

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Practices and power in the everyday life of the twentieth century: a symposium in honor of Alf Lüdtke. Michigan: Kathleen Canning (University of Michigan), Geoff Eley (University of Michigan). Sponsored by the GHI, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the following institutions at the University of Michigan: the Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies, 09.10.2007-10.10.2007.

Reviewed by Kathleen Canning

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (May, 2008)

Practices and power in the everyday life of the twentieth century: a symposium in honor of Alf Lüdtke

This symposium was organized to coincide with Alf Lüdtke's visiting professorship at the University of Michigan during October and November 2007 and in advance of his retirement in 2008. It aimed to take stock of his extraordinary contributions to the field of modern German history, to the practices of historical anthropology, and to the still-flourishing study of the history of everyday life, both in and beyond the field of modern German history. The symposium explored the methodological and conceptual issues that have made everyday life history so influential among historians and scholars across fields and disciplines. Participants included faculty and Ph.D. candidates from Michigan and from several other institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany. The panels were organized around the keywords and concepts that featured most prominently in Alf Lüdtke's scholarship: *Eigensinn*, everyday life, *Herrschaft*, physical violence, states of exception, and visualizing history.

The symposium not only honored Alf Lüdtke, who participated in conversations at every panel, but it also stimulated significant methodological discussion about the history of everyday life, the ability to situate it in conventional and unconventional source materials, and the kinds of historical writing it has inspired. In addition, the symposium sought to sustain and reaffirm the rich scholarly exchange between American universities (in this case the University of Michigan and the Uni-

versity of Chicago) and the former Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte in Göttingen and the University of Erfurt. Alf Lüdtke's visiting professorships at both institutions in the 1990s and his generous hosting of graduate students and faculty from both institutions at Göttingen and Erfurt are exemplary of this exchange.

After a short homage to Alf Lüdtke on behalf of the fellows of the German Historical Institute delivered by CAROLA DIETZE, the opening panel of the conference featured KATHLEEN CANNING, DAVID CREW, DAVID WILLIAM COHEN, and GEOFF ELEY, whose contributions both reflected on their long-term intellectual collaborations with Alf Lüdtke and aimed to introduce younger generations of scholars, including many graduate students and scholars from other fields, to his most influential contributions to everyday life history, historical anthropology, and visual history. Canning reflected on the concept of *Eigensinn*, which has remained a sharpening stone for subsequent generations of historians who continue to contemplate the issues of agency and subjectivity that remained unsettled in the wake of the linguistic turn. Cohen, historian and anthropologist of Africa, explored Lüdtke's placement of itineraries of experience at the center of the project of historical anthropology. Eley's contribution emphasized Alf Lüdtke's place in the politics of knowledge in German history, tracing the genealogies of *Alltagsgeschichte* in the theory of needs and also noting its significance in laying

the groundwork for a history of emotions. David Crew took stock of Alf Ladtke's important contributions to visual history, particularly his study of photography in the history of the twentieth century as presented in the co-edited volume, *Die DDR im Bild: Zum Gebrauch der Photographie im anderen deutschen Staat* (2004) and the expansion of the term *Eigensinn* to encompass visual *Eigensinn*.

The next panel, "Notes from the Field: Reading Power and/in the Everyday," featured MAUREEN HEALY, whose paper, "In Search of Little Stories: Confessions of a Lost *Alltags*-Historian," discussed the relevance of *Alltagsgeschichte* to her new project on "The Turks in Central European Historical Memory." In his paper, "Extraordinary Reports on Everyday Life," HARRY LIEBERSOHN illuminated understandings of everyday life in the ethnographic writings of Karl Bacher and Bronislaw Malinowski. KATHERINE PENCE's analysis of "Consumer Politics and Everyday Negotiations of Power" analyzed the links between local everydayness and broader global or transnational contexts that underpin her study of coffee consumption in twentieth-century Germany. GERALD SIDER's paper, "Anthropology, History, and the Problem of Everyday Life," examined the place of power, violence, and everyday life in his study of the economies of race and labor in Maxton, North Carolina. As commentator on this panel, ALF LADTKE suggested that we expand the term "field" to include "archive," and posed questions that probed the relationship between the routinized and the spectacular in everyday life.

Friday afternoon's closing panel, on "Eigensinn, Selfhood and Subjectivity," included papers by ANDREW BERGERSON, MARTI LYBECK, and JAN PALMOWSKI. Bergerson's co-authored analysis of "The German Sisyphus" posited an alternative understanding of *Eigensinn* as a notion of modern selfhood that crucially involves self-deception and ironic enactment, especially in the context of remembering the Nazi past. Marti Lybeck's paper, "Sex Talk: Power and Honor among Women Civil Servants in Weimar Germany," explored the realm of informal communication, particularly sexual gossip, as it shaped honor, exertion of power, and subjectivities in the gendered workplace. Jan Palmowski's paper on "Power and Community in the GDR: *Eigen-Sinn* and Private Transcript," took the example of citizens' agency vis a vis the state in the Mecklenburg town of Dabel in order to probe the private transcripts fashioned in the course of individual and local actions and the ways in which they constituted power. EVE ROSENHAFT's comment compared and contrasted the different notions of *Eigensinn*

at play in the three papers, noting the shared interest of the panelists in the terms of selfhood and subjectivity and the consensus that *Eigensinn*, refigured in terms of performance, does not always encompass subversion.

