

The View From Here

DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

Dear friends of the Department,

It's a great time to be in the Department! With the launch of another academic year, we are welcoming two new colleagues: Professor Alexandra Gerstner comes to us from Bonn as the new Visiting DAAD Professor and Professor Hang-Sun Kim joins us from Harvard to take on the role of Language Program Coordinator.

We have taken steps to make Odette Hall an even more attractive environment for study and work through installation of a highspeed Wi-Fi connection and the conversion of our seminar library into an A/V classroom. Our new website also provides relevant information in more current formats that include tablets and smart phones. This Fall, we also look forward to the launch of our new undergraduate journal "Zeitgeist," whose editorial collective is coordinated by current student Tobias Wilczek.

During the past academic year we hosted four international conferences and workshops as well as several invited lectures. A highlight during Convocation 2014 included a magical reading of *Faust* by acclaimed German theatre director Peter Stein, amidst a week of events celebrating the award of an honorary doctoral degree from the University of Toronto in recognition of his extraordinary accomplishments. In this coming year we will continue to be a department brimming with activity, so please sign up for our mailing list to receive invitations to the many events posted on our website, german.utoronto.ca.

As ever, we are very grateful to our alumni, emeriti and friends who supported the Department throughout the past year. Your support plays a crucial role in providing our students with continuing opportunities to grow and excel. I thank all readers for your interest in the Department and I hope you enjoy this latest newsletter issue.

As always, we welcome your feedback, comments and ideas.

Markus Stock,
Chair of Germanic Languages and Literatures
Associate Professor of German & Medieval Studies



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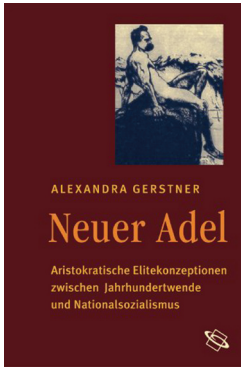


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New Arrival from DAAD's Head Office in Bonn

Dr. Alexandra Gerstner, DAAD Visiting Assistant Professor of German & History



It is a pleasure to come to Canada and experience firsthand the interest in German culture that abounds here. I studied history, philosophy and German literature at the Freie Universität Berlin, and obtained a PhD in history in 2007 with a thesis on 'Neuer Adel' and the use of aristocratic concepts by intellectuals in the early 20th century. My research applies interdisciplinary approaches to German intellectual history in the 19th and 20th century, including the history of concepts, *lieux de mémoire*, the study of intellectual networks, and the history of racism and antisemitism. My teaching interests extend to contemporary German culture and literature and German language teaching.

I grew up in West Berlin. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, I began discovering Eastern Europe during extensive travel and through cultural and academic exchange. I taught German language and literature in Poland at Wroclaw University in 2001-2002 and from 2007-2010 in Yerevan, Armenia at both the State Linguistic University and the French University. I draw great inspiration from teaching and find that discussing texts and ideas with students often gives me new, productive points of view. In fall 2014, I will teach the course "Introduction to German Literature II" (GER305H).

In 2007, I also joined the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), first as director of the Armenian office in Yerevan and beginning in 2010 at the head office in Bonn. While in Toronto, I will not only be teaching but also serve as Director of the DAAD Information Centre for Canada, which promotes study and research in Germany and provides information about funding opportunities for such activities. Having personally experienced how enriching cultural exchange can be, I am looking forward to sharing my knowledge with students and faculty in Toronto and across Canada.

Expanding Opportunities for Undergraduate Research

Christine Lehleiter, Assistant Professor of German & Associate Chair of Undergraduate Studies

Opportunities to conduct research independently or in collaboration with a faculty member count among the most exciting experiences available to our undergraduate students. This year, several presented their research at the *4th Undergraduate Colloquium in German Studies*. The conference was co-organized together with our partners from the University of Waterloo and from the Goethe Institut Toronto. The call for paper proposals on any aspect of German Studies, be it language, literature, culture, film, or language education, attracted submissions from all over Canada and even from the U.S. Following a rigorous assessment process, twelve undergraduates were invited to Toronto, where they presented on such diverse topics as: animal imagery in 20th century German literature, scent as humanity's spiritual essence in Patrick Süskind's *Parfum*, and the influence of the Germanic heroic tradition on Karl May's *Winnetou*. Particularly impressive was the high level of professionalism, as students argued convincingly, presented calmly, and engaged questions from the audience with great enthusiasm. For generous funding in support of this initiative we

credit the Goethe-Institut, CERES, the Munk School of Global Affairs, the Waterloo Centre for German Studies, and our own Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures.

