

**Los Angeles as a Site of German-American Crossings**  
**A Symposium, February 7-8, 2014**

**Host:** The Max Kade Institute for Austrian-German-Swiss Studies, USC

**Co-Sponsors:**

German Historical Institute, Washington DC (Director: Prof. Dr. Hartmut Berghoff)  
Fritz Thyssen Stiftung für Wissenschaftsförderung, Cologne  
Institute for California and the West, USC (Director: Prof. William Deverell)  
Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, USC (Ms. Michaela Ullmann, Exile Studies Librarian)  
Centre for Business History in Scotland (Director: Ray Stokes)  
German Consulate General of Los Angeles

**Organizers:**

Paul Lerner (Director of the Max Kade Institute, Associate Professor of History, USC)  
Jeffrey Fear (Professor, University of Glasgow)

**Description, Scholarly Goals**

“Exiles in Paradise,” an exhibition about the role of European émigrés at the Hollywood Bowl Museum of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, gave tribute to the many musicians who boosted the prestige and quality of the orchestra in the middle of the twentieth century. It proclaimed that “Los Angeles Really Constituted a Second Weimar—a Shadow Weimar.” The German studies scholar, Erhard Bahr, entitled his path-breaking history of exiled intellectuals and leading cultural figures such as Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Rudolph Schindler, and Arnold Schoenberg, “Weimar on the Pacific.” Otto Preminger, the legendary director once accosted a group of Hungarian exiles in the 1930s, “Don’t you guys know you are in Hollywood? Speak German!” As a recent documentary, *Cinema’s Exiles*, pointed out, the classic “American” film, *Casablanca*, had just one American-born star in it: Humphrey Bogart. Indeed, Rick’s Café was populated with some of Germany’s leading actors, including Peter Lorre and Conrad Veidt (Major Strasser).

This symposium asks whether Los Angeles, or Southern California more broadly, could be viewed as a site, a sort of *Heimat*, of German history. It explores the “local” history of Los Angeles through the lens of German and Central European history and the experiences of émigrés from German-speaking lands in Los Angeles. The contributions of German immigrants, émigrés, and exiles to Los Angeles history are legion, and even include one of the founders of the University of Southern California, Isaiah Hellmann. The symposium focuses in particular on the extraordinarily fruitful exchange of people after the 1920s that helped to reshape Los Angeles: entrepreneurs, studio executives, artists, intellectuals, directors, scientists, architects, and, the often overlooked ordinary people who restarted their lives in the City of Angels.

While the contributions of many of these figures are well-known, and a great many have been studied as individuals, we would like to explore how these people encountered Los Angeles in their lives and work and what difference their own German/Central European roots made in

reshaping Los Angeles. Exile studies, by now a well-developed field of inquiry, has tended to focus predominately on major cultural figures and key intellectuals. It has also remained largely a subfield unto itself and has yet to be integrated substantially into either the local history of Los Angeles and California or modern central European history. By tracing changing styles and practices in fields as diverse as architecture, design, business, science, art, and film, we shall explore how émigrés created new hybrid practices out of their encounters with Los Angeles (and America more broadly). However, they did not bring a static “German” or “Austrian” style that was merely imported into America, rather their experiences in Los Angeles created novel cultural forms.

Thus, we aim to move the field forward by viewing these Central European exiles in Los Angeles in transnational terms, as liminal figures who bridged cultural worlds and transformed commerce and culture on both sides of the Atlantic. We are in search of a new, de-territorialized language for describing how this encounter with the new world of Los Angeles affected such figures and their creative outputs. Significantly, it is not just a question of German-speaking exiles assimilating to the American “way of life” or finding ways to “contribute” to it. Instead, many of these individuals actively *transformed* the face of America so that German-American-Jewish (more broadly central European) heritages became silently embedded in it in new ways that made postwar America “America,” Los Angeles, “Los Angeles,” or Hollywood “Hollywood,” while simultaneously appearing to erase the original identity of these new impulses. Not unlike Walter Gropius or Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, one young immigrant in the furniture business, Hans Knoll, drew upon *Werkbund* and *Bauhaus* design traditions to become the high-end face of American corporate office design in the 1950s. Indeed, the “Knoll look” (regularly seen in the early seasons of the television hit *Mad Men*), projected *American* modernism back to Europe as many large German companies “Americanized” their office schemes. Some of the major achievements of “American” civilization of the mid-twentieth century are transatlantic or transnational, not national, in origin and were based on a complicated cross-cultural transfer and translation process that became “American,” a somewhat magical process of projection epitomized by Hollywood itself, which was more or less invented by Central European moguls, producers, and directors. We would like to problematize, to draw back the curtains—and discover a better paradigm—for characterizing this complex transnational entanglement and transformation of the Old World into the New World. What city could be more appropriate for this analysis than Los Angeles a place that projects itself as relentlessly “new” and detached from history, yet which has been sustained and developed through waves of immigration and cross-cultural encounters.