The topic of Saturday morning's panel, "Violence, Temporality, and Transformations of the Everyday," was taken up by MANUELA ACHILLES, PETER LOEWENBERG, and SCOTT SPECTOR. Achilles's paper, "Power, Violence, and the State in Weimar Germany," probed the explosive emotions unleashed by nationalist murders, both on the part of pro-republican citizens and on that of the state in response to the "masses." Loewenberg's paper, "9-10 November in Modern German History: Anniversary Reversal and Undoing," not only addressed the significance of this anniversary in German history, but also the agency that underpinned the events of November 9, 1938, *Reichskristallnacht*, in particular. Spector's contribution, "Against 'Assimilation.' Lived German Jewishness 1867-1938," offered insightful methodological reflection on the categories of identity and subjectivity among German Jews amidst the politics of assimilation, with specific reference to case studies of Gershom Scholem and Jakob Wassermann. Although MICHAEL GEYER was unable to attend the conference due to illness, his paper, "Die eigensinnigen Toten," which examined the revival of a funeral culture and funerary rituals surrounding Americans killed in the Iraq war, was included in the discussion. DAVID CREW's comment on this panel noted the papers' shared interest in the politics of emotion, interiority, and subjectivity and their embeddedness in violence (or threats of violence).

On Saturday afternoon, the participants turned their attention to an analysis of the "Everyday under States of Exception." Ph.D.-candidate ANNE BERG's paper, "Nazi Hegemony, Film, and Everyday Life in Hamburg," probed the usefulness of everyday life history to her ongoing study of cinema in Hamburg during the Second World War, in which the relationship between the everyday and the exceptional were central. In his paper, "Weimar as Text: Franz Goell's Autobiographies," PETER FRITZSCHE offered compelling insights into the fragmented and fractured self of "graphomaniac" Franz Goell, whose everyday life was recorded in three genres of autobiographical texts: the diary, household account books, and a memoir. HEIKKI LEMPA's analysis of "Dietetics as Political Autonomy" noted the importance of dietetics in shaping notions of *Lebensordnung* among the German educated middle classes from 1790-1890, but also suggested that dietetics fostered its own *eigensinnig* understandings of bodily autonomy. The state of exception

analyzed in ROBERTA PERGHER's paper was that of Italian fascism and the *Eigensinn* of settlers who sought to extend Italian rule to its borderlands and colonies, and in so doing sidestepped, ignored, or circumvented many of the state's rules and expectations. ULRIKE WECKEL compared and contrasted the different sites of *Eigensinn* reflected in this panel, ranging from the middle-class body to the cinema in wartime to settler cultures in fascist Italy and the diaries of a meticulous observer of both politics and the self in Weimar Germany.

The last set of presentations on Saturday afternoon explored "Power, Policing, and the Everyday" in realms "beyond the state." ANNEMARIE SAMMARTINO's paper, "Taking Marzahn Seriously: Reflections on Community in the *Plattenbau*," pursued the possibilities for and obstacles to everyday experiences of community among residents of Marzahn's *Plattenbauten* in the former GDR. Ph.D.-candidate ALICE WEINREB's paper, "The Powers of Hunger: the Role of the 'Hunger Years' in Negotiating Past and Future in Germany, 1945-49," explicated the conflicted meanings of hunger in the years of reconstruction and analyzed how the framework of collective hunger informed notions of community, nation, and the everyday into the 1950s. In a paper entitled "Looking for Russian Murderers in Berlin," PAUL STEEGE presented the results of "an ordinary criminal case" from December 1941, analyzing the testimony of German witnesses for their perceptions of foreign laborers and Russian POWs as a means to probe the differences between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*, between ordinary and extraordinary violence amidst war. DOROTHEE WIERLING approached the question of Russians in Germany from a different angle in her paper, "Germans from Russia - Russians in Germany." She assessed their "double existence" of both belonging and being "other," and compared the experiences of different generations of Russian immigrants on the basis of oral interviews. ANDREW BERGERSON's comments took stock of the individual and collective claims to victimhood, whether of postwar hunger, impersonal housing projects, conscripted foreign workers, or ethnic German immigrants from Russia, noting also the importance of space, distance, and movement/migrations in the papers for this panel.

