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INGEBORG BACHMANN CENTRE  
FOR AUSTRIAN LITERATURE & CULTURE

## AUSTRIA IN TRANSIT: DISPLACEMENT AND THE NATION STATE

31 August-2 September 2017 – Department of German, King's College London

The international workshop 'Austria in Transit: Displacement and the Nation State' will be held at King's College London from Thursday 31 August - Saturday 2 September 2017. The workshop examines cultural responses to issues of transit and the place of the nation state in an era of mass international displacement. Its contributions will focus on responses to the current refugee crisis, as well as those which offer a historical or comparative perspective on questions of human displacement and mass migration in the Austrian context.

Selected papers will be published in the twenty-sixth issue of the journal *Austrian Studies*. *Austrian Studies* is a peer-reviewed yearbook published in English under the auspices of the Modern Humanities Research Association. It adheres to the MHRA style guidelines ([www.mhra.org.uk](http://www.mhra.org.uk)); the word length for articles is typically 6,500. Workshop papers should be no longer than 20 minutes; the languages for the workshop are English and German.

An extensive public programme of film screenings and discussions has been planned alongside the academic sessions. We will be joined by the prizewinning filmmakers Jakob Brossmann (*Lampedusa in Winter* 2014) and Nina Kusturica (*Little Alien* 2009), as well as the acclaimed composer Thomas Larcher, for public events at King's and the Institute of Contemporary Arts. There will be a further 'sneak preview' film screening and discussion for conference participants on the final evening.

To register for the workshop, please email: [iga.nowicz@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:iga.nowicz@kcl.ac.uk)

Please contact the organisers with any questions:  
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According to UN estimates, 600,000 people passed through Austria between September and December 2015 on their way to seek asylum in Europe. Situated between Europe's two major refugee routes through the Balkans and Italy respectively, Austria received around 90,000 asylum requests in 2015, the third highest number of applications per capita after Hungary and Sweden. After initially working closely with Germany to welcome refugees, the country rapidly began to pursue a more restrictive asylum policy, proposing stronger border controls and caps on numbers of asylum applications. Spring 2016 saw international controversy, as the Austrian Ministry of the Interior funded an advertising campaign in Afghanistan that sought to deter would-be asylum seekers and high-profile politicians expressed support for building a fence to seal the border with Italy. The polarisation of public debate ultimately led to an internal political crisis that brought the resignation of Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann in May 2016 and ongoing contestation of the Austrian presidency by far-right Freedom party (FPÖ) candidate Norbert Hofer. The nationalistic tenor of much campaign rhetoric has provoked comparisons with events in the country during the 1980s, when anti-immigrationist rhetoric was rife with the rise of Jörg Haider and the FPÖ. Literary scholars have outlined how, during the 1990s, this situation gave rise to a wave of works that 'thematize issues of social and racial integration' (Fiddler 2006) with Austrian publishers beginning to show an interest in authors from refugee backgrounds who were expressing 'opposition to mechanisms of political and cultural exclusion' (Sievers 2008). Twenty years on, this conference will offer an appraisal of Austrian cultural responses to eras of mass displacement - including, but not limited to, the most recent wave of refugees. We take up the call of *Literature on the Move*, a major research project on the literature of migration funded by the Vienna Science and Technology Fund (WWTF) and based at the Austrian Academy of Sciences from 2013-16 (Sievers et al., 2011), to devise methods of combining sociological and aesthetic approaches in assessing transnationalizing tendencies in contemporary Austrian writing. Comparison of Austrian and German responses to the refugee crisis will enable contemporary reality and Austria's historical legacy as a *Vielvölkerstaat* to be examined, as we consider the ongoing commitment of NGOs, charities and private initiatives in supporting and welcoming refugees, often with little or no help from the state. The Refugee Protest Camp Vienna offers a further landmark case that succeeded in drawing together a wide range of actors and activists to partially mobilize sections of the general public otherwise uninvolved with the refugee movement (Mokre 2015). Focusing on historical and contemporary debates and representations, the nation's

place and self-understanding will be assessed in a Europe caught between loudly proclaimed humanitarian tradition on the one hand, and the rush to protect its borders on the other.