This year, the *German Studies Students' Union* (GSSU) at the University of Toronto also launched a new journal for undergraduate research under the name *Zeitgeist*. The first of its kind in our Department, it was conceived as a forum for intellectual engagement often first ignited in the classroom, but certainly also extending beyond it. Students from disciplines across campus can gain valuable experience by submitting their work to the journal or getting involved in the editorial process. The journal provides an excellent platform for students aiming to pursue graduate studies, or more immediate professional careers; rhetorical skills and agility in developing a clear and concise argument are, for example, coveted in managerial settings involving tight budgets and short delivery timelines. We are particularly proud that the GSSU's application for funding from the *Dean's Student Initiative Fund* was successful. Congratulations!

"WHY GERMAN STUDIES, OF ALL PROGRAMS?!"



This question—sometimes accompanied by a look of bewilderment—is often posed when people hear that I completed my undergraduate studies as a German specialist. Even as I explain to them the benefits and joys of learning a foreign language and studying Germany's rich history and culture, I realize they do not truly understand. I mean, how could they? They were not there when I and my classmates learned to formulate our first sentences in German or when we finally mastered the Art of Adjective Endings. They were not there as we scrawled notes and question marks all over our copies of Kafka's *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*) or laughed at the jokes and stereotypes during a screening of *Almanya: Willkommen in Deutschland* (*Almanya: Welcome to Germany*)—without subtitles! Most importantly, they do not know about the professors who constantly challenged and encouraged us, nor about the friendships forged with classmates while we spent countless nights editing papers and studying for exams. Put simply, they cannot grasp

how amazing and rewarding my experience has been because they have not been a German Studies specialist at the University of Toronto.

Here, I was not just another student; I was Jennifer, the girl who began learning German in order to study music in Vienna. My professors were not just people who graded my work, they were also my mentors and friends, who did everything in their power to help and guide me. Additionally, my classes in the department were much smaller, enabling me to actively participate in discussions, and as a result, significantly improve my spoken German.

I am now pursuing an M.A. in Child Study and Education at OISE and hope to one day teach in Germany. It is hard to believe that only a few years earlier, I could not speak a single word of the language! What I take away from this experience is not just the ability to communicate, to critically read texts or to write analytic essays; I walk away with the proud knowledge that through dedication and hard work, I was able to accomplish what I never would have thought possible.

— Jennifer Mak

New Staff Joins Department with Skills in Internship Placement

Helena Juenger, Senior Secretary & Graduate Assistant



When I started this new post last November, my first weeks were spent shadowing senior secretary Monika Lang, who retired in December. She always had a ready answer to all my questions about the diverse responsibilities involved – thank you, Monika! I now look forward to each new day here in Odette Hall—it's a great joy to work with such nice and motivated colleagues.

My background includes a Master of Education degree in English and Spanish and a broad range of international experience, in both academic and professional settings. My curiosity about the world and my desire to learn new things has led to work experience in student advising, internship coordination, project management and administration gained in positions at the University of Münster, For Fair Education e.V., Apple Computers Inc., teaching internships, and the Canadian German

Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Toronto.

In my current role, I assist the Chair in his work, administer the website, and am the first contact for our graduate students. I coordinated the conversion of our seminar library to an A/V classroom, and continue to assist members of the Department with organizing scholarly events, many of which take place in this newly upgraded space. My next goal is to build a network of opportunities for our students to put their German language skills into action and gather hands-on experience with German culture. Ideally, students would gain such experience in Germany, but this option may not be accessible for everyone. That is why we want to establish connections with German companies, organizations and institutions in the GTA interested in recruiting students for internships. To learn more about this growing network or to host one of our students as an intern, please contact me directly at 416-926-2321 or helena.juenger@utoronto.ca. I look forward to hearing from you!

