

'German in the World'. A One-day Symposium hosted by the IMLR, Senate House, University of London. Monday 2 June, 2014.

So where in the world is German? This deliberately wide-ranging question is not merely a geographical one: recognizing the undisputed political and economic importance of the German speaking nations, it also asks about the status of the language itself. To what extent are school children learning it and students studying it? And as educational politics seems to step back time and again from any real commitment to modern foreign languages, despite so much rhetoric to the contrary, is German in some sort of crisis within educational systems? Or is it more the case that, within the MFL field, German is ebbing away as other languages rise in prominence?

Looking beyond the oft-cited utilitarian model of language learning, whereby the subject area must be seen to legitimize itself by equipping individuals with useful skills that deliver measurable economic returns, what is the 'value' in studying German culture and history? Can and should university level German Studies make itself appear 'relevant', not only to students' career needs but also and to a wider public? Ought we to resist the political forces impelling scholars of German (and academics generally) to demonstrate its relevance through outreach work and societal impact projects? Or does such pressure actually nudge us towards meaningful opportunities to remodel an already and necessarily evolving field of study? And finally, do these questions pertain more to the UK context, or do they resonate internationally? What, in other words, does German Studies look like in a global context? This dizzying whorl of questions relates, of course, to the wider issues of the academy's various relationships to other sectors: to wider society, to a public that (in part) funds its activity, and to the artists and writers upon whose work academic endeavour depends.

Lively discussion on these matters had broken out at the annual IMLR/ DAAD sponsored meeting of Heads of German from British Universities in 2013, and the symposium 'German in the World', held June 2 2014 at Senate House, London, organized by Erica Carter (KCL), Godela Weiss-Sussex (IMLR) and Robert Gillett (QMUL), formalized this in the form of a one-day event. Dedicated to exploring the state of global German Studies, the event was organized around a series of panels, each centering upon one to two short papers, with a brief response from two respondents and an open discussion.

The day opened with a number of contributions on 'Disciplinary', which examined how the subject area has evolved beyond the limits of a literary model of *Nationalphilologie*. Dirk Göttsche (Nottingham) gave an admirable overview of the historical intersection between postcolonial studies and German studies from the 1990s to the present: the close relationship between other arts and humanities disciplines, the culture of critical theory and particularly the anglophone branch of German Studies had, it became apparent, made for groundbreaking English-language contributions to the German postcolonial studies. Sabine Egger (Limerick) positioned her work as a refinement of the 'spatial turn' in cultural studies. Referencing Mieke Bal's thinking on travel, she explored how spaces created by movement, as well as particular modes of movement towards and within those spaces, can function as sites for the formation or performance of transnational identities in literary texts: this, of course, problematized how texts map onto academic disciplines organized around static models of national culture. In his response, Daniel Wildmann (Leo Baeck Institute),

welcomed and affirmed these developments, though sounded a cautionary note: coming to the discussion from cognate disciplines of Film Studies and Jewish studies, he restated the danger lurking in concepts such as 'global' and 'postcolonial', which articulate white Western paradigms that can actually exclude subaltern voices from the debate. Wildmann also spoke of the need to operate critical awareness within a field of tension between an approach to German culture according to local needs and interests and an approach that acknowledges some sense of a globally recognized historical canon.

