

Internationales Symposium

“Appropriations of Karl Marx in American Culture and Literature”

July 7, 2006 (Studienzentrum Karl-Marx-Haus, Johannisstraße 28, 54290 Trier)

Organized by

Trier Center for American Studies (University of Trier)

Karl-Marx-Haus der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Trier

The symposium is planned as an exploratory journey into a surprisingly little studied region of German-American literary and cultural exchanges. While the influence of German philosophers and writers such as Immanuel Kant, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich Nietzsche is well researched, and the impact of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman on German culture and literature amply discussed, the large imprint left by Karl Marx on American literature and culture has not been studied closely. It is, for instance, still little known that the German-American architect Adolf Cluss, the man who prominently influenced the shape and look of Washington, D.C. in the late nineteenth century, was also for some time a close friend and ally of Karl Marx.

The deficit in research may be in part explained with the complication and confusion inherent in the historical connection between the varied, complex philosophical ideas of Karl Marx and the totalitarian appropriations and reductions of his ideas by Lenin, Stalin and others in the twentieth century. The symposium intends to revitalize discussion of the multiple influences of Karl Marx and the various appropriations of his thought within an American context. Marxism and McCarthyism may have been crucial moments in German and American twentieth-century history and politics, but the impact of the ideas of the Trier philosopher Karl Marx reaches well beyond such a narrow conception and interpretation. The symposium attempts to provide impulses to explore again the true extent of Karl Marx's multiple influences on American culture and letters.

Participants and topics

Alford, Steven, Ph.D., Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, FL:
“Marxism, Narrative and Style: The Example of Edward Dahlberg”

Dean, John, Ph.D., University of Versailles, Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines: “The Uses of Karl Marx & Marxism in American Popular Culture”

Fallon, Ann Marie, Ph.D., Portland State University, Portland, OR: “John Reed and American Marxism”

Hines, Maude, Ph.D., Portland State University, Portland, OR: “Intersections of Marxism, Race, and Nationalism from the Harlem Renaissance to the McCarthy Hearings”

Hurm, Gerd, Ph.D., Trier Center for American Studies, University of Trier:
"Introduction: Appropriations of Karl Marx in American Culture and Literature"

Lessoff, Alan, Ph. D., Illinois State University, Normal, IL: "The Americanization of Adolf Cluss"

Schedule

10.00 - 10.30 "Welcoming and Introductory Remarks"
Beatrix Bouvier (Karl-Marx-Haus, Trier)
Gerd Hurm (Center for American Studies, Trier)

10.30 - 11.15 "John Reed and American Marxism"
Ann Marie Fallon (Portland, Oregon, USA)

11.15 – 12.00 "Marxism, Narrative and Style: The Example of
Edward Dahlberg"
Steven Alford (Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA)

12.00 – 12.45 "Intersections of Marxism, Race, and Nationalism
from the Harlem Renaissance to the McCarthy Hearings"
Maude Hines (Portland, Oregon, USA)

Lunch break (Karl-Marx-Museum)

14.30 – 15.15 "The Americanization of Adolf Cluss"
Alan Lessoff (Normal, Illinois, USA)

15.15 – 16.00 "The Uses of Karl Marx & Marxism in American Popular Culture"
John Dean (Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, France)

16.00 – 16.15 **Coffee break**

16.15 – 17.00 Panel Discussion:
"Appropriations of Karl Marx in American Culture and Literature"

(Ort: Studienzentrum Karl-Marx-Haus, Johannisstraße 28)

ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

Alford, Steven, Ph.D., Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA “Marxism, Narrative and Style: The Example of Edward Dahlberg”

- **Abstract:** If the goal of a Marxist literature is moral transformation through engendering awareness of one's class conditions, the mimetic “realism” of Dahlberg's “proletarian” novels, *Bottom Dogs* and *From Flushing to Calvary*, as well as those of other proletarian novelists, cannot in principle achieve Marx's goal. If there is such as thing as a Marxist style, directed toward social transformation, it must be one that functions on the level of the individual reader, not an abstract collective. As such, I argue that the exhortative mode of Dahlberg's later, and decidedly non-proletarian *Because I Was Flesh* is more stylistically attuned to Marx's goal than other, more recognizably proletarian novels.
- **Bio:** Steven Alford completed his graduate work in Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where he focused on the figure of irony in early German and British romanticism. During that period he conducted important graduate research at Albert Ludwigs Universität in Freiburg im Breisgau, supported by a Fulbright grant. He has taught literature, philosophy and film at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida for over twenty years. He has published essays on Paul Auster, Lawrence Durrell, Gavin Maxwell, and Peter Ackroyd. His interest in Edward Dahlberg dates back to his undergraduate days, where he found reading Dahlberg's masterwork, *Because I was Flesh*, a useful English language vocabulary building exercise. In addition, forever after he has been thankful that his own mother, unlike Dahlberg's, was not a lady barber. For the past few years his scholarly heart has belonged to developing the nascent area of motorcycle culture. His publications on motorcycling include contributions to *The Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia* and *Harley-Davidson and Philosophy*. He also co-edited the forthcoming *Two Wheels to Freedom, Discovering Motorcycle Culture*, a collection of recent scholarly essays on motorcycling. He is currently working on a book focusing on motorcycle design issues for Reaktion Press, entitled *Motorbike*, co-written with the lovely and talented Suzanne Ferriss. Steve is also on the board of the one and only online, refereed motorcycle journal, *The International Journal of Motorcycle Studies* (ijms.nova.edu). His more recent travels on the bike have taken him from Fort Lauderdale to Vancouver Island and parts in-between. In the occasional absence of hurricane-force winds but always in sauna-like temperatures, he rides a Honda VTX 1800C and a Triumph Sprint ST (but not at the same time).