Stefan Soldovieri, Associate Professor of German & Associate Chair of Graduate Studies

Amidst thesis research in Germany, comprehensive exams, and giving lectures in Canada and abroad, our students continue to be successful in winning Ontario Graduate Fellowships and research funding from the Joint Initiative in German and European Studies, Connaught Foundation, Faculty of Arts & Science, School of Graduate Studies and a number of other organizations. Congratulations to Yasmin Aly, Marlo Burks, Ermelinda Luzi, Will Ohm, Anna Stainton, Teresa Sudenis, Andrew Warren, and all of our other grant-holders. I am pleased to report that Meaghan Hepburn brilliantly defended her PhD thesis on the cultural memory of the Nazi's T4 Euthanasia Programme and will continue in her position as Assistant Professor of German at the University of New Brunswick.

A highlight of the year for me and the rest of our graduate faculty was the team-taught seminar, Topics in Contemporary German Literature, which focussed on women writers. With guest sessions led

by Prof. Carrie Smith Prei (University of Alberta), Dr. Hang-Sun Kim, and advanced graduate students, the seminar spurred lively discussions on texts by Herta Müller, Ermine Özdamar, Marlene Streeruwitz, Yoko Tawada, Juli Zeh, and others.

We are particularly pleased about the successful first year of our new MA in Yiddish Studies, the only program of its kind in Canada and a model for North American Yiddish Studies in its dedication to exploring questions of diaspora, transnationalism, and the politics of 'minor literatures.' Prof. Anna Shternshis has been working to strengthen this new emphasis and foster links between graduate streams in the Department.

In the coming year, we again welcome a promising and enthusiastic group of new graduate students, whose intellectual interests reflect the research strengths of our distinguished faculty at the interfaces of literature, philosophy, cinema studies, and postcolonial/colonial studies.

SOLVING RIDDLES IN THE GERMAN DRAMA CLUB



This year the German Drama Club elected to perform *Turandot*, adapted by Willie Poll from the play of the same name published in 1802 by Friedrich Schiller, who based his work on a Persian tale in the collection *Les Mille et un Jours* (1710-1712) by François Pétis de la Croix. The story offers a highly accessible and fun mixture of drama and comedy and even includes a few Goethe poems.

It is set in China, and recounts how Prince Kalaf experiences love at first sight when he encounters Princess Turandot. She agrees to marry him on the condition that he successfully solve three riddles posed to him. The task is challenging indeed, for if he fails, he will be beheaded like a long succession of princes previously stumped (as it were) by the three riddles.

Turandot was staged in the Debate Room at Hart House, with two evening performances on April 4 and 5, 2014 each drawing a full house. The event would not have been possible without the extraordinary commitment of our amazing cast of 15 actors, comprised of both native and non-native German speakers. It was a pleasure to see their characters develop with ever more conviction with each successive rehearsal.

We thank everyone who helped us make this play a success, especially the units who provided financial support, including the Departments of German and of French, the Drama Centre, and the Centre for Comparative Literature. We can hardly wait to see what the German Drama Club has in store next year!

— Janick Boulerice and
Arathana Bowes

Autobiographical Turns and the Medial Self

Angelica Fenner, Associate Professor of German & Cinema Studies



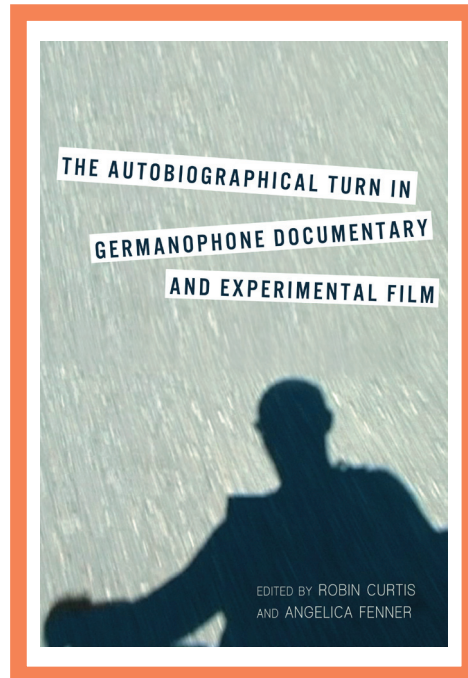
Increasingly, digital technologies shape our interpersonal relationships as much as they do our sense of a coherent self. While creating provisional community across time and space, they also render us mediated subjects of a wider screen culture that is hemorrhaging conventional divisions between personal and public spheres. By interfacing so closely with our everyday habits and patterns of perception, these technologies have also led to a heightened subjectivity in contemporary filmmaking practices, particularly in the genre of personal documentary. Yet that trend is emerging at an uneven pace within different national cultures, reflective of varying levels of receptivity towards the intimacy, even narcissism, often attributed this format.