The second panel shifted to think about how German Studies is faring in other national, cultural and geographical spaces globally. Ernest Hess-Luettich (Berne) did not see a language in terminal decline, let alone as a *Randerscheinung*: acknowledging the global decline in people learning German over the last three decades (from over 16 million to 14.5 million), he saw both continued growth in some traditionally Germanophile regions (India) and also some new areas, such China and Western Africa. Other speakers offered more 'local' snapshots: Kathleen Thorpe (Witwatersrand) described how the post-Apartheid focus on indigenous African languages with South Africa within educational politics had created something of a decline in German learning in some schools and universities, though also painted a picture of range of university departments still offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in German, successfully adapting courses and making the case for German amongst undergraduates: today an argument based more on economic imperatives than on the traditional importance of German as a language of heritage in the region. Arata Takeda (Paderborn) problematized the notion of a local German studies afresh through his own personal story, from his background in a traditionally philological department of German Studies in Japan, through experiences in the US to the (by German standards) more transnationally inclined and trans-disciplinary institutes for German Studies, in Paderborn. Profoundly aware of the conflicting forces acting upon the subject, Takeda acknowledged the interdisciplinary focus and the cross-disciplinary approaches taken by Germanists worldwide. He also seemed to suggest that such developments would best be undertaken as part of a more holistic reworking of the humanities, more particularly a rehabilitation of the wider humanistic education, which would need to be truly universal in outlook and not marginalize smaller subjects. Ruth Dawson (Hawaii) updated our view of German Studies in America: still popular in Ivy League schools and in areas of historical German settlement (such as Michigan), the field had contracted somewhat, like elsewhere, though had maintained a strong reputation for its theoretical tradition, its interdisciplinary outlook. In summing up, Dawson's characterization of the local US position as a 'dynamic' field responding to 'unsettled' and 'uncertain' times seemed indicative of a wider experience.

The first panel of the afternoon reflected on issues of curriculum and pedagogy. Sylvia Jaworksa (Reading) drew on her international experience of teaching German as a foreign language (in Germany, Poland, South Africa), to call for an internationalized curriculum aimed at using German to educate global citizens. This, she suggested, could involve a shift away from parochial German themes toward content with a more global focus, investigating and sharing local traces of German culture around the world, thus globalizing the local, or incorporating elements of oft-neglected intercultural communication from theoretical linguistics. Working from a long established centre of German Studies, Ben Morgan (Oxford) returned to the heart of the canon and to Goethe's

Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, but used the text to rethink university study as a more student-centred and less teleological experience. In Goethe's novel the protagonist embodied this process in that he learns by encountering people and making mistakes – indeed, the novel is finally undecided about how much this 'learning' process can consciously be managed. And just as the novel settles upon a necessary reengagement with practical concerns that lead Wilhelm beyond literature and the arts and, as Morgan acknowledged, the potentially 'messy' or 'fuzzy' process of study might lead a student beyond German Studies – though if this was where education and cultivated critical thought lead an individual, then that was surely the spirit of the academy. Mike Neary (Lincoln) radicalized this position further still, with a fire-in-the-belly presentation of his living and working project at University of Lincoln, "Student as Producer". Challenging at the most fundamental level the neo-liberal model of education-as-market, Neary called for a radically different curriculum design within which academics and students define their own academic pathways in an autonomous mode that seeks, in turn, to reclaim ownership of the intellectual 'capital' (in the Marxist sense) generated by the academy.

The final academic panel was dedicated to the 'porosity' of the academy, a term referring not merely to government-led 'impact' agendas, but to exploring academia's already inherent interconnectedness with other sectors of society. Stuart Taberner (Leeds) outlined his large-scale AHRC research project on the Holocaust and its follow-on project with a partner institution in Johannesburg on coming to terms with difficult historical pasts in post-Apartheid South Africa and postwar Germany. Of greatest significance were spin-off projects, which included an exhibition on the German experience of confronting the Holocaust *in a global context*, drama project with the young people of the 'Blah Blah Blah Theatre Group' based on the exhibition, and joint events focussing on HMD Day 2015 hosted with Leeds City Council. The experience of making academia talk to non-academics had been, said Taberner, not merely a bolt-on exercise necessitated by government led research criteria, but a hugely rewarding experience that was as enriching for academics as it had been for the wider public. Dr Catriona Firth (Warwick) spoke on the Warwick Commission for the Future of Cultural Value, a large scale project bringing together both academics and colleagues from arts management in a series of meetings and 'provocation' events, all of which designed to interrogate different understandings of the value of the arts beyond the merely economic, to rethink and reevaluate the so-called impact agenda, to consider on the position of arts in the digital era and remodel the relationship of classical and contemporary. From the presentation, with its reference to the second Commissioner event of April 2014, it became apparent that the arts wing of academia is actively engaged in rethinking its value and position in society through sustained, multilateral publicly accessible debate.

