

GERMAN STUDIES IN THE U.S.: HISTORY, THEORY AND PRACTICE*

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Abstract: This paper discusses the profile of *German Studies* in the context of interdisciplinary intercultural area studies, as it has been developed during the last decades at universities in the United States, particularly at the University of California at Berkeley. In its first part, it deals with the institutional history of *German Studies*, in the second, with the underlying cultural theory, and in the third, with its hermeneutic practice.

Keywords: *German Studies*; Interculturality; Interdisciplinarity.

Resumo: Este artigo discute o perfil dos *German Studies* no contexto de estudos interdisciplinares e interculturais, como desenvolvidos, especificamente, nas universidades dos Estados Unidos, em particular na Universidade de Califórnia, em Berkeley, nas últimas décadas. A primeira parte trata da história institucional dos *German Studies*, a segunda, da teoria cultural que lhe serve de base, e a terceira, da prática hermenêutica.

Palavras-chave: Estudos Germânicos; Interculturalidade; Interdisciplinaridade.

Stichwörter: Germanistik; Interkulturalität; Interdisziplinarität.

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0. Preface

What I am trying to put into words in favor of American *German Studies* is largely based on a concept of interculturality, as an argument for reflecting on the local angle from which we look at cultural difference. But writing about it in a Brazilian journal could easily be seen as pretentious, *blasé*, *unverschämt* or *chuzpah*, whatever cultural label you prefer, because I will be writing as an Americanized German, *oops*, as an Anglo-Americanized German who is completely ignorant (but anxious to learn) about the position here and now, *i.e.* the Latin-American and specifically the Brazilian angle on German affairs. But such ignorance, if coupled with curiosity, may be a good prerequisite for this triangulation of cultural perspectives.

1. Introduction

Where I come from, teaching at the foremost public university in the United States as an Americanized German, to start any presentation with a warm-up is considered good academic style, if possible, with some humorous anecdotal evidence which offers an easy lead-in to the problem to be discussed. Being German, however, and thus possibly too serious and too abstract, I am afraid that I have not mastered the humorous part as yet, but I did learn to approach problems inductively, starting with a concrete example which, while somewhat incidental or anecdotal, has some bearing on the general issue.

Both the obvious triumph and the implicit danger of *German Studies*, this new discipline of interdisciplinary cultural critique, were driven home to me two or three years ago when the best doctoral candidate I have had in thirty years of teaching took his examination in Berkeley's German Department. During the evaluation of the

student's performance, the outside examiner, the world renowned intellectual historian and leading expert on the Frankfurt School, Martin Jay, commented that this exam could as easily have taken place in the departments of History, Philosophy, Sociology or Rhetoric. As the range of exam topics included writers from Luther to Adorno, from Lessing to Lukacs, from Novalis to Nietzsche, from Heine to Hannah Arendt, from Gervinus to Gadamer, from Richard Wagner to Max Weber, from Brecht to Benjamin, with special emphasis on the strategies involved in the aestheticization of politics, this examination was indeed a splendid, if somewhat atypical, example of what *German Studies* can amount to. What Professor Jay meant as a well-deserved praise for a brilliant presentation of interdisciplinary expertise, which perfectly met the criteria of excellence we had tried so hard to instill in our students, could also be read as an indication of the blurring of disciplinary identity. If the achievement of the best students of German Cultural Studies has become indistinguishable from that of neighboring disciplines, we may have earned our colleagues' respect and a secure place in the *intellectual* competition of a high-power university. But we may also give our administrators, who for budgetary reasons are anxious to streamline the university's operations, some ideas for what they euphemistically call 'consolidation', *i.e.* the merging of departments, an eventual move which could undercut our struggle to retain *institutional* autonomy.

Thus caught between intellectual merits and institutional hazards, we have had to ask ourselves some of the questions I will discuss here: What is *German Studies*? What makes it so attractive? How did it come about? What are its theoretical implications? How is it practiced? And what are its own answers to the danger of disciplinary blurring? I will therefore deal, in the first part of my paper, with the institutional *history*; in the second part, with the underlying cultural *theory*; in the third part, with the hermeneutic *practice* and throughout all three parts, with an implicit metacritique of *German Studies*.

But in order to understand what we are talking about, when we use the term *German Studies*, I would like to start with a very tentative definition by saying first what it is not. *German Studies*, which to a dwindling group of critics is not much more than a glorified extension of an age-old standard college course called *Culture & Civilization*, should not be confused with *Landeskunde*, which has been a conventional, if sometimes rather pedestrian, attempt to introduce beginning students to the facts and customs of German life in a patchwork of basic information about *Gemütlichkeit* and the public school system, German holidays and trade unions, regional dialects and the gross national product. While such kaleidoscope of basic dates, figures and facts about the *potpourri* of historical, social and economic aspects of contemporary Germany is a helpful framing of textbooks in language classes, complete with visual aids for dramatic effect, it often reflects – and indeed resorts to – the public relations efforts of the tourist industry and government-funded German agencies abroad. The images associated with this commercial interest in German culture are the *clichés* of advertisement: from Polka and Rheinlander to the Viennese waltz, from *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht* to the *um-pah-pah* of the *Oktoberfest*, from *Sauerkraut* to Frankfurters, from *Bavarian Lederhosen* to racy cars on the *Autobahn*, from Alt-Heidelberg to Neuschwanstein, from Gothic script to the mystery of fairy tale woods, from Hansel and Gretel to the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

German Studies, however, is not the academic version of a marketable Romantic image of a quaint past which has conveniently forgotten that Weimar is located next to Buchenwald and that the modern counterpart to the cobble stones of Rothenburg are the smoke stacks of the Ruhrgebiet. But *German Studies* today is also more than what the Bloomington model intended in the mid-seventies, when it took the first step to correct the fairy tale image of German culture by adding up-to-date information on political buzzwords such as *Mitbestimmung* and *Industrieverbände*, *Mehrwertsteuer* and *dynamische Rente*, *Lastenausgleich* and *Sozialversicherung* (cf.

