

Guest Lectures in October and November 2015:

29 October 2015, 16:30–18:00. Attemsgasse 25, HS 34.K1

Charles Sealsfield: The Man and His Letters

Dr. Nicole Perry (University of Vienna / University of Auckland)

Charles Sealsfield, the nom de plume of Karl Postl (1793-1864) was a Moravian priest, who fled Prague for America, where he eventually became known as “The Greatest American Author.” Recognized for his insightful and captivating writings about America in both English and German, his true identity was only discovered after his death and his works have fallen into relative obscurity. Perhaps even more intriguing than his literary oeuvre are his biography and letters. Sealsfield burned the majority of his letters, but what remains paints the picture of a complicated and fascinating man. This lecture will provide insights into Sealsfield’s life and times, and into the intriguing process of moving from archival research to editing his letters.

9 November 2015, 16:30–18:00. Attemsgasse 25, 34.D2

Racial Stereotypes in Black Comics: A Media-Conscious Historical Survey

Prof. Dr. Daniel Stein (University of Siegen)

The history of U.S. American comics is fraught with stereotypical images of black American. As such, comics are not altogether different from radio, film, and other media that derived a substantial portion of their early content from comical depictions of the nation’s allegedly racially inferior folk. Part of this intense investment with racial stock figures and their powers as popular stereotypes can be traced back to blackface minstrelsy, which constituted one of the hallmarks of American popular culture in the nineteenth century. Yet despite frequent cross- and transmedia influences, each of these media has developed its own means of rendering race and ethnicity, with comics as a visual-verbal medium composed of sequential still images producing a very particular history of racialized images and narratives. This talk will offer a historical account of key forms and functions of racial stereotypes in black comics, focusing specifically on the medial affordances, limitations, and peculiarities of the comics medium from the late nineteenth-century until today.

11 November 2015, 11:45–13:15. Attemsgasse 25, SR 34.D2

The Droning of the Commodity: The Political Impact of the *Velvet Underground*

Prof. Dr. Barry Shank (Ohio State University)

This paper will explore a new formation of the political in the field of popular music. This formation was first articulated as a new popular music aesthetic of noise and aggression that directed its attack against the market as a definer of success. This musical aesthetic was agentive in the construction of a “restricted field of cultural production,” which is Bourdieu’s term for a group of artists who produce for other artists and the prestige they can convey, not directly for a market of consumers and the cash they provide. But this restricted field was not the mere reproduction of an avant-garde within the popular, mimicking the efforts of “downtown” composers to transform the means of production of music. It was a specific intervention into the field of popular music. The chief function of “Heroin” and other early works by the Velvet Underground was to challenge the relationship of popular music to the market, to instantiate an alternative process of value production and thereby to create the space for a politics of dis-identification from the popular mainstream.

