Nachrichten aus der Forschung

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»›War, Violence, and Visual Culture‹, Panels sponsored by the interdisciplinary Network ›War and Violence‹«

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At the 41st German Studies Association (GSA) conference in Atlanta, Georgia the interdisciplinary Network, »War and Violence« (Krieg und Gewalt) sponsored three panels on the theme »War, Violence, and Visual Culture,« organized by the three outgoing coordinators of the Network: *Jörg Echternkamp* (Potsdam), *Stephan Jaeger* (Manitoba, Winnipeg) and *Susanne Vees-Gulani* (Cleveland, Ohio). Literary scholars, cultural, military and architectural historians presented eight original papers on three panels that explored different facets of visual representations of war and violence. The organizers developed the panels to explore ways in which visual culture presented and transmitted war and war-related violence through many different visual forms in battle paintings, popular culture, architecture, photography and film. The papers succeeded in fulfilling this goal and provided interesting analyses of war and visual culture from the Napoleonic Wars to the conflicts of the twentieth century to contemporary drone warfare.

The first panel session, »Marketing Patriotic Products and War Goods across State and Enemy Lines?« included papers by *Katherine Aaslestad* (Morgantown, West Virgina) and *Claire Zimmerman* (Ann Arbor, Michigan) whose presentation shared a common exploration of under-explored manifestations of violence in popular culture and wartime architecture.

Aaslestad's paper »Visual Representations of the Napoleonic Wars in the German Confederation« analyzed caricatures, drawings, watercolors, prints, and votive paintings produced by trained and untrained artists during and immediately after the Napoleonic wars. Unlike most studies that feature battle paintings

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and present war culture as glorifying or romanticizing the war, Aaslestad's examples depicted the brutality and suffering of the wars.

She presented the work of chroniclers of military campaigns and the urban experience of war who shared the violence, brutality, suffering, and deprivation of war in their works. Images of naked corpses, rotting horses, burning towns, and votive panels for the dead were certainly not heroic and preclude a single interpretative narrative of war. Aaslestad argued that this imagery, a vast visual culture comprising high, commercial, and popular art, permeated life for decades after combat ceased. Furthermore, depictions of the brutality and suffering of war, like their heroic counterparts in battle paintings, multiplied in commerce as reproduction contributed to their widespread dissemination. Military artists turned campaign sketches into widely circulating and reissued prints, illustrated books, and battle paintings into the 1840s. Urban chroniclers multiplied the economic hardships of the wars in folio and distributed them across central Europe. Votive painters continued to turn out panels that functioned as ritualistic reminders of the wars' immense cost to small towns in human life and property into the 1830s.

Zimmerman, an architectural historian, presented on the industrial architecture of war in her paper »Building to meet any contingency: Mobile Architecture in the World Wars«. Instead of the architecture of Albert Speer or wartime bunkers associated with war architecture, Zimmerman introduced the unseen yet publically built environment dedicated to violence that would include factories that produced the material of war: tanks, planes, boats, trucks, armaments, and munitions. Her paper is part of a larger project that examines the impact of wartime capitalism and architectural firms, in particular the firm of accomplished industrial architect Albert Kahn from Detroit, who erected hundreds of factories across the United States and the Soviet Union from World War I to World War II. For this talk she was specifically interested in examples of mobile prefabricated buildings that had two immediate applications: colonial expansion and the conduct of war. Prefabricated mobile buildings could include barracks, field hospitals, and military storages, any structure that fit the needs of required wartime speed and flexibility, or in the words of Zimmerman, buildings that »functioned like other temporally limited munitions«. By building to meet any wartime contingency, the structures themselves supported the conduct of industrial warfare.

Kathrin Maurer (Odense, Dänemark) commented on this session and asked questions of both presenters on the visual nature of their subjects. She queried Aaslestad on the diverse genre and functions of images of Napoleonic warfare and their contribution to the spectacle of war and the imagining of war after 1815. Maurer turned to Zimmerman with questions about the direct and indirect nature

of war architecture showing the violence of war. How do we differentiate between the prefabricated mobile buildings that housed military supplies and the barracks at Bergen Belsen? She also raised a question for both papers on the process of analyzing and revealing war narratives in these diverse representations and manifestations of wartime violence. Finally, the commentator and presenters also addressed the topic of the visibility of the images and buildings discussed in the panel and the degree to which images or structures can present a selective understanding of war through the process of a conspicuous overlooking of their full or true nature.

