Jesters, Jokes, and Laughter: The Politics of Humour in the Twentieth Century

March 16-18, 2006

Munk Centre for International Studies,
University of Toronto, 1 Devonshire Place

Sponsored by The Joint Initiative in German and European Studies,
The German Historical Institute (Washington, DC),
The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and The Thyssen Foundation
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Conference Program

Thursday, March 16, 2006

Munk Centre for International Studies, 1 Devonshire Place
Vivian and David Campbell Conference Facility
South House

5:00 – 6:30 pm
Keynote address:

Peter Jelavich, Johns Hopkins University
When Are Jewish Jokes No Longer Funny?

6:30 – 8:00 pm
Reception

Friday, March 17, 2006

Conference sessions take place in the North House of the Munk Centre for International Studies, Room 208N, on the second floor.

Panel 1: 9:00 - 10:45 am
Subversive Humour?

Commentator: Dirk Schumann,
The German Historical Institute, Washington, DC
Kaspar Maase, Universität Tübingen
The Use of Humour Commodities in Germany during the Great War: Historical and Anthropological Questions

Kathleen Stokker, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa
Norwegian Occupation Humour: Creating an Alternative Reality

Peter Keller, Universität Zürich
Constructions of Resistance: The Zurich Cabaret Cornichon 1933-1945 and its Reception after 1945

Break 10:45-11:15 am

Panel 2: 11:15 am-1:00 pm:
Popular Laughter: Laughing to Order One’s World

Commentator: Modris Eksteins, University of Toronto

Jan Rüger, Birkbeck College, London
‘Berliner Schnauze’: Humour and Laughter in Berlin, 1914-1918

Jakub Kazecki, University of British Columbia
Hierarchies of Humour: Comical Situations and Soldier Laughter in the WWI Memoirs of Walter Bloem

Patrick Merziger, Freie Universität Berlin
Humour in National Socialism: Destructive Satire and the Desire for Harmony

Lunch 1:00 - 2:00 pm

Panel 3: 2:00 - 4:00 pm
Ethnicity, Nationality, Gender: Communities of Laughter?

Commentator: Michelle Murphy, University of Toronto

Giselinde Kuipers, Erasmus University Rotterdam
Ethnic Humour in the Netherlands: On the Dynamics of Social Sensibilities and Ethnic Hierarchies

Christie Davies, University of Reading

Eileen Gillooly, Columbia University, New York
Smile of Discontent: Humour and Gender in Late Twentieth-Century British Fiction

Saturday, March 18, 2006

Conference sessions take place in the North House of the Munk Centre for International Studies, Room 208N, on the second floor.

Panel 4: 9:00 - 11:00 am
Media: Shaping the Laughing Public

Commentator: Nicholas Sammond, University of Toronto

Mark Winokur, University of Colorado, Boulder
Early American Animation and Ethnicity: The Fleischer Studio

Monika Pater, University of Hamburg
  Shaping a Cheerful Public:
  Light Entertainment in National Socialism

Vincent Brook, California State University, Los Angeles
  Laughing to Keep from Dying:
  Jewish Self-Hatred and The Larry Sanders Show

Break 11:00-11:30

Conference conclusion: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Concluding remarks and general discussion
Conference participants:

Vincent Brook has a PhD in film and television from the University of California, Los Angeles. He has worked as a film editor and a screenwriter and currently teaches film, television, and cultural studies at the University of Southern California, California State University Los Angeles, and Los Angeles Pierce College. He has written numerous articles for leading media journals and is the author of Something Ain’t Kosher Here: The Rise of the “Jewish” Sitcom (Rutgers, 2003). His latest work, due out from Rutgers in mid-2006, is an anthology titled You Should See Yourself: Jewish Identity in Postmodern American Culture.

Christie Davies is a graduate of Cambridge University (MA, PhD). He is the author of Ethnic Humor around the World: a Comparative Analysis (Indiana University Press, 1990 and 1997), Jokes and their Relation to Society (Mouton de Gruyter 1998), The Mirth of Nations (Transaction, 2002), and (with Goh Abe) Esuniku Joku (Tokyo, Kodansha 2003), and of forty journal articles and book chapters on humour. He did archival research in Canada in Memorial University of Newfoundland and at the Université de Moncton and Université Laval with a grant from the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and has done similar research in Bulgaria and the United States. He taught humour at the University of Reading for many years and also at several Summer Schools in the Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, and the USA. He is a regular broadcaster on both radio and television and writes for the popular press. His most recent work of humorous fiction is Dewi the Dragon (Y Lolfa, 2006).

Modris Eksteins is Professor of History at the University of Toronto, with research interests in the relationship between war and culture in the twentieth Century. Among his recent publications are the books Daighilev Was Here (2005, co-author), and Walking Since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Heart of Our Century (1999).

Eileen Gillooly is Associate Director of the Heyman Center for the Humanities and the Associate Director of the Society of Fellows at Columbia University, where she teaches courses in nineteenth-century British literature and culture. She is the author of Smile of Discontent: Humor, Gender, and Nineteenth-Century British Fiction (University of Chicago Press, 1999)—winner of the Perkins Prize by the Society for the Study of Narrative Literature (2001)—and of essays and reviews in Victorian

Peter Jelavich is Professor of History at Johns Hopkins University. He specializes in the cultural and intellectual history of Europe since the Enlightenment, with emphasis on Germany. His areas of interest include the interaction of elite and popular culture; the history of mass culture and the media; and the application of cultural and social theories to historical study. He is the author of Munich and Theatrical Modernism: Politics, Playwriting, and Performance, 1890-1914 (1985), Berlin Cabaret (1993), and, most recently, Berlin Alexanderplatz: Radio, Film, and the Death of Weimar Culture (2005). He is currently writing a book on censorship of the arts in Germany from 1890 to the present.

