

30th Berkeley Annual Interdisciplinary German Studies Conference

Arrested Mobilities: Stillness, Power and Modernity



As early as the 1920's, Robert Musil remarked on the enormous effort it takes to stand still in a world that demands constant motion. Reflecting on the zooming street he sees through his window, the protagonist of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* comments: "Könnte man die Sprünge der Aufmerksamkeit messen, die Leistungen der Augenmuskeln, die Pendelbewegungen der Seele und alle die Anstrengungen, die ein Mensch vollbringen muss, um sich im Fluß einer Straße aufrecht zu halten, es käme vermutlich... eine Größe heraus, mit der verglichen die Kraft, die Atlas braucht, um die Welt zu stemmen."

As Musil's observation demonstrates, the imperatives of global commerce have required constant activity. Inactivity, as a result, has become a *problematic* but inevitable byproduct. Indeed, over the last nineteen months, the pandemic has confirmed that staying still requires an Atlas-like exertion. Though one's access to physical mobility is often curtailed by increasingly policed international borders, the emergence of new media that incessantly clamor for attention and/or the surge of xenophobic sentiments that demand constant vigilance from underprivileged social groups that render *stillness* almost impossible in modern life. For some, stillness is a utopian ideal that signals leisure, political resistance, or self-care; for others, stillness symbolizes arrested mobility, incarceration, or quarantine.

Nearly one hundred years after the publication of Musil's novel, the trope of stillness speaks to ambiguous questions of power and identity in modernity and functions as a critical term for thinking about movement, migration and translation within German Studies. For whom is stillness a political intervention, and for whom does it constitute oppression? How does the meaning of stillness change for the modern bourgeoisie, the migrant, the refugee, the worker, and other social groups?

Access Conference Program and Zoom Link [here](#)."

Berkeley 2022 German Studies Conference: Arrested Mobilities (Online)

Join the conference meeting room on Zoom by clicking [here](#) (Meeting ID: 996 8267 2549; Passcode: 273088).

Day 1: Friday, February 25, 2022

8:00-8:15 PST / 17:00-17:15 MEZ

Introductory Remarks by Sean Lambert, Elizabeth Sun and Qingyang Freya Zhou (UC Berkeley)

8:15-9:45 PST / 17:15-18:45 MEZ

Panel 1 — Stillness, Perception and Possibility

Moderator: Qingyang Freya Zhou (UC Berkeley)

Commentator: Lilla Balint (UC Berkeley)

- Sean Lambert (UC Berkeley) — Vision, Inaction and Possibility in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*
- Neele Illner (Universität der Künste Berlin) — Active Passivism in Robert Musil's novel *The Man without Qualities*
- Siegrun Wildner (University of Northern Iowa) — „Variationen über das Sehen“: Anita Pichlers literarische Suche nach erweiterten Wahrnehmungsmöglichkeiten in ihren Prosavignetten *Beider Augen Blick*

9:45-10:00 PST / 18:45-19:00 MEZ

Coffee Break

10:00-11:30 PST / 19:00-20:30 MEZ

Panel 2 — Stillness and Aphorism in Benjamin and Adorno

Moderator: Elise Volkmann (UC Berkeley)

Commentator: Karen Feldman (UC Berkeley)

- Caio Marin Brunet Lee (University of Valencia and University of Luigi Vanvitelli)— The Aphorism as Moving Stillness in Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia*
- Tekla Babyak (Independent Scholar) — Listening for the Gaps: Adorno, Beethoven, and the Trope of Silence
- Riley Spieler (Harvard Divinity School) — The Impossible Failure of Death: Kafka, Benjamin, and Abstention from Interpretation as the Seizure of It

11:30-12:00 PST / 20:30-21:00 MEZ

Coffee Break

12:00-13:00 PST / 21:00-22:00 MEZ

Keynote Speech by Niklaus Largier (UC Berkeley)

*16:30-18:00 PST, Dwinelle 370

In-person Happy Hour for Berkeley Participants (with light refreshments)