The essay collection *The Autobiographical Turn in Germanophone Documentary and Experimental Film* (Camden House Press, 2014), co-edited by Robin Curtis and Angelica Fenner, addresses these developments with attention to the specificities of medium, culture, and national history. Although the impulse toward self-documentation was already discernible in the 1960s in the experimental film movement that coalesced around Birgit and Wilhelm Hein, ensuing directors of the New German Cinema, such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Wim Wenders, and Helke Sander, also often interwove the roles of author, narrator, and film protagonist in their self-reflexive interrogations of post-Holocaust society. In the 21st century, by contrast, adult children and grandchildren both of Nazi perpetrators and survivors alike broach the documentary camera as an empathetic psychoanalytical stimulant, one coaxing forth repressed memories and capturing fragments of testimony for posterity. Another strand of 'family films,' those by second-generation filmmakers of immigrant descent such as Fatih Akin, produce counter-memories that reframe German

national history as also encompassing a history of immigration. In turn, recent essayistic films by Sylvia Schedelbauer, Kate Hers, and Hito Steyerl, ponder the extent to which nation-states and culture industries alike collude in promoting mythologies of a unified national subject; they critically reflect upon the terms of participation in monolingual communities grounded in the illusion of cultural homogeneity and unified historical memory.

The conceptual introduction to this scholarly volume approaches the autobiographical as a mode recognized, indeed, produced at the site of its reception; across different epochs, consensus regarding the parameters of the textual self has evolved considerably amidst changing media. The confessional religious writing of St. Augustine, for example, was only retrospectively recognized as autobiographical, as were women's epistolary writings of the 18th and 19th centuries and the East German prose of Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*. Today, we also find this trait in contemporary performative documentaries whose makers occupy the film frame or audio track and assume a subjective stance towards events unfolding before the camera. Even films not demarcated by their authors or by critics as autobiographical may betray moments of self-inscription and glimpses into quotidian personal realities and collective memories rich in cultural and historical significance.

As a publication, *The Autobiographical Turn* first gained impetus several years ago from a gathering of local and international scholars recruited to campus for the first edition of the U of T German Studies Symposium. Hosted annually in April by the German Department with additional funding from the Faculty of Arts & Science and related units and centres, the 2015 symposium will explore the topic "Global Yiddish Culture 1938 to 1948" under the coordination of Professors Anna Shternshis (Yiddish and Diaspora Studies), Doris Bergen (Holocaust Studies) and Jeffrey Kopstein (Political Science and Jewish Studies).





ACOUSTIC PHENOMENA AND SPACE

Before enrolling in the Ph.D. program in 2008, I pursued coursework in medieval German language and literature, comparative literature, and religious studies at the Universities of Tübingen and Strasbourg. I then went on to earn my M.A. in modern German literature from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. At the U of T, I found a stimulating intellectual environment for my ongoing interest in medieval studies. Initially, it was the sound of the Middle and Old High German languages—intriguingly foreign and familiar at the same time—that attracted me. Later I also became fascinated with the inherent interdisciplinarity, inextricably linking cognate fields such as religious studies, theology, history, and art history.

Both these facets now figure prominently in my doctoral research on spatial practices and acoustic phenomena in mystical writings and monastic culture

of the late Middle Ages. I investigate the performative and medial aspects of such sounds as bells, angelic singing, and ecstatic songs and utterances with regard to how they deliberately produce and stage coexisting spaces. While medieval space has sometimes been conceived as a rigid space of localization, my thesis expands the current focus on visibility to also encompass the auditory field, and contributes to a more accurate conceptualization of the historical foundations of space and place. Financial support from JIGES, SGS, and the FAS Germany/Europe Fund enabled me to view medieval manuscripts in Germany in summer 2011, and pursue research for 8 months at the University of Freiburg in 2012. I greatly benefitted from the exchange with both junior and senior scholars, especially Professor Burkhard Hasebrink, renowned scholar in medieval mysticism and religious culture. With Prof. Markus Stock I recently completed the co-edited volume *Spatial Practices—Medieval/Modern*, forthcoming in Fall 2014, and this summer I attended the *Mittelalterforum* of the *Freie Universität* Berlin to deliver a paper on the mediality and (spatial) function of liturgical chants in mystical texts.

