

# America through the Small Screen: Television and Its Transformations

Report by Roberta Hofer

From 11 to 13 November, the Department of American Studies at the University of Innsbruck hosted the 43<sup>rd</sup> annual conference of the Austrian Association for American Studies (AAAS), this time tackling "America through the Small Screen: Television and Its Transformations."

The university's rector Tilman Märk as well as dean Sebastian Donat opened the conference, expressing their delight that the Department was holding a conference on such a current and important area of research. Also part of the opening ceremony was the awarding of the Fulbright Prize to Leopold Lippert (University of Salzburg) for his PhD thesis on "Cultural Performance in Transnational American Studies."

Three internationally renowned keynote speakers provided the theoretical and diachronic backbone to the conference focus: Television expert Christopher Bigsby (University of East Anglia) discussed the changes and trends in television production and consumption in his talk "America on Television: Television on America." Media and film scholar Diane Negra (University College Dublin) spoke about "Animality, Domesticity and Enterprise in *My Cat From Hell*" where she analyzed the rise of male-fronted instructional lifestyle television and animals on reality TV. Communication studies professor Amanda D. Lotz (University of Michigan) presented "Understanding Creative Change: Why the 'Distinction' of 21<sup>st</sup> Century US Television," arguing that the evolution of milestones in US television over the past decades is deeply rooted in a change of industrial practices and competitive norms.

In total, 50 speakers gave papers at the conference. This not only demonstrated that the conference topic was indeed very current, but also managed to link scholars from a vast number of universities and countries, including Austria, the USA, Great Britain, Germany, Spain, Greece, Italy, and Norway. Thematically, the focus spanned from innovations in television narratology to feminist film theory, character analysis, and viewer engagement. It was a particular success that many promising young scholars and graduate students seized the opportunity to present their research and enter into a dialogue with their colleagues.

In addition to the scholarly exchange, the Austrian Association for American Studies also held their annual organizational meetings which discussed, among other things, the acceptance of new members, the organization of next year's conference, and the details of the soon to be established *Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies (JAAAS)*.

An impressive number of scholars, Americanists as well as scientists from other departments, visited the conference. Furthermore, a large number of Innsbruck University students not only attended the keynote lectures and panels, but also engaged in discussions and reflections afterwards. Visitors especially highlighted the interesting content of the papers as well as the smooth organization and warm atmosphere during the three days. As organizers, we could not be more delighted with the success.



A large audience attended the keynote lectures. Photos: Roland Thaler and Roberta Hofer