East Berlin, but since the fall of the Wall it has been reborn as a vibrant crossroads. Individuals can get lost in the crowd. The story of Franz Biberkopf is not just of one man's failure; it's of him being crushed by fate, urban and supernatural.

The text is constantly intercut with apocalyptic Biblical quotations ("On her forehead her name is written, a name of mystery, great Babylon, the mother of harlots and of earth's abominations"). But also with citations from classic Greek tragedies, weather reports, set pieces about breadmaking and a slaughterhouse, physics, psychiatry, storms straight out of *King Lear*, ubiquitous construction (a reader today thinks how in just a few years it will be rubble), mass transportation, politics, military and cabaret songs. Döblin collected clippings about all manner of phenomena and bundled them into this book. Franz has his own *dérives*: he walks constantly, compulsively, making a litany of street names, summoning the concrete reality of the city. Social realism meets stream of consciousness, to their mutual enrichment. Döblin's collages recall the technical whaling descriptions in *Moby-Dick*, and his Biblical visions the religious annunciations in *Angels in America*.

Some early readers objected to the interpolations, especially those citations from the Bible—Hofmann says he was at first put off, too—but now they seem all of a piece, enriching Döblin's vision. The story of Franz Biberkopf the man, on which

Fassbinder focuses, is really the story of his city, set against a cosmic context. Fassbinder tried to evoke that context with his retention of the two angels who accompany Franz in his later days, along with a Hollywood-style Crucifixion scene starring the principal characters. Likewise with Döblin's oscillations of tenses and sudden switches from first to third person. Fassbinder hints at some of that in his own (uncredited) voiceovers and silent film titles, but the omnipresence of an omniscient narrative description is the heart of the novel.

Döblin was Jewish, and, at the beginning, just out of jail, Franz is comforted by two Orthodox Jews, portrayed as comic but kind. After that, anti-Semitism and Nazism (a minor electoral force in Berlin in the late 1920s) disappear, and even in most of Fassbinder and *Babylon Berlin*, blessed with hindsight, they play a minor role. In Döblin, one of Franz's odd jobs is hawking the Nazi newspaper,

**The story  
of Franz Biberkopf  
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supernatural.**

the *Völkischer Beobachter*, but he's no Nazi, and nothing much is made of it. At one point, he falls in with some communists, but really he is indifferent to politics.

Throughout, Döblin is fiercer and more intense than Fassbinder, in his physical descriptions and cosmic interjections, mixing voices and points of view symphonically. In the film the murdered girl lies in the woods almost picturesquely. Here is Döblin, in the new translation: "Violence, violence is a reaper, by Almighty God employed. Let me go. She wriggles and tries to get

up and lashes out behind her. We'll see you there, the dogs will come and eat what's left of you. [. . .] It's pitch-black. Her face is pulp, her teeth are pulp, her eyes are pulp, her mouth, her lips, her tongue, her throat, her trunk, her legs, her crotch, I'm yours. [. . .]"

Everything after the murder could be anti-climactic, and Döblin still has a hundred pages to go. Yet as a decompression chamber, it works. Franz moves in a fog, dazed. He spends time in a madhouse, tortured by proto-Nazi doctors, visited by hallucinations of those he has loved and wronged. The murderer is finally given a mild sentence, and Franz slips back into the anonymity that defines the great city.

The other emblematic scene in the book is Döblin's depiction of a slaughterhouse. The men work indifferently and clinically, torturing beasts to feed bestial man. For Döblin, men truly are beasts, except that male beasts don't mistreat their females with such brutal indifference. When they finish killing the day's quota of helpless animals, the slaughterhouse crew become animals themselves: "They come mooing and bleating down the ramps. The pigs grunt and snuffle. You're walking in a fog. A pale young man picks up the axe, thwack, the blink of an eye, and lights out. At nine, they freed up their elbows, stuffed cigarettes in their fat mouths, and started belching out fatty restaurant smoke."

In 2008, Ian Buruma wrote an essay in the *New York Review of Books* about Döblin's novel and the DVD release of Fassbinder's film. In his first sentence, he called the novel's pervasive Berlin dialect "pretty much untranslatable." He ended his essay, dismissive of Jolas, by dreaming that "it is high time for the book to find a new translator brilliant and inventive enough to do justice to the text in English." Now Buruma is editor of the *New York Review*, which, in partnership with Penguin Books in London, commissioned Michael Hofmann to translate the novel anew.