— Nicola Vöhringer

Summary of 7th Annual German Studies Symposium, April 11-12, 2014

SPECTERS OF THE OTHER GERMANY: 24 YEARS AFTER THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

Aleksandra Pomiecko, Doctoral Candidate, Department of History

Organized by Stefan Soldovieri, this year's symposium brought together scholars from North America and across disciplines. The papers delivered on three panels resulted in discussions that adopted the notion of "specters" manifested through geopolitical frames, literature and memory, and the redefinition of spaces to highlight current understanding and interpretation of the "other" Germany.

German Consulate General Walter Stechel opened the conference with a discussion of this "other" Germany – an "unexplained" part of history and memory still "difficult to understand." Drawing from personal experience and popular cultural conceptions, his opening observations brought to light our continued limited understanding of this region. Amidst this twenty-fifth anniversary year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, this gathering of historians, anthropologists, and literary and cultural scholars demonstrated the need to both individually and collectively reexamine East German Studies,

while acknowledging the problem of approaching it in a professional and balanced manner. What filters can we use to both illuminate certain aspects of East Germany without ignoring other larger trends? How transnational should research on East Germany be, without forgetting some of the details specifically unique to the region? How can we better untangle some of these intricacies and delicate subjects such as memory, identity, and politics? These were some of the questions and topic points that emerged in the papers and from the three panels and ensuing discussion. The event included a screening and ensuing discussion of Konrad Wolf's *Professor Mamlock* (1961), which recently premiered in North America as a re-edited DVD release.

Sponsored by the Dept. of Germanic Languages and Literatures, the Center for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, Faculty of Arts & Science, and the DEFA Film Library. Full report at www.german.utoronto.ca



GERMAN LITERATURE THE VIEW FROM TORONTO

When people learn where I was born and raised, and what I am studying at UofT, this almost invariably results in the following question: why would a German national study German literature in Canada? Since I am asked this question quite frequently, I have continuously refined my answer, and the one that I now use the most is that *you cannot admire the mountain from its peak*. I like this answer partly because, besides being illustrative, it is also brief. After all, most of them are not seeking a comprehensive account of the reasons that lead me here. But what makes this line more than a sparkling but shallow cliché is that, despite its brevity, it does capture those reasons.

I seriously doubt that I would have discovered the love for German classics that fuels my work if I had not left Germany, if I had not come to Canada, and if I had not entered the undergraduate program at UofT in particular. Like their cousins over here, German high schools — despite best intentions — are remarkably proficient at training students to loathe canonical authors or, at best, to regard them with indifference. I was one of those teenagers, and when I left Germany, the last thing I expected was to become a professional student of the likes of Goethe and Heine.

Leaping forward by a decade, I find myself sitting here in Odette Hall surrounded by books that share their beauty and profundity with me freely. What change occurred in those years that opened my eyes to these great works of thought and imagination? It is not the books I read — they are the same. It is how I read. The great gift that my education at UofT gave me was to undo the inevitable narrowing and dulling of thought that results from habitual exposure. Having wandered into an undergraduate course in German literature out of curiosity, I was astonished to discover what the distance from Germany and

the fresh view from Canada could do to these books: together, we pulled back the drapes, swept away the dust, and discovered these books in their true splendour. A third year undergraduate in History at the time, I was quickly converted to the study of literature.

But having recognized how important it is to think about how we read, my appetite was far from satisfied. In the years following graduation, I continued to think about other methods to more fully exploring the books I loved, methods that might also be useful for other readers. These interests eventually lead me back to UofT's German Department when I discovered in the writings of and about Goethe a particularly rich source of ideas about the purposes and practices of reading. This is the object of my research. I want to find out how great readers like Goethe read—about what they did when they entered a book. Even in these early stages of my research, I can tell that the insights to be gained are fascinating, both in their own right, and as guidelines for our work as teachers of literature.

