Rediscovering America

Wolfgang Holtkamp

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New Approaches
to American Culture

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PREFACE

This book recalls five years of teaching American culture studies at the University of Stuttgart. I will always remember the spring day when one of the students walked into the office and talked about my seminar on American regions. We soon agreed that there is only one way to find out about regions—apart from reading about them—and that is to visit them and to talk to the people living there. My train of thought started wandering, and I wondered how we could get students from my seminars on excursions to the United States. Why not?

My colleagues were very skeptical when I told them that I would take a small group to the United States in the fall of 1995. We wanted to meet American students and professors and study our subject first hand. At the same time we wanted to explore the influence of American developments on Germany. The combination of American openness, intellectual curiosity, and generous sponsorship by companies from the Stuttgart region made the project possible.

This book assembles essays by some of those students and professors involved in our discovery and rediscovery of America.¹

Stuttgart, July 2001

Wolfgang Holtkamp

¹ The rights for the use of the photographs, figures, and statistics were the responsibility of the contributors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1995 we started work on the program “Exploring America,” which combined American culture studies seminars with excursions. The program was extremely successful, and thus its teacher was nominated by the student representatives (Fachschaft Anglistik) and the University of Stuttgart for a special award in teaching, the Landeslehrpreis Baden-Württemberg. With the prize came a donation that was matched over the next years by companies from the Stuttgart region. On this basis we were able to continue our work. I want to thank the students and colleagues of the English Department, the University of Stuttgart, the James F. Byrnes Institute, the Ministerium für Kunst, Kultur und Wissenschaft in Baden-Württemberg, and especially our main sponsors DaimlerChrysler AG, Kaufhof AG, the Landesbank Baden-Württemberg, and Stuttgarter Hofbräu AG for their financial support.

Between 1995 and 2000 my students and I enjoyed the hospitality of many American friends and colleagues on our excursions. Among them were Sally and Rodney French from Minneapolis, who opened their house—and their hearts for us. Their son Arthur French and his wife Kyoko introduced us to the American mid-west—and to sushi. From Arthur I have learned that the word ‘no’ does not exist in American English. (Arthur, I have been trying to exclude it from German as well.) Linda Macri and her husband Drew Debelack turned their house into a youth hostel for us, celebrated bagel-fests with us in the mornings, and toured D.C. with us at night.

We felt at home wherever we turned, and we received a lot of help. Those who were helped are:

Lia Hasenmaier, Matthias Kugler, Markus Lutz, Barbara Schreiber, Hans Sajaniemi (1995); Christine Bilger, Stefan Brecht, Jörg Schmidt, Ingo ‘Floyd’ Wenzel, Mirko Wojnowski (1997); Sebastian Altemüller, Timo Hantz, Senta Kuhnert, Claudia Seitan, Sabine Weber (1998); Jörg Bäuerle,

Stefanie Liepens, Sandra Schinagel, Ingmar Volkmann (1999); Jürgen Bock, Tina Halm, Andrea von Streit, and Hilmar Pfister (2000).

I received my inauguration to the United States as a Fulbright scholar at Brown University. I have returned to that outstanding school many times. I have enjoyed the help and advice of many friends and faculty members there, and spent many hours at the Rockefeller Library, not without the support of Marilyn Netter from the English Department and Ruth Santos from the Department of Modern Media and Culture. Margot and James Schevill, who now live in Berkeley, were my first contacts at Brown. They broadened my horizon not only by taking me to the isle of Cuttyhunk, where people say “This is not the end of the world, but you can see it from here.” I, for one, saw the beginning of the world on this special island. I wished that I could have more of Margot’s energy and Jim’s creativity. They also introduced me to Robert Scholes and his wife JoAnn Putnam-Scholes, who became first my hosts and then part of my American family. Now Barrington, Rhode Island, sounds a little bit like Brook, Mecklenburg, at least to me. Bob has given me both encouragement and assistance of a unique kind with my work and JoAnn has planted an optimism in me that will grow forever—with one exception: I will never reach her culinary wisdom.

It was Robert Scholes who strongly recommended traveling to Las Vegas and studying postmodern America at its culmination point. When I told Charles Berryman from the University of Southern California about my next adventure, he agreed to travel with me right away. We toured Las Vegas inside out—just as we had circled the hotel *New York, New York* on a roller coaster. Together with his wife Jo we explored culture upside down between theme parks and fabulous museums in Los Angeles. California is so much more than a region to me because of their friendship and hospitality.

When I started work on this program, I was a fellow at the international Stuttgart Seminar in Cultural Studies. I have especially benefited from the seminars and conversations with Neil Harris from the University of Chicago, who taught me how to analyze complex historical structures.

I want to thank Markus Lutz, who was my first program assistant, for his work and inspirations, and for having asked the question ‘Why not?’

Thomas Lamatsch met us on our excursions and put us in contact with American students and colleagues. He is now professor at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. (Thomas, one day we will all come and visit.)

Thanks to Mark Gaipa, who introduced us to Harvard University and its history.

Ruth Florack and Julika Griem from the University of Stuttgart shared many of my assumptions about culture that helped to pave the way for the program and this book.

I am also fortunate to have a wonderful colleague, Dorothea Fischer-Hornung at Heidelberg University, who read some essay drafts and offered valuable suggestions. I am looking forward to our next project, which we have already started to orchestrate under the motto ‘Let’s make things better.’

Douglas Garland read parts of the manuscript and shared his ideas in late evening discussions.

My special gratitude goes to Jörg Bäuerle and Thorsten Gutmann, who provided essential assistance and showed initiative and flexibility during our work on the manuscripts.

Barbara Gast from WHB Reisen and Holger Lutz from Rominger Reisebüro of Stuttgart were my travel agents and consultants on technical aspects of the travel business for the duration of the program. They always provided me with first-hand information. Good job.

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