HELBIG 1976: 54), all of them are terms of social engineering in the celebrated welfare state. Obviously, such topics were meant to prepare American students, usually future businessmen, so they could move with ease in the exclusively West-German culture; for East Germany remained off-limits anyway. Without a critical concept of cultural paradigms, however, even an expanded topography of the divided German culture, with comparative notes on *Bundestag* (West) and *Volkskammer* (East), *CDU* and *SED*, *AEG* and *LPG*, *ARD* and *ADN*, *BND* and *Stasi*, *Gruppe 47* and *Bitterfelder Weg*, *Habermas* and *Havemann*, *Schaubühne* and *Berliner Ensemble*, *Kreuzberg* and *Prenzlauer Berg*, would not have sufficed to turn superficial knowledge into critical understanding of cultural difference between East and West or, for that matter, even between American and German concerns.

In stark contrast to such affirmative models of cultural training, the underlying assumptions of *German Studies* today are much more sophisticated, methodologically based on cultural theory and ideologically motivated by a rather critical view of German history and society from a less than identificatory position outside of Germany. Partaking in the so-called cultural turn of the humanities and some social sciences and often associated with the critical school of New Historicism (cf. SEEBBA 1997 a), *German Studies* belongs to the wider field of interdisciplinary and increasingly intercultural area studies. While *International Studies*, which were introduced at the same time, offered a cross-sectional view of the entire world in wide-ranging comparisons, concentrating on international relations in law, trade, environmental politics etc., *Area Studies* would look at localized systems of interaction, at specific areas such as Germany and study the intersections of its history, its political and economic system, its society and culture. As part of this combined effort of several disciplines, *German Studies*, as it is now being practiced in the eminent German departments in the U.S., has become a discipline of its own by attempting to contextualize German literature as only one of the sev-

eral cultural practices, *i.e.* by connecting it with various other textual strategies, with film and architecture. Understanding culture as a collectively imagined system of significations and dealing with both verbal and visual representations of collective memory, *German Studies* aim at cultural literacy based on sensitivity to cultural difference. With this admittedly abstract definition in mind I will now turn to its historical, theoretical and practical implications.

2. Institutional History

Today hardly any job description in the United States for academic appointments in the humanities and social sciences does not list, as one of the major requirements, a proven commitment to cultural studies or, more specifically in the case of this article, to *German Studies*. This is a dramatic change from thirty years ago, when the New Criticism, the then-leading critical school with its devotion to close reading of literary texts, reigned supreme, when doctoral dissertations would still deal mainly with individual authors, preferably with minute details of their literary *oeuvre*, and when interpretive skills ranked among the top requirements for literary studies to be pursued in a teaching career at the college or university level. The fact that most of the doctoral candidates thirty years ago eventually landed a teaching job where language instruction, usually according to the local immersion method, was much more important than elaborate literary analysis, did not deter the new-critical emphasis on the "masterpieces" of German literature. After all, teaching jobs were plenty, and the canon of Western culture was unchallenged.

All of that changed in the 1970's mainly for four reasons.

First, the rebellious students of the late sixties, urging immediate political relevancy, eventually achieved the elimination of the for-

eign language requirements at American colleges and universities. As soon as our undergraduates were no longer required to learn German (which at the time was, next to French and Spanish, the major foreign language), the enrollment in our courses dwindled, and the reduced number of language classes usually taught by our graduate students could no longer support the extensive program in German literature. To use Berkeley as an example which still boasts the largest (and the top-ranked) German department in the country, the number of teaching assistants went down from ninety in the late sixties to thirty in the late nineties. In order to attract new students from other disciplines, the German department had to develop new concepts which would make the study of the German language and eventually literature attractive to students who were generally interested in a different culture, who, in most cases, had no longer any family ties to a German background and who needed now to be convinced rather than just be told that developing their language skills and even some literary expertise would provide the cherished access to the foreign culture. Thus, the question arose as to what the interdependence of language and culture really is. This question is the first theoretical challenge I will address later.

Second, the trauma of the Vietnam war ended the new-critical paradigm of aesthetic autonomy and raised questions of social and political relevance even for literary analysis. The frantic search for new theoretical paradigms (some of which I will discuss later with regard to the theory of *German Studies*) led to the adoption of French poststructuralism and, to a lesser degree which can be explained with the perceived difficulty of the German language, German hermeneutics and the Frankfurt school of Marxist-inspired social theory. While the French text model, with its affinity to American New-Criticism, was clearly preferred in other foreign language departments, the German departments increasingly acknowledged the fact that the fractures, divisions and catastrophes, so characteristic of German culture, could not be dealt with in a political void, but rather in a context

that allowed to see literary texts and their diverse instrumentalizations as largely determined by changing political culture and their different claims to national identity. Thus, the question arose as to what the role of language and literature in the construction of German national identity really is. This question posits the second theoretical challenge.