This symposium aims to rethink the émigré experience by inviting both Americanists and Germanists, exile studies scholars and others, to create a cross-disciplinary and cross-national dialogue. Inspired by these émigrés themselves who had to cross borders and learn new languages, we aim to draw fields together, create new terms and inspire new, transnational research agendas. We hope, in short, to stimulate a lively discussion on the nature of Los Angeles through a mid twentieth-century Central European mirror. We are envisioning a lively workshop with short pre-circulated papers and intensive discussions among the invited experts, who range in age from doctoral students to emeritus professors and include scholars on business, culture, and science from both sides of the Atlantic.

Central questions to be addressed:

- How and why did the subject(s) arrive in Los Angeles?
- What sort of impressions did s/he have of Los Angeles/America?
- What were the results of this “encounter” for his/her career, thinking, art, or entrepreneurship?
- What aspects of “coming to America” or Los Angeles could *not* be absorbed by the person, i.e. which ones came as a shock of the new?
- How did this person navigate the shoals of a transatlantic identity in an age of divisive conflict?
- What relationship did the figure have (or not have) to his/her German identity? What sort of relationship did s/he maintain with Germany and/or relatives back home?
- How did the individual’s identity shift between the vectors of Germanness, Jewishness and Americanness over his/her life abroad?
- What was distinct about Los Angeles/California/the West as a site of emigration as compared to New York or other cities like London, Tel Aviv, Buenos Aires, or Cape Town?
- What sorts of local and global networks did the individual(s) maintain?

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**Program**

**Day 1, Friday, February 7, 2014**

**Venue: Max Kade Institute, USC**

**9:00: Greetings, Introductions & Opening remarks (Deverell, Biedermann, Lerner, Fear)**

**9:30 – 11:30 Session 1: Intellectuals, Writers, Artists**

Chair: Marje Schuetze-Coburn, USC Libraries

Ehrhard (Ted) Bahr, (UCLA): Weimar on the Pacific Revisited

Thomas Wheatland (Assumption College): Critical Theory. The Los Angeles Years

Michaela Ullmann (USC): A Lasting Legacy: Lion and Marta Feuchtwanger's Impact on Preserving the Memory of German-Speaking Exiles in Southern California

**11:30 – 12:00 Coffee Break**

**12:00 – 13:30 Session 2: Lunchtime Panel on Exhibiting the Émigrés**

Chair: Bill Deverell, USC

Karen Wilson (UCLA/Autry): Jews in the Los Angeles Mosaic

Doris Berger (Skirball Cultural Center): Light & Noir: Exiles and Émigrés in Hollywood 1933-1950

**13:30 — 14:00 Coffee Break**

**14:00 — 16:00 Session 3: Immigrant Entrepreneurs in California**

Chair: Jeffrey Fear

Hartmut Berghoff (GHI): The German-American Immigrant Entrepreneur Project

Uwe Spiekermann (GHI): The Spreckels Family in Southern California

Kathleen Feeley (University of Redlands): American, then German: Irving Thalberg and the Second Generation in Hollywood

**18:00-20:00 Dinner at University Club (USC)**

Cornelius Schnauber (USC): Speak German You Are In Hollywood: Episodes and Experiences with German-Speaking Exiles and Émigrés.

**Day 2, Saturday, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014**  
**Venue: Villa Aurora, Pacific Palisades**

**9:00 Bus from Hotel to Villa Aurora**

**10:00 — 12:30 Session 4: Exile, Science and the State**

Chair: Jonathan Steinberg (University of Pennsylvania)

Judith Goodstein (CalTech): Caltech's German Connection

Anne Schenderlein (UCSD): Making German History in Los Angeles: German-Jewish Refugees and the West German Foreign Office

Giles Hoyt (University of Indiana): Max Kade: Pertussin and Philanthropy

**12:30 — 14:00 Lunch**

**14:00 — 16:00 Session 5: Film Worlds**

Chair: Steven Ross, USC

Nicole Neuman (Univ. of Minnesota): Home Sweet Heimat: Finding Germanness in LA's Moviegoing Culture

Margrit Frölich (UCSD, DAAD Visiting Professor): Liberties and Constrictions: Émigré Producers in Hollywood Motion Pictures

Tom Kemper (USC): Sue Mengers and the Rise of the Hollywood Agents

**16:00 — 16:30 Coffee Break**

**16:30-18:30 Session 6: Weimar on the Pacific Revisited: Exiles between Two Worlds**

Chair: Paul Lerner (USC)

Marion Kant (Cambridge University): "For the Time Being a Row of Palm Trees Is Nothing but a Nice Façade"

Cristina Stanca Mustea (Paris), No More Crossings: Carl Laemmle's Last Visit to Germany

Joachim Schlör (Southampton): Werner Richard Heymann in Hollywood: A Case Study in German-Jewish Emigration after 1933 as a Transnational Experience

**18:30 — 21:00 Closing Reception Sponsored by German Consulate General of Los Angeles**

**21:00 Bus to Biltmore Hotel**