The closing session of the conference offered an opportunity for the participants to reflect on the recurrent themes of our discussion, including the possibilities and limits of *Alltagsgeschichte*: If everyday perspectives shape many different histories now, how subversive or creative is it today? How has everyday life history reinforced or helped to dissolve the boundaries between and

among social, cultural and political history? In the face of an increasingly transnational field, can *Alltagsgeschichte* be conceived as a transnational inquiry despite its close attention to specific empirical settings? How do the fragmented and fractured stories of everyday life change the kinds of narratives historians compose? Do they provide mere details or compel a rewriting of our narratives? What is the relationship between key concepts of *Alltagsgeschichte* and the history of emotions or the notions of subjectivity and agency? We hope to have the chance to pursue these questions and others at a follow-up conference, which would take place in Europe in 2008, with an eye to the publication of a volume of essays.

The symposium also prompted the creation of an inventive and attractive website (<http://eihs-online.net/luedtke>), which provided an overview of Alf L dtke's intellectual biography and served as a gateway to the conference papers and other information for participants. Thanks to the design skills of Ph.D.-candidate PETER LAWLESS, the website also now serves as an archive for the symposium, which will be particularly useful in the event of a follow-up conference and/or the compilation of a volume of essays on the basis of these conference papers.

On a sad note, the symposium was marked by the death of DAPHNE BERDAHL, anthropologist of Germany from the University of Minnesota and close colleague and friend of Alf and Helga L dtke and many other symposium participants. Daphne had been part of the symposium since its inception and corresponded with us about it until weeks before her death of cancer on October 5, 2007.

Kurz bersicht:

Opening session/Eisenberg Institute Friday Workshop:

Alf L dtke: Reflections on Methods and Meanings of Everyday Life History

Carola Dietze, German Historical Institute
Kathleen Canning, University of Michigan
David Crew, University of Texas
David William Cohen, University of Michigan
Geoff Eley, University of Michigan

Notes from the Field: Reading Power and/in the Everyday

Chair: Kathleen Canning

Maureen Healy, Oregon State/Lewis & Clark

âIn Search of Little Stories: Confessions of a Lost Alltags-Historianâ

Harry Liebersohn, University of Illinois

âExtraordinary Reports on Everyday Life: Reflections from the Ethnographic Fieldâ

Katherine Pence, Baruch College

âConsumer Politics and Everyday Negotiations of Powerâ

Gerald Sider, CUNY Graduate Center

âAnthropology, History, and the Problem of Everyday Lifeâ

Respondent: Alf L  dtke, University of Erfurt

Eigensinn, Selfhood, and Subjectivity

Chair: Geoff Eley

Andrew Bergerson, University of Missouri, Kansas City, MO

âThe German Sisyphusâ

Marti Lybeck, University of Michigan

âSex Talk: Power and Honor among Women Civil Servants in Weimar Germanyâ

Jan Palmowski, Kings College, London:

âPower and Community: Eigen-Sinn and Private Transcriptsâ

Respondent: Eve Rosenhaft, University of Liverpool

Violence, Temporality, and Transformations of the Everyday

Chair: Scott Spector

Manuela Achilles, University of Virginia

âViolence, Power, and the State in Weimar Germanyâ

Peter Loewenberg, UCLA

â9-10 November in Modern German History: Anniversary Reversal and Undoingâ

Scott Spector, University of Michigan

âAgainst âAssimilationâ: Lived German-Jewishness 1867-1938â

Michael Geyer, University of Chicago

âDie eigensinnigen Totenâ

Respondent: David Crew

Analyzing the Everyday under States of Exception

Anne Berg, University of Michigan

âNazi Hegemony, Film, and Everyday Life in Hamburgâ

Peter Fritzsche, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana

âWeimar as Text: Franz Goellâs Autobiographiesâ

Heikki Lempa, Moravian College

âDietetics and the Autonomy of the Body in Nineteenth Century Germanyâ

Roberta Pergher, University of Michigan

âEmissaries of the Nation: Settlersâ Eigensinn in the Construction of a Fascist Empireâ

Respondent: Ulrike Weckel

Beyond the State: Power, Policing and the Everyday?

Chair: Carola Dietze

Annemarie Sammartino, Oberlin College

âTaking Marzahn Seriously: Reflections on Community in the *Plattenbau*â

Alice Weinreb, University of Michigan

âThe Powers of Hunger: the Role of the âHunger Yearsâ in Negotiating Past and Future in Germany, 1945-49â

Paul Steege, Villanova University

âLooking for Russian Murderers in Berlin: An âOrdinaryâ Criminal Case

Dorothee Wierling, Forschungsstelle f  r Zeitgeschichte, Hamburg

âGermans from RussiaâRussians in Germany: The Problem of the âRusslandsdeutscheââ

Respondent: Andrew Bergerson

Final Round-Up:

Chair: Helmut Puff, University of Michigan

Alf L  dtke, Universit  t Erfurt

Jan Palmowski, Kings College, London

Michael Geyer, University of Chicago

Dorothee Wierling, Forschungsstelle f  r Zeitgeschichte, Hamburg

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Kathleen Canning. Review of , *Practices and power in the everyday life of the twentieth century: a symposium in honor of Alf Lüdtke*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. May, 2008.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=28766>

Copyright © 2008 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.