

Interview mit Matchless Online Magazine
12. September 2009
<http://matchlessmagazine.de/> - Keyword „Lasky“

Christof Mauch on the Lasky Center

Written by Stefan Piterna
Saturday, 12 September 2009 09:22

He is a famous historian, environmental researcher and not least a very popular professor at the LMU: Christof Mauch. This week, he will tell us more about his latest project, the Munich based Lasky Center.

Matchless Magazine: Last year you started a new project that is also known as the Lasky Center. What is it?

Christof Mauch: This is a research project that is funded through the Excellence Initiative of Ludwig Maximilian University. It consists of a number of individual projects that have one thing in common: We are trying to explain European-American relations in the post war era. The first project deals with constructions of Europe in America, including Anti-Europeanism. We know a lot about what Europeans think about America, but we know little about how Americans perceive Europe. The second project deals with an individual, Melvin Lasky, whose biography is being written as part of this project.

MM: What is so special about this project?

CM: We're very lucky! We received from the widow of Melvin Lasky not only his enormous library with 14,000 books, but also his personal papers. We had to ship them from a little place north of Berlin to Munich, and now we have something that you could call a real Cold War Library: the library of an intellectual who was a cold war player and cold war thinker, with all the original annotations in the books, a library that works like a time warp, that takes you into the 1960's, 70's; it is something like an intellectual museum - a museum of cold war thoughts. And the books all still have their original covers!

MM: Where is it located and who is involved in this project?

CM: The Lasky Project is located at the Amerikahaus. We're lucky here as well. The

University helps us fund the project, but the space could not be offered by the University. But the Amerikahaus, and its director, Dr. Lammersdorf, have provided us with a wonderful room in the basement of their Karolinenplatz location.

Who's involved? There are quite a few interns, research assistants and research associates working with the materials. We are really dealing with enormous amounts of papers and many, many books. Some of them got wet at one point and we had to separate them. We also have to catalog everything. The two main researchers are Dr. Ariane Leendertz, who works on American constructions of Europe, and Dr. Marion Rot, who writes the Melvin Lasky biography.

MM: Whom do you want to attract? The library contains books of all kinds and fields, from Cultural History to books with pure sexual content.

CM: I think it can be interesting both for students and researchers and for the interested public. Basically everybody, who's interested in the intellectual history of the Cold War, and the social and cultural issues – including the sexual revolution – that were discussed at the time.

MM: Who was Melvin Lasky? What's his story?

CM: It's a fascinating story. We hope to find out more by reading through his correspondence, with hundreds and thousands of people, who you know – Noam Chomsky, Thomas Mann, Raymond Aron, John Updike, Hannah Arendt, Arthur Schlesinger, jr., Tom Stoppard, Peter Ustinov. A thousand famous names. His correspondence is really a “who is who” in postwar Western Europe and America, and he's so fascinating because he's probably the biggest networker that America had during this time. He's fascinating because he changed from being a Trotskyite to being an anti-communist and anti-totalitarian actor.

MM: What are the next steps with the Lasky Center?

CM: Well, we realized that the project will cost us more than we thought. So we will have to do some fundraising. This is a big job. Most importantly, however, we want to have a public event some time in the summer or fall of 2010: a conference and speeches that will discuss Melvin Lasky and his role in postwar political culture. We are hoping to get speakers like

Michael Naumann, the editor of DIE ZEIT and several Americans; and we are planning a little exhibition in the Amerikahaus. All this is really exciting.

MM: Thank you very much!

Read more next week! In the second part of this interview, Christof Mauch will talk about his academic life and the America Institute. Moreover, he will answer questions of students of the America Department.