Peter Michael Keller is associate lecturer for Historical Learning at the Pedagogical High School of Solothurn. He studied History and German literature at the universities of Zurich and Madrid. He holds an MA and is currently a Ph D student writing a dissertation on the history of Swiss cabaret. He contributed to several productions concerning cabaret history (exposition, book publication, TV-documentary).

Jakub Kazecki studied German Language and Literature at the Adam-Mickiewicz-University in Poznań, Poland, and holds an MA in German Literature from Dalhousie University, Halifax. His research interests include autobiographical forms and representations of war in twentieth-century German literature and visual arts, with a concentration on the relationship between power, violence, and humour. He is currently a sessional instructor at the University of British Columbia, where he is also working on his dissertation on the functions of humour and laughter in German literature about the First World War with an analysis of selected works by Erich Maria Remarque, Ludwig Renn, Ernst Jünger, Walter Bloem, and Walter Flex.
**Martina Kessel** is the DAAD Visiting Professor for German and European Studies at the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto for the academic year 2005-2006. She is also Professor for Modern History at the University of Bielefeld, Germany. She studied at Cologne, Munich and College Park, Maryland (USA), received her Ph.D. at the University of Munich and completed the Habilitation at the Free University of Berlin. Her research focuses on cultural and gender history from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Her major book publications include *Westeuropa und die deutsche Teilung. Englische und französische Deutschlandpolitik auf den Außenministerkonferenzen 1945-1947* (München: Oldenbourg, 1989) and *Langeweile. Vom Umgang mit Zeit und Gefühlen in Deutschland vom späten 18. bis zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001). She is currently working on a book project concerning “German humour” in the epoch of the world wars.

**Giselinde Kuipers** is a research fellow at the Department for the Study of Culture and the Arts at Erasmus University Rotterdam. She received her PhD in sociology from the University of Amsterdam in 2001. Giselinde has done research in the fields of cultural sociology, media studies, popular culture, and globalization/ internationalization of culture. Her thesis, entitled *Good Humor Bad Taste*, was a study of social differences in sense of humour in the Netherlands. An English translation of this book will be published in 2006. At present she is conducting a study of the import of American television comedy to the Netherlands, France, Italy, and Poland. Giselinde Kuipers is member of the editorial board of the Dutch sociological journal *Sociologie*, and member of the advisory editorial board of *Humor: The International Journal for Humor Research* and of the *Journal for Popular Culture*. She is a secretary of the Dutch Sociological Association and executive board member of the International Society for Humor Studies.


**Patrick Merziger** studied history and German literature from 1994 to 2001 in Bochum, Madrid, and Berlin. Since 2001 he has been teaching and doing research as a scientific assistant at the Institute for Media and

Michelle Murphy is with the Institute for Women and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto. Her research interests are feminist science studies; the history of race and sex as scientific categories; and women’s health and reproduction in the United States and transnationally.

Monika Pater has worked on the history of German broadcasting in a comparative perspective from the 30s to the 60s. She earned her PhD in Journalism and communication studies and focuses on gender studies and media history. In recent years she has been employed at the Institute for Journalism and Communication studies, School of Economics and Social Sciences at the University of Hamburg.

Jan Rüger is Leverhulme Research Fellow and Lecturer in Modern European History at Birkbeck College, University of London. He specializes in cultural and comparative European history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a focus on Germany and Britain. He is a convener in the Capital Cities at War project, an international group of historians, chaired by Jay Winter (Florence) and Jean-Louis Robert (Paris), working on the history of London, Paris and Berlin during the First World War. Jan recently held a visiting fellowship at the Yale Center for International and Area Studies, Yale University. His research interests include the cultural history of the sea and the navy; the relationship between humour and politics; and the history of borderlands and cultural nation-building in modern Europe. His book on Britain and Germany in the age of empire will be published by Cambridge University Press later in 2006.

Nicholas Sammond teaches in the Department of English and the Department of Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto. He is the author, most recently, of Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960 (Duke University Press, 2005)

Dirk Schumann completed his PhD at the University of Munich and his Habilitation at the University of Bielefeld. Dr. Schumann has been Deputy Director of the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, since June 2002. His main research interests are modern German history; modern European and American social and cultural history; and the history of

**Kathleen Stokker** is Professor of Norwegian at Luther College, where she has taught since 1978. She earned her PhD in Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin. In addition to language textbooks, she has written *Folklore Fights the Nazis* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1996) about the Norwegians’ use of humour during their occupation by Hitler’s forces, and *Keeping Christmas* (Minnesota Historical Society, 2000), tracing the origin, meaning, and transformation of Norwegian and Norwegian American yuletide customs, and the “Norway” chapter of the four volume *Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Folklore and Folklife* (2005). *Remedies and Rituals of Norwegian and Norwegian-American Folk Medicine*, is forthcoming in 2007. Her articles have appeared in *The Journal of American Folklore, Humor: The International Journal of Humor Research*, and *The Journal of Popular Culture*. In 2005 she received the St. Olav Medal from the Norwegian government for “strengthening the bonds between Norway and Norwegian-Americans.“

**Mark Winokur** is Professor at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He has written on a wide variety of topics in film studies, from a book on American comedy (*American Laughter: Immigrants, Ethnicity, and 1930s Hollywood Film Comedy*) to work on avant garde lesbian cinema (“Body and Soul: Identifying (With) the Black Lesbian Body in Cheryl Dunye’s Watermelon Woman”). He has recently published an article on Foucault, signification, and the Internet (“The Ambiguous Panopticon), and is presently at work on a book on race theory and horror films.