Dean, John, Ph.D., University of Versailles, Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, France “The Uses of Karl Marx & Marxism in American Popular Culture”

- **Abstract:** Civilization is a mosaic of society and culture. In the popular culture of American civilization Marxism had its 20th Century place as a pattern of colourful tiles of varying dimensions, shapes, visibility and fluidity amid the greater design. How and where did Marxism fit in? US Marxists characteristically had a difficult time grasping popular culture on its own progressive, optimistic, and wary terms. In general, they either misunderstood it as the culture produced by an economic elite in order to brainwash and degrade We The People. Or US Marxists attempted to produce and sell their own version of popular culture in order to achieve specific ideological ends. Where and how did this happen and what were the consequences? I seek to answer these and other pertinent questions by illuminating the hit-and-miss appropriations of Karl Marx, Marxism, and communism, and their most visible,

mainstream expressions in, for example: (i) the US popular hero who demanded respect for Marxism, specially in show business, academia, public life; (ii) the popular culture produced by the social arts projects of the American communist party, the New Deals' WPA, private patrons; (iii) Marxism & the popular, civic arts, specially its influence on movies, murals, photography, the bestseller; (iv) Marxism and the popular culture of politics, specially with early TV; (v) the pivotal role of the Marxist popular culture critic when dealing with "the folklore of industrial man".

- **Bio:** John Dean is Professor of American Cultural History at the University of Versailles, France. He was born in Boston, grew up & was educated in the USA, received his Ph.D. from the University of London, and has subsequently lived in Europe half his life. John Dean is the author of 8 books and is currently working on his 9th (books ranging from the France's first university text on American Popular Culture, through a cultural history of US mass media, and works on US organized crime in the city & on the screen). He lives in Paris.

Fallon, Ann Marie, Ph.D., Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, USA
"John Reed and American Marxism"

- **Abstract:** John Reed is perhaps best-known in the United States today either as the only American buried in Red Square in Moscow or the romantic co-star of the 1981 film *Reds*. While his romantic persona persists, his writings, including: *Ten Days that Shook the World*, his essays for Max Eastman's *The Masses*, short stories about Mexico and the book *Insurgent Mexico* remain largely unexamined. Throughout his work, Reed used Karl Marx's writings to argue for social justice or "American ideals". While Marx is usually imagined as antithetical to American values, Reed went to great lengths to imagine Marx as an American worker. Through his journalism and his concise portraits of "ordinary" Americans, Reed attempted to make Marx both legible and sympathetic to a broader American public.
- **Bio:** Ann Marie Fallon received her BA in English from Swarthmore College and her M.A. and Ph.D. in English literature from the University of Virginia. She is an assistant professor in the University Studies program at Portland State University and was a junior Fulbright scholar at the Trier Center for American Studies in Germany in the 2004-5 academic year. She lectures and writes on postcolonial aesthetics, the literature of the Americas, and the changing role of the humanities in the modern university.

Hines, Maude, Ph.D., Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, USA
"Intersections of Marxism, Race, and Nationalism
from the Harlem Renaissance to the McCarthy Hearings"

- **Abstract:** In 1953, Langston Hughes testified before the infamous Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations (McCarthy Hearings 1953-54). The questions he was directed to answer, as well as the answers themselves, illuminate central concerns about the relationship between race struggle and class struggle, literature and politics, authors and characters. Perhaps more surprisingly, Theodore Kaghan, called to witness in his capacity as a State Department employee, was questioned about plays he had written that discussed race relations in a way that "follows the communist line." And Dashiell Hammett, most famous for his hard-boiled detective fiction, was questioned by the McCarthy Commission about a short story that dealt with race relations. That fiction and poetry would come under scrutiny in hearings to determine loyalty to the U.S. raises questions about the meanings and uses of literature not only as an incitement to action, but as evidence of national loyalty. My talk will focus on the legacy of Karl Marx and the American receptions of his ideas in discussions of the relationship

between race and nationalism in American writing from the thirties in the fifties, teasing out some of the tensions between Black nationalism and U.S. nationalism in both periods.

- **Bio:** Maude Hines is assistant professor of English at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. She received her Ph.D. in Literature from Duke University in 1998, along with graduate certification in African-American Studies and Women's Studies. Her teaching and research focus on Anglo-American Children's Literature, African American Literature, and Cultural Studies. She is currently completing a manuscript on citizen formation in late nineteenth-century American children's literature. She is also working on a project about the treatment of racial transformation in American cultural production. She has published articles on science fiction, children's literature, ecocriticism, and African-American literature.

Lessoff, Alan, Ph. D., Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois, USA
“The Americanization of Adolf Cluss”

- **Abstract:** This paper traces the experiences of the South German Marxist and 1848 revolutionary, Adolf Cluss, after his emigration to the United States in September 1848. After spending his first years in the United States working to build an American socialist movement while maintaining correspondence with Marx and his circle in Great Britain, Cluss drifted away from his Marxist contacts and convictions. The paper will examine what about his youthful revolutionary heritage Cluss set aside and what endured as he built a noteworthy career as an architect and civil engineer in Washington, D.C. The paper will use the example of Cluss to explore how 1848ers with a radical background adapted their mindset and convictions to the political and ideological environment they found in the United States.
- **Bio:** Alan Lessoff is Professor of History at Illinois State University and editor of the “Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era”. His contribution to the symposium is adapted from his latest book, co-edited with Christof Mauch, “Adolf Cluss, Architect: From Germany to America” (New York and Washington, 2005), published in German by the Stadtarchiv Heilbronn as “Adolf Cluss, Revolutionär und Architekt: Von Heilbronn nach Washington”. Lessoff spent the spring semester of 2006 as a Fulbright professor at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. He was also Fulbright professor at the University of Kassel in 1996-97.