I would, however, not have been able to afford even this first step without the generous financial support from the university and our donors. The graduate student funding package and the Katie Keeler entrance scholarship—one of several endowed scholarships extended to students—enabled me to support myself in my first year of study while I also applied for other major fellowships. I am glad to announce that I have won an Ontario Graduate Scholarship for the next year of my studies and research. Thanks to this generous assistance, I will be able to continue to study the art of reading, and, hopefully, become a better guide for others who wish to discover for themselves the special beauty and continuing relevance of German literature.

—William Ohm

SPECIAL NOTE Canadians who haven't claimed a donation tax credit since 2007 can take advantage of the new First-Time Donors Super Credit. For your donation of \$200 and under, you are eligible for a tax credit of 40% and for your donation of \$201 to \$1,000, you are eligible for a tax credit of 54%.

Please consider this benefit when making your gift to the **Hermann Boeschstein Memorial Fellowship in German**. Your gift postmarked before December 31, 2014 will be eligible for a 2014 income tax receipt.

Creating a Legacy for Future Generations

Angelica Fenner, Associate Professor of German & Cinema Studies



Photo: Mark Tearle

When Joan Andersen enrolled at the University of Toronto in the 1970s, she became the recipient of an undergraduate scholarship sponsored by Dr. Irwin Hilliard, a local medical practitioner. That award fully financed her studies in German and French literature under the stipulation that she maintain a GPA of 80% or higher in each year of study. Joan recalls meeting her sponsor in person while still a student and wondering whether and how she might some day pay forward his generosity. Now a mentor to a new generation of German students and a donor profiled in last year's newsletter, Joan recently also included the Department in her will. She shares her experience with this process to assist others in exploring ways to create a meaningful legacy.

"Drafting a will," she explains, "is the cornerstone of estate planning— it sets forth how you wish to allocate your money, personal effects, real estate, investments, and insurance amongst your heirs." It is not uncommon for people to postpone this step to avoid confronting their own mortality and important decisions about the dispensation of assets among surviving family, friends, institutions and charities. In what Joan aptly describes as "a society conditioned to be reactive rather than pro-active," it sometimes takes a life-changing emotional event, such as the loss of a family member, to bring home the importance of drafting a will. Survivors may otherwise be confronted with the tragic consequences of having provincial probate courts decide how the estate will be divided among heirs, which may not reflect the wishes of the recently departed. This can also create misunderstanding among surviving family and incur substantial legal and tax expenses for them.

To ensure that you are, as she puts it, "in the driver's seat rather than a mere passenger, not only of life but of your legacy," it is crucial to confer with a lawyer and a financial advisor or investment banker. Many banks provide financial counsel free of charge, and draft wills codified according to Ontario legislation are also available on the Internet to get you started. You may not feel financially equipped to give anything to the charity of your choice just now,

while still pursuing the fulfillment of your dreams, including enjoying a secure retirement. But through estate planning, you can ensure your assets generate a legacy that lives on indefinitely. A will should also be revisited with every significant change in life circumstances, including death of an heir, marriage or divorce, transfer of property, or onset of serious illness. If you'd like to make provisions to support the education of future generations with regard to 'all things German,' please contact Development Officer Jacob Wesolowski (jacob.wesolowski@utoronto.ca or 416-978-2722) in the Office of Advancement. He can help you develop wording that is as specific as possible with regard to how you wish that funding to be implemented: for example, in form of a named scholarship or support for annual events such as symposia or guest speakers.

SELECTED EVENTS

September 4, 2014

Lecture: "Paläste der Zerstreuung"

Kino zwischen Unterhaltung und Wahrnehmungstraining

Dr. Petra Löffler

Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

October 2-3, 2014

Stanford-Berkeley-Princeton-Toronto **Medieval German Studies Symposium**

Dept. of Germanic Languages & Literatures, University of Toronto

October 2, 2014, 4pm

Lecture: Mechthild of Magdeburg's Experimental Style

Niklaus Largier, Sidney and Margaret Ancker Chair in the Humanities University of California, Berkeley

April 20-21, 2015

"Global Yiddish Culture 1938 to 1948"

8th Annual Symposium of the Dept. of Germanic Languages & Literatures

University of Toronto

For more events visit our website: www.german.utoronto.ca

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