

Christina von Braun (Humboldt University and Max Kade Distinguished Visiting Professor, University of Virginia)

### **November 13: “The Symbol of the Cross: From Religion to Politics“**

Lecture, Friday, November 13, 2:30-4:00  
Newcomb Hall 481

Ever since Eric Voegelin created the term “political religion” in the early 1930s, religious elements have been seen as constitutive of both the appeal and destructiveness of National Socialism. Exploring the “religious” in this particular political religion, Christina von Braun argued that there is a double face to the phenomenon. On the one hand, National Socialism was a secular religion that abandoned all forms of transcendence, thus implying a process of secularisation. On the other hand, we are confronted with a process of sacralisation that charged the secular world with magical power. This double process – secularisation of the transcendent and sacralisation of the secular – also characterized the history of Christianity, and is already contained in the idea of god becoming man or the word becoming flesh. The history of this development is reflected in the history of the Christian symbol of the cross. Undergoing a series of semantic changes, the cross came to imply: (1) domination of death, (2) sword and worldly rule, and (3) male empowerment. These elements were taken up and reactivated in the Nazi symbol of the cross – the swastika. Nazi symbols and rituals could unfold their political ‘effectiveness’ only because they drew on a long religious and symbolic history.

### **November 14: “Denazification in the Divided Germany“**

Workshop, Saturday, November 14, 10:00-12:30  
Newcomb Hall Boardroom

This workshop focused on *Die Erben des Hakenkreuzes*, a two part film Christina von Braun made in 1986/87. Prof. von Braun showed parts of the film as a basis for discussing the history of denazification and the creation of a “new identity” in East and West Germany after 1945. Both German states founded their idea of a new and better Germany on the distance between themselves and the Nazi regime. At the same time they insisted that the “other Germany” resembled the “old regime.” For East Germans this proximity was founded on the irrefutable fact that many old Nazis came into power and office in West Germany. For West Germans the GDR was “like the Nazi state” because it bore totalitarian traits. Made only two years before reunification confronted Germans with the task to grapple with their common Nazi past, “Die Erben des Hakenkreuzes“ documents a history of denazification that displaced the question of responsibility onto the “other Germany.”

Christina von Braun is a cultural theorist, author and filmmaker. She holds the Chair for Cultural History and Gender at Humboldt University Berlin, and has published widely on gender, media theory and religious history. She is currently the Max Kade Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at UVa.