



THE AMERICAN
ACADEMY IN BERLIN
HANS ARNHOLD CENTER

The Fall 2017 Fellows Presentation

OPENING REMARKS BY MICHAEL P. STEINBERG

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Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

Einen schönen guten Abend, meine Damen und Herren, und heißen Sie herzlich willkommen zu unsere Fellows Presentation.

Welcome to the presentation of the Fall 2017 fellows of the American Academy in Berlin.

It is a special pleasure to welcome our distinguished guests and friends, including

Excellencies

Members of Government

Trustees Hans Michael Giesen, John Kornblum, Volker Schlöndorff, and, especially, Kati Marton, who has a second capacity as Writer-in-Residence this semester. It is also a pleasure to acknowledge our founding executive director, Gary Smith, and former Dean of Fellows Pamela Rosenberg. Our board chair, Gahl Burt, couldn't be here tonight; Gahl, I assume you are or will be watching. We miss you and feel your presence and inestimable contribution.

It's a pleasure for me to work every day with Academy colleagues, all of whom help to build an event such as this one, whether they are on camera or off. Since this evening is about our fellows, permit me to single out especially Carol Scherer and Johana Gallup, who managed the selection process that yielded this cohort.

Most of all, welcome officially, Class of Fall 2017. You are our thirty-ninth cohort of fellows, marking the start of the twentieth year of our fellowship program.

If this greeting sounds to you similar to a greeting of a freshman class, this is because there are similarities. Let me assure of you—the Class of F’17—of three things:

1. You are all gifted and unique, selected painstakingly from a pool of some 300 applicants.
2. You will have a great stay here, and the time will go by faster than you think.
3. Our retention and graduation rates are the best in the business.

As we introduce you to a wide circle of Berlin friends of the Academy, we also introduce an exciting academic year, to be highlighted by your lectures, by the presence and presentations of numerous Distinguished Visitors in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and public policy; by programs in Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Hamburg, and Tallinn, in addition, of course, to Berlin; to Richard C. Holbrooke fora on diplomacy in the Balkans, past and present, and on the new digital diplomacy; to a symposium on the New Global Europe, in conjunction with the presence of the international board of the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes. More broadly, we have identified a series of key themes that will inflect conversation within the American Academy and, increasingly, with partners in Berlin and beyond, beginning with “Migration and Integration” and continuing with “Race in Comparative Perspective” and “Exile and Return.” We are launching an initiative on digitalization, including, but not limited to, the Holbrooke Forum, and are looking forward to expanding our programming on this and other issues to locations in the United States through a series of colloquia led by some of our most distinguished alumni.

Excitement is the partner of expectation, and it is clear to all of us in the Hans Arnhold Center as well as to our associates and friends in Germany, the United States and indeed around the world, that more is expected of us than ever. Our central mission and the vision of our founders—the sustenance and enhancement of transatlantic dialogue and cooperation through multiple academic disciplines and creative as well as political practices—has entered a period of fragility and anxiety.

As you know, the American Academy in Berlin is an independent, non-partisan, and privately funded institution. Essentially, it is an academy. As an academy, it rests on basic principles. We are here to build knowledge, the knowledge associated with curation and the transmission of archives

and traditions, and the knowledge of innovation, discovery, originality, novelty. Knowledge and its applications cannot happen without the basic integrity of the *fact*—including what Emile Durkheim called the *social fact*. There is no such thing as an alternative fact. Facts enable the development of counting and reading, of observation and explanation (categories familiar to the natural and social sciences), and of translation and interpretation (as familiar to the humanities and the arts).

Second, knowledge is live being and must therefore be shared, disseminated, rendered subject to critique and self-critique, revision, and, as Max Weber poignantly wrote, exactly 100 years ago, capable of encouraging its own obsolescence. Knowledge cannot exist without education. Perhaps the greatest achievements of modern higher education in the United States have been, first, its integration of teaching and research—in other words, the inclusion of students as apprentices in the making of new knowledge, and, second, the diversification of student populations, including generations of immigrant communities as well as the slow and ever challenging recognition of domestic diversity and inclusion. To cite a trope that became especially well known in this city almost 20 years ago, education is for the *Bevölkerung* rather than for the *Volk*.

These days, we American scholars are intensely worried about the survival of these principles, which are suddenly in far greater danger than anyone thought possible. We have become somewhat inured, in the United States, to politically motivated attacks on science, on climate change, and on the arts and the humanities. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, to cite Richard Hofstadter's famous title of 1963, is nothing new. In the same way, we know that our social fabric is easily torn by racial violence, beginning with slavery and its legacies. But we are not inured to the normalization of such violence by the highest elected officials. After Brexit, after the Hungarian government attack on the Central European University in Budapest—to mention just two examples—we know that we share these dangers with more European interlocutors than we did even a year ago, and we know that transatlantic and indeed global solidarities are required in order to move forward with both the curatorial and innovational dimensions of knowledge-making in all areas.

Faced with these challenges, ladies and gentlemen, the American Academy punches well above its weight, as our colleague Gahl Burt likes to say. My own bond with the American Academy began with my

fellowship semester in the fall of 2003. I recall “my” fellows presentation very well. [One of my classmates, Wendy Lesser, is here tonight.] For many of us, Germany in 2003 was not only post-Wall, but also still post-war. Things are profoundly different now. I know that, for many people, a kind of second “Wende” took place between 2004 and 2006, understood as the normalization of national identity and channeled largely through football championships. I tend to place emphases elsewhere, largely in the growth of Germany’s self-understanding as an international and, indeed global, player. Coming back in 2016, I came to a Germany that had switched places with the United States as a responder to the global migration crisis, as a society in which public debates and civil-society initiatives about the constitution of society are difficult, often painful, and fundamentally healthy. It has been riveting to see how politics lives in culture, to read, for example, the intense debates around the new directorship of the *Volksbühne* and its transformation from a theater of the *Volk*—in the many valences of the word—to a theater of the *Bevölkerung*. It was fascinating to hear Ivan Krastev—a few weeks ago at the Hertie School of Governance—refer to international education a hedge against “intellectual protectionism,” and it was equally fascinating, just two evenings ago, to hear *Bundespräsident* Steinmeier host a panel on the future of democracy and observe that current debates about cultural identity begin with the assumption of the reality multi-cultural identity. If the American Academy brings to Berlin the best minds the United States has to offer—a claim I believe you will see justified in a few minutes—we also crave the kinds of negotiating space that contemporary Germany, and especially the city of Berlin, have to offer.

Such is also the legacy of this house, which has emerged from the most difficult German century as a beacon with such remarkable dignity and generosity.

Ladies and Gentlemen: it is now my pleasure to welcome this evening’s distinguished speaker, Professor Jutta Allmendinger.