German-born and English-based, Hofmann might have seemed brilliant and inventive

enough to do the book justice. In many ways, he has done so. But just as British critics rejected Jolas's American slang, some Americans, like me, find Hofmann's reliance on Cockney to be intrusive, as foreign as the original German. Neither Jolas nor Hofmann had much choice: one can't translate slang mid-Atlantically. Fassbinder went light on the dialect, too, and he didn't even have to deal with translation into a world language with a wide range of dialects like English.

For the most part, Hofmann's prose reads perfectly fine in slang-free passages. His Cockney seems accurate, if English reviewers are to be believed, and he supplements the novel with footnotes and an informative afterward. But apart from occasional awkwardnesses and the inevitable use of English spelling (labour, tyre), the pervasiveness of words and phrases like "pouring beer down their necks" "commer-sants," "if your luck's in you'll earn a few coppers," "old Zannovich had to leg it," "the knacker," "summer duster," and "smuggins," just to adduce a few examples from the first pages, seriously impedes an American's appreciation of Döblin's achievement.

So what to do? For economic reasons, New York Review Books had to use Penguin's template. But at what cost to readability? Maybe *Berlin Alexanderplatz* really is untranslatable into English. For American readers, I would still recommend the Jolas. Why let annoying Anglicisms get in the way of a great modernist masterpiece, the toughest, truest literary achievement of Weimar Berlin? □



**OPEN ARCHITECTURE:  
MIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP  
AND THE URBAN  
RENEWAL OF BERLIN-  
KREUZBERG BY IBA  
1984/87  
BY ESRA AKCAN**

Birkhäuser,  
April 2018, 405 pages

A review by Christina Schwenkel

There is no shortage of visual representations of Kreuzberg in the 1980s. Images of squats, punks, and protests dominate the popular imagination of West Berlin as center of radical politics during the Cold War. Neither are books on Berlin's architectural heritage and experimental design in short supply. Esra Akcan's extraordinary study brings a new and much-needed intervention into these all too familiar discourses through her astute analysis of the fraught relationship between architecture and noncitizens.

Kreuzberg, she reminds readers, was a poor, working-class, immigrant neighborhood, which tends to be forgotten in nostalgic recollections of its German countercultures. This point demands that whole new conversations take place about racialized rights to the city. In placing migrants at the center of Kreuzberg's postwar history and its debates over social housing,

Akcan asks: How can one bring a new and genuine "ethics of hospitality" into a participation-based, urban design process to produce a more just city for all inhabitants, noncitizens and citizens alike?

To answer to this question, Akcan turns to the International Building Exhibition (IBA) experiments in "open architecture" and the construction of public housing in Kreuzberg between 1984 and 1987. Combining rich oral histories with archival research and architectural design analysis, Akcan documents the dynamic social lives of buildings through the conflicting viewpoints of designers and inhabitants, who also serve as resident-architects, she argues. Through their voices, we learn of migrants' struggle for adequate housing and the incongruities between utopian designs and the built environment, between architectural visions and occupants' aspirations. These represent the lost opportunities of open architecture, though not for a lack of trying. Through beautiful, color photographs of Kreuzberg as technical plan and as lived space, from urban murals and local commerce to the intimate spheres of the family, we see a celebration not of the static built form—the centerpiece of architectural histories—but its reinvention. The pride expressed in the voices of female migrants and refugees as they discuss their pursuit of, and improvements made to, their housing while encountering stifling racism, makes clear their unequivocal claims to non-open spaces in the city.

*Open Architecture* is a tremendous accomplishment that invites the reader to act as a kind of postcolonial flâneur, a non-gendered figure who strolls Kreuzberg's streets, peering—at times voyeuristically—into the open doors, hallways, courtyards, and stairwells of its trademark buildings and the intimate places that inhabitants call home. This flâneur is not Baudelaire's wanderer of spectacular arcades of nineteenth-century Paris, but an observer of subsidized public housing in twentieth-century Berlin. She or he is not enthralled by the material world of commodities like



Benjamin's flâneur, but confronted with the very people whose labor made such consumption, and Germany's economic "miracle," possible: the so-called *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers, a significant number of whom were Turkish and live in Kreuzberg. They are the same people, we learn, responsible for rebuilding Kreuzberg: "We did the renewal," a Turkish woman in Akcan's study asserts. It is a cruel irony that the hard and selfless work that noncitizens invested (and higher rents they paid) into transforming this once-crumbling borough into a desirable, vibrant neighborhood now puts it at risk of gentrification, threatening to displace those very residents from their homes.