Third, the generation of exiled Jews from German-speaking countries, who had reshaped and directed the major German programs in the U.S. during the forties, fifties and sixties, was stepping aside in the second part of the 1970's. Most of them retired and died in a relatively short time span, leaving behind a legacy that could not easily be adopted by their former students. Even the post-war immigrants from Germany, who were beginning to leave their marks on the field – *Germanists* like Jost Hermand, Reinhold Grimm, Frank Trommler, Peter Uwe Hohendahl, Ernst Behler, Paul Michael Lützeler, Andreas Huyssen, Anton Kaes and myself – were not prepared to become the heirs of the exiles. Their agenda was very different, in most cases shaped by the political struggles in Germany during the sixties and thus anxious to change, if not politicize, the literary canon. While most of the exiles, in an effort to counter the political fallout of the Third Reich, had held on to an image of untainted classical German culture of the past, the German-trained post-war immigrants and their American-trained colleagues in the so-called successor generation, who started chairing the German departments in the late seventies, were much more interested in issues of contemporary post-war German culture, in current social movements such as environmentalism (the Greens), feminism in West Germany, socialism in East Germany and the divided efforts to deal with the Nazi past and their reflection in contemporary German literature. Increasingly critical of Germany's political culture, these pointedly *American* Germanists gained confidence *vis-a-vis* their German colleagues in affirming their American perspective on German language, literature and culture as markedly different from, and in no way inferior to, views, concepts

and theories developed at German universities. Over the years it has become increasingly clear that *German Studies* in the United States is no longer an offshoot of German *Germanistik*, not a mere branch of *Auslandsgermanistik*, as a colonizing view in Germany would have it, but a field of its own. Thus the question arose as to what the special American perspective is, when it comes to discussing things German. This question is the third theoretical challenge to be addressed in this paper.

Fourth, the demographic constitution of the student body has drastically changed over the last twenty years. While in the seventies the large majority of our students ethnically and intellectually came from a distinct Eurocentric background, with many of them second-generation immigrants from German speaking countries and in search of their cultural roots, the situation is very different today. At least in California, where the fallout from the Vietnam war and the return of Hong Kong to China is felt the most, homogeneity has given way to an unprecedented heterogeneity, with minorities often constituting the new majority. While these demographic changes are expected to clearly affect the general population profile of the U.S. as a whole not before fifty years from now, California is as always the test case for future developments. The population profile of the United States in 1995 resembles that of the student profile in California twenty years ago: 73.6 percent whites (who are expected to shrink to 52.8 percent by the year 2050), 10.2 percent hispanics (who will experience the largest increase, to 24.5 percent in the year 2050), 12.0 percent blacks (who will increase only slightly to 13.6 percent) and 3.3 percent Asians (with an expected increase to 8.2 percent). The article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, from which I culled these figures, was entitled *Population Expected to Be Half Minorities by 2050* (March 14, 1996: A 3). But the future has long begun in California, the largest state on the West Coast, which has become the entrance gate for millions of immigrants from the Pacific Rim. The demographic change from small minority to large majority is nowhere more

noticeable than in the University of California, which, with nine campuses and about 200,000 students, is the largest university system in the country. The figures for the Irvine campus, which is located near the burgeoning communities of Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean immigrants, are a fairly good indication of what the undergraduate breakdown may look like at other campuses, such as Berkeley, in just a few years from now. In Irvine there are 53.0 percent Asian students, more than twice the size of the second largest group, that of white students at 25.0 percent, with hispanics trailing at 13.4 percent and black students at 2.6 percent (figures taken from an article by Norimitsu Onishi on "Affirmative Action" in *New York Times*, Sunday section: Education Life, March 31, 1996: 33). The acronym UCI, which stands for University of California at Irvine, has already been referred to as the "University of Chinese Immigrants" (ibid.: 28). The demographic shift from Eurocentric Identifications to eminently Asian identities is the background for what has become known as the "culture wars" (cf. GITLIN 1995), the struggle to retain, modify or replace the classical canon of American higher education. Thus the question arose as to how to adjust the German canon of cultural representations to better accommodate the rapidly changing priorities of a multicultural student body. This question is the fourth theoretical challenge we faced when we questioned the underlying assumptions of our discipline.

These four reasons – institutional, conceptual, generational and demographic – created an academic climate around 1980 that made the leading German departments in the U.S., with Berkeley being in the forefront, more receptive to the strong outside push for innovation coming from the DAAD, the German Academic Exchange Office in New York. It was the directors and deputy directors of this office (such as Dr. Ebel, Dr. Schmidt, Dr. Nastansky, Dr. Wedigo de Vivanco, Dr. Heidrun Suhr) who over the years proved to be reliable partners in the project of disciplinary innovation. They were very knowledgeable about and sensitive to the workings of the American

university systems, the need for conceptual change in the discipline and about individual faculty members and administrators nationwide who could and would get involved in this project. Berkeley was the first university, incidentally during my turn as department chair from 1977 to 1981, to start already in 1979 a DAAD-funded Summer Seminar in Interdisciplinary *German Studies*, which under annually changing topics would bring together for six weeks doctoral candidates from various fields and different universities to explore current issues of German culture. When I directed the summer seminar in 1984 and 1985, dealing with images and myths of national identity formation from the 18th century to the present, many of the participants were already on their way to become leading experts in *German Studies*, thus serving as what German politicians devoted to cost-effective programs like to call *Multiplikatoren*. The appointment of a series of DAAD-Lecturers who would serve as liaison between the German department and programs in the Social Sciences (History, Sociology and Political Science) starting in 1985 and the implementation of German-funded Centers for German and European Studies at Berkeley, Harvard University and Georgetown University in Washington D.C. in 1991 were the next steps to ground the interdisciplinary and interdepartmental concept of *German Studies* institutionally.