The second panel, »Visual Perspectives of World War I«, included papers by *John Maker* (Waterloo, Ontario), *Andreas Immanuel Graae* (Odense, Dänemark), and *Sylvia Kesper-Biermann* (Hamburg). If a common war united the papers, the approaches and visual material varied considerably. Maker's paper, »Eyes in the Sky: The Growth of Aerial Reconnaissance and Photography in the First World War«, emphasized how aerial observations in drawings and photographs represented a new level of battlefield surveillance that generated war tools and technologies for war. Whereas popular memory has mostly discussed the war in the air in the First World War through the stories of famous fighter pilots, Maker traced the trajectory of air observation from air balloons to dirigibles to air squadrons as observers recorded roads, forests, towns, battery positions and troop movements. By 1918 thousands of photos and a corps of skilled technicians who read them, revealed fake and camouflaged batteries, crucial for military intelligence. He also addressed the increased violence generated by and directed against surveillance crews as the enemy sought to put out the eyes of their opponents with deadly anti-aircraft artillery and air dog-fights, escalating the war in the air and illustrating that aerial surveillance became a deadly weapon of war.

Graae's paper, »Seeing like a Drone: Unmanned Gazing in Ernst Jünger's ›In Stahlgewittern‹ and ›Gläserne Bienen‹«, reinforced Maker's key theme of the aerial photographs as a weapon through analysis of Ernst Jünger's literary works. In Jünger's wartime novel, In Stahlgewittern, Graae emphasized the relationship that Jünger drew between insects and machinery during the war. Jünger described his early encounter with ariel reconnaissance, as feeling like an insect observed by an artificial eye, like an insect's eye, that stripped the human body of sensitivity or humanity. Likewise, in his later work Gläserne Bienen, Jünger presented swarming insect machines, micro robots and the persistence of surveillance and highlighted the experience of being de-humanized by the drone gaze. Graae discussed Jünger's works as influenced by the trauma of wartime machine culture, in particular the mechanized battlefield of the Great War and asserted his works illustrated that a reconfiguration in warfare in which human vision is replaced with a machine like drone gaze. Maker's and Graaes' papers provided

different perspectives and representations on the new technology associated with aerial surveillance and photography during the First World War.

Kesper-Biermann's paper, »Distance and Involvement: Comic Books and the First World War in Germany, 1980–2015«, retained the Great War as its focal point as it explored representations of the war in 28 European comic books published in original or translation in Germany over thirty five years. Her paper explored how the complexity of the Great War transferred to pictorial stories in ways to make the war and its costs understandable and the horrors and trauma of war visible. She traced changes in comic book narratives from the classical military history approaches from the 1970s to the methodology of »Alltagsgeschichte«, to the plurality of war experiences including women and colonial soldiers by 2014. Along with different narrative approaches, Kesper-Biermann depicted the varied visual form cartoonists employed to portray and provide interpretations of the war. Her analysis of the comic books emphasized that they endeavored to present a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of wartime Germans beyond a good and evil paradigm and that through art they sought to engage and appeal to their viewers emotions as they educated and entertained readers on the Great War.

In addressing the three papers commentator Stephan Jaeger from the University of Manitoba wondered if the visual representations of the war more than other senses shaped knowledge and authority on the war experience. He also addressed the importance of different perspectives in visual representations; for example, the bird's eye view in aerial surveillance in Maker's paper as fundamentally different from the aesthetic entomological approach in Jünger's work as discussed by Graae. He noted that Kesper-Biermann's paper presented comics as history from below, often dealing with war traumata and highlight their own subjectivity, and he wondered if there were alternative approaches for the comic to present the objectivity of a bird's eye view of the war. Jaeger's comments were followed by a spirited and engaged discussion with the audience.

The final panel, »War Images in Context«, took place on Saturday October 7 and included three presenters: *Markus Wurzer* (Graz), *David W. Wildermuth* (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania), and *Brian Crim* (Lynchburg, Virginia). All three papers shared the background of the Second World War. Wurzer's paper, »Neither Private nor Public? New Perspectives on the Entanglements between War and Photography«, explored the relationship of private photographs of the war taken by amateurs to official public images of the war, and suggested that private photographs could also be appropriated as public images as well. He provided examples for photographs from collections that did not necessarily have a framed narrative in the form of an album. In most photos, the violence, death and destruction remained outside the frame. Moreover, some photos in these collections were taken as photographic souvenirs, and others became postcards once

the film was processed by family members at home. Similar to eighteenth century correspondence, Wurzer made a strong argument that private photographs often received public attention and could even be published in the press. He also suggested that soldiers used these images to help construct their own narratives of the war.