These invited workers were not treated kindly by their hosts. Akcan shows how institutionalized racism compounded everyday discrimination in housing practices at all levels: from landlords refusing to rent to migrants (adding this outrageous clause to public ads), to media warnings of an emerging "Turkish ghetto" beset by crime, to senate regulations that restricted the settlement of noncitizens in Kreuzberg.

Out of this racialized history emerged the International Building Exhibition (IBA) to promote urban renewal in West Berlin, including six sites in Kreuzberg. Two dominant strategies guided this multiyear project that involved a surprising number of eminent and rising architects (some turned starchitects, like Rem Koolhaas) and their teams: construction of new buildings (*Neubau*) in West Kreuzberg and restoration of old buildings (*Altbau*) in East Kreuzberg. These strategies, embroiled in debates about form and function, and modernism and postmodernism, reflected divergent perspectives on the role of Berlin's architectural inheritance in future urban design. For example, *Neubau* insisted on continuity in form, while *Altbau* embraced gaps and permeability. The former argued for an autonomous architecture free from non-expert influence, and the latter advocated adaptable, democratic architecture with the involvement of noncitizen users.

As Akcan shows, these approaches translated into distinctive, if not contradictory, ideas about open architecture. Members of IBA *Neubau* "disparaged participation," while IBA *Altbau* took participatory urbanism as its central mission. There were clear limits to this ideal, however, despite its radical potential to which people felt committed. The refusal to build a mosque, for instance—which fell outside IBA's plan for restoring decayed dwellings—exposed the cynical relations that underpinned the practice of critical participation, which dictated when noncitizens could speak, and when they would be heard. Even the most noteworthy attempts at inclusion of inhabitants' voices and interests were tinged with racialized anxieties. In the end, Akcan concludes, IBA failed to adequately address immigrants' needs or safeguard their rights to the city in ways that proved meaningful and enduring.

**Six different strolls through Kreuzberg and its environs frame the book, punctuated by seven longer stops at IBA buildings that encourage the reader to linger in space.**

The book is structured around these *Neubau* and *Altbau* projects and their iterations of open architecture. Part One introduces open architecture as collectivity (or multi-authorship) guided by the notion of "critical reconstruction" of the historical city. In Part Two, we see a more politicized engagement with open architecture as democracy (or user-centric), one that advocated for "gentle urban renewal" in harmony with the urban fabric. The last section on open architecture as multiplicity reconciles a Hegelian theory of historical actuality with an imaginative history of possibility through an analysis of unbuilt projects; that is, those experimental

entries not selected by competition juries.

This book is not intended to be read from cover to cover. On the contrary, it invites the postmodern flâneur to wander through, if not skip around, its pages. Six different strolls through Kreuzberg and its environs frame the book, punctuated by seven longer stops at IBA buildings that encourage the reader to linger in space and dwell on the words, descriptions, and images. As such, the book will appeal to a wide readership in and beyond academia, which is itself a major accomplishment. There is something for everyone here: the architect, the anthropologist, and the urban explorer. Architectural historians will appreciate the scrupulous examination of architectural forms at each stop in the book, buildings that have become emblems of the city, and in some cases, tourist attractions. They will revel in the detailed life histories and philosophies of the designers (all men, with a rare exception, such as Zaha Hadid). Anthropologists will welcome the humanistic portraits of the urban actors—mostly first generation female migrants—who appropriated built forms to create entirely new social, spatial, and material worlds on their own terms. And urban explorers, like myself, who enjoy venturing behind the facades of Berlin's endlessly fascinating buildings will be inspired to stop, look up, and look over the walls more closely. One can detach the comprehensive map of the stops and strolls at the back of the book and hit the streets, or navigate the built world with Google street-view (I did both, and was surprised by how many of my favorite buildings had been IBA projects!)

*Open Architecture* is much more than a city tour or a history of buildings and their visionaries. It is a somber reminder of the human stakes involved in a participatory urbanism that privileges rights-bearing citizens. Akcan's call for an attention in urban planning to migrants, exiles, refugees, and other stateless persons who lack the legal and social protections of citizenship could not be more prescient at this moment. □

## ALUMNI BOOKS

**Esra Akcan**

*Open Architecture: Migration, Citizenship and the Urban Renewal of Berlin-Kreuzberg*  
by IBA 1984/87  
Birkenhäuser, April 2018

**Sinan Antoon**

*The Baghdad Eucharist*  
The American University  
in Cairo Press, April 2017

**Mary Cappello, James**

**Morrison, Jean Walton**  
*Buffalo Trace: A Threefold*  
*Vibration*  
Spuyten Duyvil,  
September 2018

**W. S. Di Piero**

*Mickey Rourke and the*  
*Bluebird of Happiness:*  
*A Poet's Notebook*  
Carnegie Mellon,  
October 2017