The obvious forum for the discussion of *German Studies* across the disciplines were the annual meetings of the *German Studies Association* (GSA), which was founded by the historian Gerald Kleinfeld in 1976 as *Western Association of German Studies* (WAGS), and the journal *German Studies Review*. The annual GSA conferences soon evolved, without a doubt, as the best and the most interesting conferences in the field, now attracting almost as many historians from Europe as Germanists from the U.S. The professional visibility the GSA and the journal provided were as important as the institutional framework – and the financial backing it provided – to win over also those colleagues who were afraid that literary analysis for which they

were trained might no longer be central to the degree program. Their fears were well-founded: the marginalization of purely literature-based programs has been the price to be paid by those faculty members who were too slow to adapt and, more seriously, by their students who were not properly trained to meet the changing demands of the classroom. But this institutional shift in the twenty-year history of *German Studies* would not have been possible without a strong undercurrent in theory, which emerged under the heading of New Historicism and New Cultural History.

3. Cultural Theory

Before I discuss some of the modern theoretical concepts which helped shape *German Studies*, I would like to pick up the four theoretical challenges which evolved from the discussion of the institutional history of *German Studies*:

1. the interdependence of language and culture,
2. the role of language and literature in the construction of German national identity,
3. the special American perspective on German culture,
4. the need for adjustments to the Eurocentric canon.

While the last two challenges, which involve the diverging positions in intercultural discourse, will be addressed more indirectly in theoretical terms, the first two questions can be answered more directly against the background of particularly German intellectual and institutional history. For the constitutive role of language in cultural understanding is central to German language philosophy from Herder and Humboldt through Novalis and Kleist to Nietzsche, Dilthey, Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Gadamer. Attention to the historicized interplay of language and culture, with cultural experience shaping

its language and with language determining cultural identity, is not just a fancy theoretical hypothesis for the sake of an ahistorical argument, but a fundamental assumption in the development of German culture since the 18th century. Anticipated by Herder's insistence on the linguisticity of thought, the prominent position in German language philosophy is represented best by Wilhelm von HUMBOLDT, who summarized his philosophical, educational and linguistic efforts of a lifetime as late as 1835 in the famous dictum on language-based cultural identity: "(...) so liegt in jeder Sprache eine eigenthümliche Weltansicht" (HUMBOLDT 1830-1835: 434), implying that any critique of cultural difference must be based on language criticism. The German discourse on the power of language, in theoretical as in fictional texts, is so powerful that major works of German literature, from Kleist's *Der zerbrochene Krug* (1808) and Grillparzer's *Weh dem der lügt* (1838) to Hofmannsthal's *Der Schwierige* (1921) and Peter Handke's *Kaspar* (1966) have espoused the primacy of language in generating truth.

Best expressed in Novalis's famous line "*Dann fliegt von Einem geheimen Wort / Das ganze verkehrte Wesen fort*" (NOVALIS 1802/1960: 345), the idea of redemptive language is not necessarily shared by Anglo-American or French philosophers of language with John Locke and de Saussure being only the best known advocates of the *a priori* of thought (cf. ARSLEFF 1982). It thus could be argued that cultural studies dealing with German texts are more likely to have to critically consider not only the theoretical principle of linguisticity of cultural propositions, but also the very language in which these propositions are being made. This, then, requires philological rigor and, even more important, literary sensitivity to the connotative power of language. It requires interpretative skills which, I would like to emphasize in the interest of disciplinary identity, only the language- and literature-based programs of cultural criticism, *i.e.* foremost the German departments, can cultivate. This emphasis on the vernacular of the cultural area to be explored, in our case the emphasis on Ger-

man as providing critical access to cultural difference, clearly distinguishes area studies from international studies whose *lingua franca*, for obvious reasons, is English.

It follows from this philosophical background that in the absence of a national state in the 19th century language and literature, as the prevalent areas for forming an “*eigenthümliche Weltansicht*”, became central to vicarious identity formation. The evidence to support this claim is overwhelming. For the present consideration, it must suffice to highlight the significance of language and literature for the disciplinary development of our academic field.

From Joachim Heinrich CAMPE, who in his *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (1807) wanted to uphold the German language as the last bastion against Napoleon¹, to Jacob GRIMM, who in his *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1854) lamented: “*Was haben wir denn gemeinsames als unsere Sprache und Literatur?*” (GRIMM 1854/1984: III), from Ludwig WACHLER, who in 1818 was among the first to write a history of national literature as the last resort for his demoralized readers², to Heinrich von Treitschke, for whom the history of German literature served as the vehicle of antisemitic nationalism, the study of German language and literature became the stepping stone

1 “Schließlich muß ich mich hier noch öffentlich zu der festen Meinung bekennen: daß es in unsern unglückswangern, oder vielmehr seit Jahren schon mit Verderben kreißenden Zeiten zum Besten unserer weiland Deutschen Völkerschaft durchaus nichts Nothwendigeres, Dringenderes und Verdienstlicheres zu thun giebt, als an dem Anbau – der fernern *Ausbildung, Reinigung und Festigung* – unserer herrlichen Sprache zu arbeiten. Sie, das einzige letzte Band, welches uns noch völkerschaftlich zusammenhält, ist zugleich der einzige noch übrige Hoffungsgrund, der uns zu erwarten berechtigt, daß der Deutsche Name in den Jahrbüchern der Menschheit nicht ganz verschwinden werde; der einzige, der die Möglichkeit künftiger Wiedervereinigung zu einer selbständigen Völkerschaft uns jetzt noch denkbar macht.” (CAMPE 1807: XXII f.)