Wildermuth's contribution »War Tourism and Smoking Guns: Bombed-out Lida, the German Army and the Holocaust« analyzed wartime photography as partial evidence in understanding the fate and timing of murder of Jews on the Eastern front. He examined Wehrmacht soldiers' photographs described as war tourism to illustrate the violence and murder committed in Lida in western Belarus briefly after German troops occupied the city before the arrival of the SS Einsatzgruppen. He used a mundane image of a recent urban warzone – an empty street devoid of life – to link wartime perpetrators to war crimes against local Jewish civilians. He made a strong argument that the image revealed much more than the soldier-photographer intended, as it collaborated with survivor testimony to present the timing and agency of genocide on the Eastern Front. Since the representation of the photograph conflicted with the standard interpretations of genocide in Lida, it both raised questions and provided an alternative narrative that coincided with other forms of evidence.

»Celebrating America's Rocket Baron: The Mediated Legend of Wernher von Braun« by Crim, also based on a larger book project, drew on authentic and fictional war photography to illustrate the whitewashing of Wernher von Braun's past from a committed supporter of the National Socialist weapon program at Peenemünde to an heroic scientist and space enthusiast in the Cold War era United States. His work on rockets clearly explained the United States's interest in von Braun in 1945. Crim analyzed both photography and film to present the ways in which von Braun transformed his image in print media and film, including Disney productions, to one that expressed irreproachable American values. Crim also illustrated the complicity of the United States in rewriting von Braun's past and presenting him to the public as a representative of heroic science and the spokesman for the space program with the motto »I aim for the stars«, when in fact his wartime aim had been squarely at Great Britain, a key ally of the United States. The manipulation of von Braun's successful visual representation went beyond solely self-fashioning, as Crim emphasized, it was reinforced by American authorities who cultivated von Braun's new Cold War persona as building enthusiasm for a Cold War space program within the American public. Susanne Vees-Gulani from Case Western Reserve University commented on the final session and offered insightful remarks to the three intriguing papers and a lively discussion followed.

Conflicts from the Napoleonic War to the Cold War provided areas of scholarly analysis of visual representations of war and violence by a diverse group of

international scholars. The audiences that attended these sessions viewed amateur watercolors, political caricatures, votive tablets, building diagrams, official and private wartime photographs, comic book illustrations and clips of feature films as examples of the vast scale of visual imagery that engages war and violence. As a whole, the papers raised questions about the producers and consumers of these images as well as the context in which they were produced and the perspectives and narratives they presented. The panels illustrated that there is much more for scholars from all disciplines to contribute to our understanding of the intersection between war experiences and visual representation of those experiences and the legacy of war.

Following the final panel, the coordinators of the War and Violence Network handed over the leadership of the interdisciplinary network to two new coordinators, Katherine Aaslestad and Kathrin Maurer. Aaslestad and Maurer warmly thank their predecessors Jörg Echternkamp, Stephan Jaeger and Susanne Vees-Gulani for their outstanding service to the German Studies Association and look forward to organizing such high caliber innovative panels for the next three years. In fact, the theme for next year's German Studies Association Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for September 27 to 30 is »War, the Body and Communities«.

War experiences and legacies affect individual bodies and broader communities. War violates and traumatizes bodies as it simultaneously destroys and builds communities. The 2018 War and Violence Interdisciplinary Network panel series, »War, the Body and Communities« explores how war contributes different narratives about the body and communities in relation to conflict and violence. Topics for this panel will explore the forming and disciplining of bodies for war, the disfiguration of bodies during war, »disembodied« contemporary warfare, and the disappearances of the body during conflicts. The body can be a weapon as well as a victim of war; it can execute, document, archive, aesthetize, and politicize war. Likewise, wartime communities can develop from the idea of a shared »bodily« experience that is in turn conducive in shaping a collective associated with war. Communities, therefore, represent a dynamic and variable entity constructed by common encounters, attitudes, and emotions. This panel could also investigate communities of victims, mourners, widows, protesters, veterans, survivors, perpetrators; and their respective representations, experiences, and negotiations with their own (or other) bodies. Panel presentations could focus how war can build and undermine these »war communities« and how aesthetic as well as historical works about war can shape a sense of community as well as ways they thematize the topic of the body. The time span will be from the Medieval Ages to today.