Naturally the panel drew in colleagues from the arts, too. Earlier in the day, Patrick Spottiswoode (Globe Theatre) had given the first contribution of the day from the performing arts sector, showing how recent and ongoing projects, both on the stage and in outreach work, had connected this 'national' institution with German Studies: naturally, the reassessment of Shakespeare's place in the global age was the focus – a writer, whom the Germans had since the eighteenth century regarded almost as much as their own as had the English. This demonstrated not only how arts and the academy mesh unavoidably and productively, but also how the fiction of discrete national cultures breaks down upon closer

scrutiny. Carrying on in this vein, two other arts practitioners spoke of the practical ways in which theatre companies work with academic institutions: Trine Garret (Foreign Affairs Theatre Company) gave the example of new dramatic translations undertaken by academics for the purposes of performance; the collaboration illuminated how academic colleagues had needed to review their entire approach to translating texts for theatre for reasons of performability, whilst the theatre company shared in the academic expertise on texts. Caroline Steinbeis (Royal Court Theatre) noted that, as a director of actors, her direct connection was more to academic material than to academics. That material was essential in crafting acting and performance practice. Her role was to connect the intellectual capacity of her actors to their emotional cores and, while the emotional centre was relatively easy to reach through training, the intellectual side often required further investment. She showed how that very balance could best be articulated by recourse to the theoretically couched dramatic methodologies of practitioners such as Stanislavski and Brecht.

The symposium's final panel drew together representatives from London-based cultural institutions of the German-speaking world, including Stefano Weinberger (German Embassy), Karl Pfeiffer (Goethe Institute), Andreas Hoeschen (DAAD) and Elisabeth Koegler (Austrian Cultural Forum). This more plenary discussion was not so much an opportunity for well known cultural organs to outline their remits yet again, but to raise awareness amongst delegates, academic and non-academic, of initiatives such as the 'Think German' campaign, launched by the embassy and running since 2010. This wide-ranging drive continues not only to promote German language and culture nationally, but does so by connecting multiple agents with a shared interest in the field. It became apparent that numerous campaigns and networks engaged in promoting the field exist in parallel, often working at best tangentially with one another, and that all would benefit from greater connectivity.

The complex picture emerging from the symposium was not one of overwhelming despondency in the face of the diminution of the German language and German Studies. The need for the academy to evolve, for there to be more bridges between its constituent disciplines, and more bridges beyond academia as a whole to the arts and wider society, and the need, too, for (especially smaller) subjects to engage with wider non-academic audiences, was stated and restated throughout the day. What also became clear, though, were the many ways in which this was already happening, in which change was also being seized as a moment of opportunity for enrichment and for constructing alternative models of teaching and research above and beyond the requirements of transient government agendas. The arts, and German studies within the arts, are showing an ever-greater capacity for critical self-evaluation and self-renewal in admittedly challenging times. In his keynote address of the evening, Anil Bhatti (JNU, Delhi) revisited his provocative reading of East-West encounters in Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*. There, Bhatti suggested, we do not find an instance of intercultural dialogue derived from a hermeneutically derived model of cultural difference, but rather a literary experiment in surrendering the borders of the self and inhabiting, for a time, the position held by our ostensible others. With a reference to the history of German Studies in linguistically plural India, Bhatti proposed a more flexible architecture for German Studies, which would allow for greater cross-disciplinarity in a way that did not threaten the survival of the subject itself. Thinking back over the papers given,

it became apparent that, like Bhatti's contribution, many of the suggestions for innovation and evolution had drawn upon cultural sources often associated with the canonical core of the traditional discipline, and yet were innovative nonetheless. Indeed, many of the calls for renewing the subject area and academia as a whole throughout the day had made direct appeals to an older humanistic model of the university as defined by Wilhelm von Humboldt at the dawn of the nineteenth century. One of the messages emerging from the event, then, seemed to be that it made sense for German's cultural stakeholders to continue learning to master precisely that trick – one of re-thinking the subject, connecting with with other disciplines and widening its boundaries – though to do so in a way that preserves its own particular and unique contributions. On the basis of this wide-ranging and thought-provoking symposium it seems that we may be better equipped to do this than we might think, and that the future does not look quite so bleak after all. Just different.

James Hodgkinson (Warwick University).