for the foundation of the entire discipline, *Germanistik*. It should be remembered that Jacob GRIMM, who is generally honored as the founding father of our discipline, adopted the very term of *Germanistik* from another, long-established discipline, *jurisprudence*, where it meant – and still means – the study of Germanic law *versus* Roman law (cf. GRIMM 1846). GRIMM appropriated the term to embrace the integrated study of German language, German history and German law, a truly interdisciplinary project which soon would give in to ideological pressure, when the academic study of language turned into the study of German literature, now detached from historical and legal concerns, as the preferred articulation of German national identity. The ensuing separation of the disciplines, with only the students of Germany’s national literature identified as *Germanisten*, resulted in the narrowing of the cultural canon, with ever increasing emphasis on fictional rather than non-fictional texts and with a concurrent shift from the philological study of medieval texts to a nationalist reading of what was to become the classical canon (cf. SEEBA 1991). Thus the recent push for the interdisciplinary *German Studies* could also be seen as an attempt to undo more than a century of ideological instrumentalization and to return to the foundational moment of *Germanistik* in 1846, when it was the cultural context of language and literature which gave birth to the new discipline.

The early concept of *Germanistik* as a national discipline evolved at the same time as advocates of cultural history tried to ad-

2 “Den einzigen irdischen Trost gewährte damals [*i.e.* after 1806] der Hinblick auf eine großartige Vergangenheit; er wurde geschöpft aus der Geschichte und aus den Denkmälern des teutschen Lebens in Wissenschaft und Kunst; als Kleinod wurde bewahret die hehre Muttersprache, die reine Tochter freyer Mannheit; ihr Geist weissagte Errettung aus unwürdigen Banden. Bald mußte als einzige Hülfe in der Noth erkannt werden Rückkehr zu teutscher Gesinnung, zu teutschem Glauben, zu teutscher Frömmigkeit. Es war Gottes Stimme, die das teutsche Volk in sein Inneres zurückwies; dieses vernahm sie mit Ergebung und Vertrauen, und erwachte zu einem neuen Leben.” (WACHLER 1834: 3)

vance a trans-national, more comparative field, as it is revived today under the heading of New Cultural History. Indeed, there is a distinct conceptual affinity between *Kulturwissenschaft*, as it was established soon after 1850, with Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl in Munich and Karl Lamprecht in Leipzig being the most visible, but institutionally marginalized champions, and the leading paradigm of recent theory, cultural anthropology with its emphasis on language, spatial relations and the visual, as it is associated with names such as Clifford Geertz and James Clifford (cf. SEEBBA 1993, 1995). But beyond a certain conceptual affinity between the two, there may even be a traceable historical connection. The missing link could be found in the cultural transfer in which the mostly Jewish exiles, who were expelled from Germany by the Nazis, were engaged. The circle around the art historian Aby Warburg, himself a student of Lamprecht, is the most likely candidate for such transfer: Ernst Cassirer left Germany for England to eventually move on to Columbia University in New York, Erwin Panofsky went to the United States to teach at Princeton, and Ernst Gombrich went to England. Reinforced by the many exiles who shaped the German departments in the U.S. in the image of comprehensive cultural critique rather than narrow literary scholarship, this transfer looms large in the background of the renewed interest in cultural criticism (cf. SEEBBA 1997 b).

For the last twenty years the concept of *culture*, indeed, seems to have been on every critic's mind. There has been an inflation of concern with culture with small or capital *c*, in terms of *cultural difference* (as a descriptive term for dealing with "otherness"), *minority culture* (as a corrective to national hegemony in the post colonial age), *bi- or multiculturalism* (as a politically correct philosophy for a new kind of identity formation), *interculturality* (as a methodological principle for perspectivism in de-colonized research), and, of course, *cultural studies* (as an institutionalized field of investigation into cultural difference). Partly based on a new school of critical thought, New Cultural History, the call for cultural studies is an off-

spring of New Historicism and thus at least indirectly connected with Berkeley, which in the 1980's came to be seen by many observers as a hotbed for new theories for the analysis of cultural practice.

The name that comes to mind, of course, is that of Stephen GREENBLATT, who, I am sorry to say, has moved on to teach at Harvard University two years ago. But for almost two decades he has been identified with Berkeley so that the critical school of New Historicism, as whose founding father the author of *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988) is seen, was identified already in 1982 as "*La scuola di Berkeley*" (CESARINI 1984). The fact that the journal *Representations* has been edited in Berkeley since 1984 and that the book series *The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics* has been edited by Stephen GREENBLATT and published by the University of California Press in Berkeley has contributed to the now legendary identification of Berkeley with a critical paradigm that in many aspects paralleled, yet was in fact preceded by, the critical practice of early *German Studies*, which started also in Berkeley in 1979 as an interdisciplinary exploration of cultural determinants in post-war Germany. Especially Stephen GREENBLATT's call for *cultural poetics* as "a study of the collective making of distinct cultural practices and inquiry into the relation among these practices" has drawn attention to what he calls "negotiations" between culturally different arguments (GREENBLATT 1988: 5). The term "negotiations", by now a well-established buzzword among the growing number of New Historicists, has drawn new attention to the complex relation between sets of collective beliefs and experiences as they involve literary and non-fictional modes of expression; "negotiation" refers to the process of circulation and exchange in which art captivates and in turn shapes social energy and collective memory.