**Laura Engelstein**

*Russia in Flames: War,*  
*Revolution, Civil War,*  
*1914-1921*  
Oxford University Press,  
September 2017

**Nathan Englander**

*Dinner at the Center of*  
*the Earth: A Novel*  
Knopf, September 2017

**Jeffrey Eugenides**

*Fresh Complaint: Stories*  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux,  
October 2017

**Myra Marx Ferree, (German**

**translation by Claudia**  
**Buchholtz, Bettina Seifried)**  
*Feminismen. Die deutsche*  
*Frauenbewegung in globaler*  
*Perspektive*  
Campus, March 2018

**Hristos Doucouliagos, Richard**

**B. Freeman, Patrice Laroche**  
*The Economics of Trade*  
*Unions: A Study of a Research*  
*Field and its Findings*  
Routledge, March 2017

**Avery F. Gordon**

*Letters from the Utopian*  
*Margins. The Hawthorn*  
*Archive*  
Fordham University Press,  
October 2017

**Matthias Middell, Michel**

**Espange, Michael Guyer**  
*European History in*  
*an Interconnected World:*  
*An Introduction to*  
*Transnational History*  
Palgrave Macmillan,  
July 2017

**Jane Kramer**

*The Reporter's Kitchen:*  
*Essays*  
St. Martin's Press,  
November 2017

**Nicole Krauss**

*Forest Dark*  
Harper, September 2017

**Vladimir Kulic**

*Toward a Concrete Utopia:*  
*Architecture in Yugoslavia,*  
*1948-1980*  
The Museum of Modern Art,  
New York, July 2018

**Corien Prins, Collette**

**Cuijpers, Peter L. Lindseth**  
**and Monica Rosina (Eds.)**  
*Digital Democracy in*  
*a Globalized World*  
Edward Elgar, September  
2017

**John Mauceri**

*Maestros and Their Music:*  
*The Art and Alchemy of*  
*Conducting*  
Knopf, November 2017

**Michael Meltsner**

*With Passion. An Activist*  
*Lawyer's Life*  
Twelve Tables Press,  
October 2017

**David Scheffer**

*The Sit Room. In the Theater*  
*of War and Peace*  
Oxford University Press,  
November 2018

**Barbara Schmitter Heisler**

*An Artist as Soldier. Seeking*  
*Refuge in Love and Art*  
Peter Lang, August 2017

**Tom Sleigh**

*The Land Between Two*  
*Rivers: Writing in an Age of*  
*Refugees*  
Graywolf Press,  
February 2018

**Michael P. Steinberg**

*The Trouble with Wagner*  
The University of Chicago  
Press, November 2018

**Margarita Tupitsyn**

*Moscow Vanguard Art:*  
*1922-1992*  
Yale University Press,  
August 2017

**Dana Villa**

*Teachers of the People:*  
*Political Education in*  
*Rousseau, Hegel, Tocqueville,*  
*and Mill*  
University of Chicago Press,  
September 2017

**Leland de la Durantaye**

*Hannah Versus the Tree*  
McSweeney's, November 2018

Spring 2012 Holtzbrinck fellow Leland de la Durantaye's debut novel, *Hannah Versus the Tree*, published by McSweeney's in November 2018, is about the fiercely intelligent daughter of a powerful family's black sheep son. Hannah has been raised to question who was, is, and will be damaged by business deals meant to protect and maintain the family dynasty. A devastating wrong is done to her when she opposes a family scheme; her response is a battle cry of astounding violence and beauty. *Hannah versus the Tree* has been heralded as a new literary genre: the mythopoetic thriller. Critic and fall 2010 Academy alumnus James Wood writes that Durantaye's novel "is unlike anything I have ever read—thriller, myth, dream, and poem combined. [. . .] Sometimes I thought I was reading the Chorus's part from a lost Greek tragedy, or perhaps an impossibly updated *Beowulf*. Written in an immaculate, lyrically charged, uncannily autonomous prose, this lovely novel is at once a modern story about money and politics and sexual violence, and an ancient fable of grievance and justice."



# SUPPORTERS AND DONORS

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Richard C. Holbrooke Berlin Prize  
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Airbus Distinguished Visitorship  
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Lloyd Cutler Distinguished Visitorship  
Marina Kellen French Distinguished Visitorship for Persons with Outstanding Accomplishment in the Cultural World  
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The American Academy in Berlin's fellowship program is made possible in part by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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