Contemplating seismic political and territorial shifts in her Klagenfurter Rede zur Literatur [Klagenfurt Address on Literature] of 2014, the Austro-Slovenian author Maja Haderlap insisted on the imperative to speak from the periphery in an age of high-speed global technology, since it is on the margins that upheavals and ruptures are perceptible in society, politics and culture. By examining cultural engagements with human displacement in literature, cinema, performance and the visual arts, the conference will contemplate the possibilities offered by the arts in helping to document and communicate geopolitical experiences of persecution and transit in this central European space. We seek to build on existing intercultural readings of Austrian texts (Shafi 2001; Bürger-Koftis 2010; Schweiger 2012; Prutti 2014; Vlasta 2015), and a key focus will be on issues of linguistic displacement, multilingualism and translation in the context of Austria's disputed language borders. Here, we follow Maja Haderlap in paying attention to the political circumstances of a writer's shift into another language, to linguistic histories and power relations, and the extent to which any decision for or against a language is always inscribed in a societal and political process. We invite contributions from researchers working on issues of transit and displacement from literary, cultural, musical, historical and interdisciplinary perspectives, as well as more specifically on works by authors, artists and filmmakers who came to Austria as refugees, including (but not limited to) Vladimir Vertlib from Russia, Dimitré Dinev from Bulgaria, Nina Kusturica from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Hamid Sadr from Iran. We are also keen to receive submissions on cultural infrastructures in Austria, such as publishing houses, professional networks and literary prizes for displaced writers and artists, and on political initiatives and activism in the cultural domain. The action *Ausländer raus! Schlingensiefs Container* (2000) by the performance artist and director Christoph Schlingensiefel and the writings and articles of Peter Waterhouse, Julya Rabinowich and Stefanie Sargnagel, for example, offer trenchant interventions on the role of the media and forms of language in public debates on immigration.

Echoing Lyndsey Stonebridge's call for 'an interpretation of modern literature that focuses on the type of subjectivity that emerges in the cracks between nation states' (Stonebridge 2015), we encourage contributions which examine such issues as the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, as found in the writings of Viktorija Kocman and Alma Hadžibeganović, or contemporary migration in the Mediterranean, as treated in films by Ruth Beckermann (*Those who go those who stay*, 2013) and Jakob Brossmann (*Lampedusa im Winter*, 2015).

Papers might also examine Austrian spaces of detainment and settlement, for example the Traiskirchen Refugee Camp in Lower Austria and the Macondo housing project in Vienna, treated in recent works by novelist Daniel Zipfel (*Eine Handvoll Rosinen*, 2015) and filmmaker Sudabeh Mortezaei (*Macondo*, 2014). We set out to consider how aesthetic engagements serve as points of contrast with and critique of broader media discourse on refugees and immigrants, an issue central to *Die Schutzbefohlenen* (2013/16), a play by Nobel Prize winning author Elfriede Jelinek and in short prose by Anna Weidenholzer (*Der Platz des Hundes*, 2010), as well as in the films of Ulrich Seidl (*Good News*, 1990; *Import/Export*, 2007). We wish to explore how aesthetic modes offer a means of testimony by rendering visible people and experiences that are excluded by – and from – the dominant culture, as thematized in Michael Köhlmeier's *Das Mädchen mit dem Fingerhut* (2016) and Carlos Peter Reinelt's *Willkommen und Abschied* (2016). We thus invite further contributions that focus on the gender and sexual politics of displacement, as for example treated in the writings of Julya Rabinowich (*Spaltkopf*, 2008; *Die Erdfresserin*, 2012; *Dazwischen: Ich*, 2016), Susanne Scholl (*Emma schweigt*, 2014), Semier Insayif (*Faruq*, 2009), Katharina Winkler (*Blauschmuck*, 2016), Anna Mitgutsch (*Die Annäherung*, 2016) and Seher Çakır (*Zitronenkuchen für die 56. Frau*, 2009; *Ich bin das Festland*, 2012). As such, our concern is to analyze to what extent cultural engagements can shift subject positions by holding forms of language and discourse to account for their forced exclusions. As Europe surveys a new era of mass migration with rising levels of nationalism and xenophobia right across the continent, our concern is to offer case studies from the Austrian context whose critical aesthetic potential might help enable some wider transformation of the terms in which we – as a culture – conceive human displacement.