Calling the study of such aesthetically mediated social relations "poetics", thus referring to the traditional set of poetic rules that govern literary discourse, evokes a long tradition in cultural philosophy,

developed mostly in Germany, of looking at claims to truth in terms of their fictional construction from diverse and ever changing perspectives. One among such critics, who would look at the constitutive role of language in various cultural systems of signification, was Ernst CASSIRER whose major work, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (1923-1929), is based on the assumption that epistemological concerns, which had been central to philosophy since Kant, would have to give way to cultural studies in the symbolic construction of reality through language, mythological thought and artistic perception: "*Die Kritik der Vernunft wird damit zur Kritik der Kultur.*" (CASSIRER 1988: 11). This programmatic statement of 1923 has to be recognized as the founding moment for the "cultural turn" everyone seems to have adopted during the last twenty years, when another German philosopher became a source of inspiration across the disciplines: Friedrich NIETZSCHE. His famous dictum that truth is nothing but a perspective conglomerate of metaphors, which are no longer recognized as such,³ has highlighted the age-old assumption of hermeneutics (from Chladenius through Schleiermacher and Dilthey to Gadamer) that claims that truth needs to be interpreted in terms of the language in which it is made. It is this now widely accepted emphasis on the metaphoric and imagistic character of propositions which has given new importance to the interpretive skills developed and taught in the humanities. But when NIETZSCHE's outcry against the positivism of his time, "*nein, gerade Tatsachen gibt es nicht, nur Interpretationen*" (NIETZSCHE 1966 b: 903), is read today as a rejection of essentialism, the underlying plea for cultural perspectivism fits

3 "Was ist also Wahrheit? Ein bewegliches Heer von Metaphern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen, kurz eine Summe von menschlichen Relationen, die, poetisch und rhetorisch gesteigert, übertragen und geschmückt wurden und die nach langem Gebrauch einem Volke fest, kanonisch und verbindlich dünken: die Wahrheiten sind Illusionen, von denen man vergessen hat, daß sie welche sind, Metaphern, die abgenutzt und sinnlich kraftlos geworden sind, Münzen, die ihr Bild verloren haben und nun als Metall, nicht mehr als Münzen, in Betracht kommen." (NIETZSCHE 1966 a: 314).

perfectly into the ongoing debate on the parameters of ethnic, cultural and national identities.⁴

Concerns about the ethnic and cultural diversification of the American society, with a heterogeneity so much graver than that of Germany where the notion of a multicultural society is increasingly experienced but officially denied, have also raised the awareness of cultural difference in critical perspectives we employ in intellectual projects. Whereas among German intellectuals there is still a strong commitment to a universalist agenda, holding onto imperatives of a generalized truth which are considered valid norms independent of cultural difference, American intellectuals, who instinctively tend to shy away from self-righteous aspirations to the one and only truth, seem to have much more readily adopted multiculturalism, whether or not it happens to be the "politically correct" position, in epistemological as well as in more practical terms. The resulting divergence of how American critics look at German culture, emphasizing the critical concept of "positionality", and how Germans look at themselves, often unaware of differing perspectives, has contributed to the ever increasing independence of *German Studies* in the U.S., if not separation, from *Germanistik* in Germany (cf. SEEBBA 1996).

This divergence of fundamental viewpoints came about at the same time that a clearly growing theoretical interest in cultural 'otherness' and intercultural dialogue was expressed rhetorically in a fascinating way crossing the very cultural borders which had just been established. The metaphor of crossing borders has controlled recent cultural theory to such an extent that it is fair to speak not just of "local knowledge", as Clifford GEERTZ did in his cultural hermeneu-

4 "'Perspektivismus.' Unsere Bedürfnisse sind es, die *die Welt auslegen*; unsere Triebe und deren Für und Wider. Jeder Trieb ist eine Art Herrschaft, jeder hat seine Perspektive, welche er als Norm allen übrigen Trieben aufzwingen möchte." (NIETZSCHE 1966 b)

tics,⁵ and the “location of culture”, as Homi BHABHA did in his theory of cultural hybridity (BHABHA 1994), but of a pervasive localization of cultural discourse. In the spatial realm of locus, sites, places, borders, boundaries and thresholds much of today’s cultural criticism consists of an obsession with crossing borders through either traveling, migration, displacement and exile or through translation, transfer and transgression. There are at least twenty-five books, almost all of them published after 1990, entitled *Crossing Borders*, from fiction and autobiography to cultural history, literary theory and social analysis (from KENNEDY 1990 and YAKOBSON 1994 to GUTWIRTH, GOLDBERGER & SZMURLO 1991, HOLUB 1992 and HAOUR-KNIPE & RECTOR 1996); and there are twenty more titles of *Crossing Boundaries*, most of them in cultural studies, including several with a feminist bent (e.g. CANE, GROSZ & DE LEPERVANCHE 1988, DAVIES 1989, BUJS 1993, KLEIN & LEVELT 1981, MCCARTHY 1989, THOMPSON KLEIN 1996).

The interest in both drawing and crossing cultural borderlines was reflected in 1993 in a seminal and widely discussed article of political theory, which was published in *Foreign Affairs*. In this article, entitled “The Clash of Civilizations”, Harvard-Professor Samuel P. HUNTINGTON predicted that future wars, if any will be fought not between nations and their legitimizing ideologies, but along what he called “cultural fault lines”⁶. The image of seismic plates, which will

5 “To see ourselves as others see us can be eye-opening. To see others as sharing a nature with ourselves is the merest decency. But it is from the far more difficult achievement of seeing ourselves amongst others, as a local example of the forms human life has locally taken, a case among cases, a world among worlds, that the largeness of mind, without which objectivity is self-congratulation and tolerance a sham, comes. If interpretive anthropology has any general office in the world it is to keep reteaching this fugitive truth.” (GEERTZ 1983: 16).

6 “It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation

collide in catastrophic earthquakes, gives the borders a violent twist and adds to the playful need for border crossings a sense of urgency. The clash of cultural systems, HUNTINGTON argued, will be the result of conflicting identity politics, with cultural identity being defined “by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people” (HUNTINGTON 1993: 24). Using these criteria, Huntington distinguished the following cultures where cultural fundamentalism may overtake political identifications: Western, Buddhist, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin-American and African. In the aftermath of this article, it seems, cultural critics, if they are experts on collective identity formation, have become acceptable as limited partners even in political circles. While the raging war in former Yugoslavia was the immediate background for HUNTINGTON’s argument in favor of the political significance of studies in cultural identity, it would be easy to extend his concern to the one obvious historical example, where the lack of a consistent political system in a nation state was compensated culturally, with catastrophic consequences for the entire world, because the political culture was not experienced and sophisticated enough to withstand the brute force of fanaticism.

I am speaking, of course, of the particularly German obsession with “Kulturnation”, with special emphasis on the German character of art and music, philosophy, literature and literary history, ever since the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 at the hands of Napoleon led Germans to define their collective identity culturally. SCHILLER had set the agenda already in 1795, when he, in a famous *distych*, *Das Deutsche Reich*, tried to locate the embattled German

states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.” (HUNTINGTON 1993: 22).

identity (“*Deutschland? Aber wo liegt es? Ich weiß das Land nicht zu finden.*”) in terms of a temporal and eventually ideological shift from the political to the cultural realm: “*Wo das gelehrte beginnt, hört das politische auf.*” (SCHILLER 1795: 30). If the cultural nation could be invoked only after the demise of the political nation, cultural identity would become the battle cry of nationalists determined to secure and, if need be, to invent a purely German identity called “*Deutschtum*” (cf. SEEBBA 1998). In the increasingly ideological opposition to cultural alterity it was first the French and then the Jews, the epitomy of “*orientalische Fremdlinge*”⁷, who served to represent the dreaded threat of difference, “the other” of “*Deutschtum*”, which, in order to affirm “*das Eigene*”, had to be excluded, isolated, persecuted, expelled and finally, in the “*Final Solution*” of the Nazis, exterminated. The German tradition of defining culture (with the untranslatable “*Bildung*” itself being a translation from Cicero’s *cultura animi*, the raising of the mind) in opposition to the technological and scientific as well as the social and political reality may have helped refine the cultural sophistication in Germany, but it also left the educated ill-prepared to deal with the challenges of the ever more complex reality in times of crisis.

The stereotype of the stranger, who does not belong, the foreigner who has lost his home, or the alien, who brings doom, is still very common in popular culture today. Hollywood can do as little without him as did a play by Ibsen or, still earlier, a Romantic fate tragedy or, according to Aristotle, even Greek tragedy, with the decisive difference that the Greek word *xenos* meant both ‘stranger’ and ‘guest’. Modern man has been much less hospitable and finds himself easily in the grip of *xenophobia*, the aggressive fear of strangers, because it is this resistance to “the other” which helps him define what is familiar and what belongs to him as his own, *i.e.* personal

7 This is a standard phrase in antisemitic rhetoric, among others also in the founding text of modern, *i.e.* racist antisemitism (MARR 1879: 12).

identity. Obviously, identity formation cannot do without such antithetic constructions of “*das Fremde und das Eigene*”. But in cultural theory the often macabre fascination with the perceived threat by “the other” has been turned into a positive assessment of the alien perspective as an advantage, so much so that we as critics have been asked, in the title of an acclaimed book by Julia KRISTEVA⁸, to become “strangers to ourselves” and to use the position of a ‘foreign’ observer as a vantage point which allows insights otherwise not accessible.

If area studies led to interdisciplinarity the newly prevalent, almost fashionable interest in alterity raised the notion of interculturality, *i.e.* the need for a vantage point outside the cultural area to be examined, to the level of epistemological validity. The self-reflective view on cultural difference is the favored position which guides the frequent reference in the United States to “positionality”. *Positionality* means a metadiscourse where reflection on one’s own cultural partiality becomes thematic and where the outsider’s position is the preferred vantage point of criticism. This means in the extreme that the intercultural nature of a chosen subject can prove less significant than the intercultural view from which the topic is selected, shaped and discussed. To give but one example: It is one thing to look at Turkish writers writing in German, for instance Aras Ören, Emine Özdamar or Akif Pirincci (cf. SUHR 1990), and the lesson we can learn from a Turkish literary scholar living in the United States, for instance Azade SEYHAN, who chooses to write on German romanticism (SEYHAN 1992), is quite another. While the former concerns the constitution of the *subject matter*, the latter involves the construction of the *subject position*. Thus, intercultural identity comes into the view of critical perspectives, only when the selection of material and approach, the rheto-

8 “It is not simply – humanistically – a matter of our being able to accept the other, but of *being in his place*, and this means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself.” (KRISTEVA 1991: 13)

ric and result of the argument and the communication of the resulting insights can be traced to, or are self-reflectively situated in the intercultural experience of the critic. In view of these theoretical considerations it comes as no surprise that one prominent test case of intercultural criticism, within the American context and with regard to German culture, is the situation of the mostly Jewish exiles from German-speaking countries, who, living between two cultures and trying to adopt the new vernacular, were faced with the dilemma of growing ever more critical of the old vernacular while nostalgically clinging onto a past forever lost.

4. Hermeneutic Practice

In the last two decades there has been so much talk about the definition and theory of *German Studies*, that their advocates sometimes forgot to discuss how to implement them, or at least to indicate how / what they were already doing in the classroom under the auspices of *German Studies*. Actually, it relates to the alleged theoretical underpinnings of their project. This lack of bridge between theory and practice, a gap often considered characteristically German, was lamented for several years, in individual departments as well as at the national level, until the daily practice, eventually leading to remarkable results in the students' intellectual performance, convinced both the theoreticians and the skeptics that the celebrated "cultural turn" had actually taken hold.

Focusing now more 'locally' on the changing profile of my own department, I could identify the following major areas of emphasis: national identity formation, construction of memory, visual representations, urban modes of perception. Courses I have taught during the last few years include the following: "Introduction to Reading Culture", "German Concepts of *Kultur*", "*Väterliteratur*":

The Quest for Personal Identity". "Literary Criticism as Theory of Culture", "Myth and Metaphor: Theory and Practice of Imagistic Thought", "Cultural Poetics: History and Literature from Historical Perspectivism to New Historicism", "Academic Exile and Cultural Transfer", "Cityscape Berlin: Constructions of Urban Space", "Staging the Crisis of Modernity: Kleist's Dramas", "19th Century Survey: Literary, Intellectual and Institutional History".

But one of the best indicators of the substantial change is the topics of ongoing dissertations I am involved in now: "Aesthetic Reenchantments: Political Freedom and the Work of Art in German Modernism" (Brett Wheeler; on concepts of aestheticizing the political from Max Weber to Jürgen Habermas), "German Jews Beyond Journalism: Essayism and Jewish Identity in the Writings of Heine and Kraus" (Paul Reitter; on the role of essayism in Jewish acculturation), "Temporality and the Emerging Sense of Historicity in 18th Century Berlin" (Matt Erlin; on Friedrich Nicolai's contribution to the early urban discourse), "Representations of Memory: Trends Towards Orality in the Current Debate on the Berlin Holocaust Memorial" (Kirsten Harjes; on visual and verbal forms of commemoration), "Heterotopic Performances in the Berlin *Hinterhof*" (Rob McFarland; on the *Hinterhof* as a utopian site of both rural and urban attitudes), "Displays of the Exotic: German Perceptions of Primitivism" (Eric Ames).

Recent dissertations of students who went on to become professors of *German Studies* include the following: "*Intellektuelle Aporie und literarische Originalität. Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studien zum deutschen Realismus: Keller, Raabe und Fontane*" (Mark Lehrer, University of Denver), "Authenticities: Bodies, Gardens and Pedagogies in Late Eighteenth Century Germany" (J. Courtney Federle, University of Chicago; on corporeal identity in philanthropic writings), "Speaking Out of Place: Vulnerability of Narration and Narration of Vulnerability" (David Levin, Columbia University; on Sieg

fried's "*Lindenblatt*" as a cultural trope in Wagner's opera and Fritz Lang's film), "Reading and Identity Construction in the Eighteenth-Century German Novel: Gellert, La Roche, Nicolai, Goethe" (Robert Bledsoe, Rice University; on strategies of identificatory reading), "Poetics, Politics, and the Romantic Concept of the Work of Art" (Michel Chaouli, Harvard University; on the crossroads of aesthetics and politics in the early writings of Friedrich Schlegel).

If criticism across cultures, understood as reflecting on the transfer of culturally constructed meaning, is the main project of cultural studies as we understand and perform them today, we have to look for both theoretical and historical models which may help us understand the act of cultural transfer we are involved in when we look at literature written in a language other than our own. Obviously, we have to be bilingual in the literal and in a metaphorical sense in order to translate meaning from one language to another. This may appear as an obvious conclusion, but such appeal to common sense is no longer as common as one might wish. Academic disciplines are no longer necessarily defined by discrete subject matter, and their interdisciplinary efforts are often integrated also methodologically by adhering to pervasive theoretical paradigms such as Deconstruction or New Historicism, which persuaded critics to increasingly rely on English as the *lingua franca* of globalized intellectual exchange.

When, under the auspices of cross-disciplinary cultural studies, the scholar of French literature, for instance, deals with Nietzsche, the philosopher with Novalis, the colleague in Rhetoric with Hannah Arendt, and the critic of German literature with Adorno, they are all dealing with texts written in German, but most of them, including many Germanists, read and discuss them only in English translation. Besides, they often talk about the rhetorical construction of theoretical discourse without even looking at the particulars of the very language that generates and transports the argument. While in theory all

disciplines involved in cultural studies emphasize the integrity of what in such metaphorical transfer is to be understood as "the other", in practice the actual translation of such "other" subject matter into English is no longer avoided as a kind of linguistic colonialism. The theoretical commitment to multiculturalism and the practice of monolingualism does not seem to strike many cultural critics as a contradiction. But in view of recent political attacks on bilingualism and, even more so, in view of the rampant administrative push for the consolidation of smaller departments, with foreign language departments often slated to be absorbed by the English departments, the case must be made for the basic assumption that, within the project of multiculturalism, cultural competence means linguistic competence, *i.e.* the ability to look critically at the bilingual construction of the "otherness" of the subject.

5. Conclusion

For the conclusion of my observations, I will return to the opening scene and close the rather theoretical remarks with a much more tangible outlook. The doctoral candidate, whom I mentioned at the outset as a brilliant example of the kind of intellectual rigor in *German Studies* that I have tried to outline, proved to be the most sought-after candidate nationwide on the academic job market this year. He could even turn down a prestigious offer of Yale University, a most cherished position out of reach for most candidates, and decide, instead, to become Assistant Professor of *German Studies* and Intellectual History in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in Washington D. C., where future politicians and diplomats for the entire world are trained. This is more real political impact than the politicized Germanists of the sixties could have dreamed up in their intellectual utopias. Obviously, *German Studies* has become a public field which can no longer be ignored, as the study of literature

sometimes was, as merely an academic version of private bedside reading. As an intellectual enterprise, it is both challenging as any demanding project and enjoyable as any venture which involves our identity as critical intellectuals and committed human beings.

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