Hannah Schroder and Achim Hölter

Round Tables (summaries)

A: The Arts as Universal Code

Chair: Gerald Gillespie
Participants: Achim Hölter, Christine Knoop, Marc Mathieu Münch, Haun Saussy

This panel explores the aesthetic debates surrounding the possible equivalencies surrounding various medial forms. It is chaired by Gerald Gillespie from Stanford University. Marc Mathieu Münch, from the University of Lorraine; Haun Saussy, from the University of Chicago; Christine Knoop, from the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics in Frankfurt (Main); and Achim Hölter, from the University of Vienna, participate in the discussion.

Gerald Gillespie opens the panel by noting that, although this question could be applied in almost any socio-historical context, he will be focusing on the Romantic period. The Romantics, he argues, were interested in unifying the arts and examining the interactions between modes of artistic expression, rather than seeing them in opposition. He acknowledges the complexity of this area of study, noting that there are of course many methodological approaches to the interaction of different media, before turning to a presentation of two significant events in Western cultural history and how these events may provide a productive way to explore the issues raised in the panel.

The first of these events, Gillespie argues, is the evolution of an "encyclopaedic and heuristic tradition"[1] which has developed over a number of centuries in the Western novel and which has enabled the emergence of a huge range of narrative representations of culture. The second, Gillespie contends, is the presence of other forms of artistic production, from opera in the Romantic period to contemporary film and cinema. Referencing Arthur Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1818, repr. 1844), he notes Schopenhauer's acknowledgement of the various forms of artistic pursuit and his cosmological approach to studying this range of form. Schopenhauer, according to Gillespie, saw music as incorporating this whole *cosmic range*, from the planetary bass to the high lyrical expression of the human voice. This interest in representing the entire range and production of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was then picked up by Wagner in his operas. Gillespie then turns to a consideration of several works of modernist literature

1 All quotes in this article are from transcripts of the recorded panel discussions at the ICLA 2016 (21.-27. July 2016, University of Vienna).

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from the nineteenth and twentieth century, before moving on to film from the early twentieth century. Films can also, he argues, reflect the "encyclopaedic" tradition of the novel, containing within its wide-ranging historical processes.

Haun Saussy joins the conversation by turning his attention to Vienna itself. Vienna, Saussy notes, is an ideal location for the discussion to take place, being a former multilingual empire and having a strong tradition of "hybridity" and varying languages, religions, and cultures. It is, therefore, a place which lends itself especially well to the question regarding the extent to which art can offer "universal codes". Saussy turns to the topic of digitisation in order to address the central question of the panel. The computerisation of culture, he argues, offers the potential to turn every piece of art into a singular code – a sequence of zeros and ones which can be achieved for all art forms. Saussy expresses doubt about this claim, contending that it "disregards in fact the way in which binary media is a technique of representation".

Here, Saussy calls for a return to the Baroque period for further insights. Whilst computerisation was still centuries ahead, the Baroque period did represent a time when the possibility of universal codes and languages was a matter of significant concern. Looking back to 1665, Saussy notes the example of the famous Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher who had a particular interest in languages and entered into a correspondence with Kaiser Rudolph of Vienna. Kaiser Rudolph, concerned about the practicalities of the diversity of the number of languages spoken in his territories, tasked Kircher with the creation of a machine which could translate languages. Kircher, Saussy explains, did in fact build a box which contained a number of codes that would point to the corresponding terms in Kircher's universal dictionary. This idea that the world was formed by a number of micro units that could be combined and recombined in an infinite number of ways, Saussy contends, was "essential to the Baroque understanding of the world".

Returning to the present, Saussy points out that we now do have number of mechanical means of cultural production. He uses a poem by Quirinus Kuhlmann – "basically a list of nouns [that] can be permuted in billions and billions of different ways" – as an example. An individual in Switzerland, Saussy explains, has embedded this into a webpage, whereby every time a person loads the page it will reshuffle the words into a different order. It will take ten thousand years of people reloading the page to exhaust the possible combinations. Saussy then turns to the contemporary Austrian composer Peter Ablinger who has deconstructed a recording of a human voice into its parts. Saussy argues that this demonstrates a continuity from the work of Hermann von Helmholtz who, in the 1850s, showed that every vowel and consonant could be reproduced in the form of a series of vibrations, occurring at the same time but at different frequencies.

Ablinger uses a computer to much the same effect, reproducing the different tonalities of the human voice. This, Saussy contends, represents "a mechanical decomposition of the forms of signification" which can be transferred to a different medial form, "so that via the computer the piano's chords take the place of human vocal chords".

Christine Knoop joins the conversation with a clarification of the term *empirical aesthetics* as this is the focal research commitment of the *Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics*, where she carries out her research. She describes this as the investigation of the human response to works of art, so in the case of literature "how actual readers respond to particular typescripts, to particular genres, to individual texts, or to individual features in literary texts". This work is carried out through collaboration and "interdisciplinary operations with psycholinguists, with empirical psychologists, and with neuroscientists". Knoop traces this interest in the affective qualities of artistic production back to classical rhetoric through to the eighteenth century, in particular the work of Kant. Knoop, however, claims that this interest waned in the nineteenth century, and believes it is still lacking today. She thinks that "the only option we have to gain back such an [...] overarching understanding of aesthetics" is to follow a comparative and interdisciplinary study which incorporates, for insights to emotional response, expertise from psychologists, biologists, and neuroscientists. This approach, Knoop argues, is offered through empirical aesthetics.

Knoop goes on to describe in more detail the work of "empirical aestheticists". Their research, she explains, attempts to bridge biologically and socioculturally influenced perceptions of works of art, with intermedial explorations being of particular interest and significance. Taking music and poetry as an example, she notes that studies have shown that the human brain processes poetry in more similar ways to music than to other literary genres. Concepts and terminologies are also of special interest, taking as an example the word "elegance", which is used in different forms of artistic production, such as "elegant terms and phrases", "elegant brushstrokes in paintings, elegant harmonies in music". Therefrom arises the question of whether "empirical readers and art-lovers experience similar aesthetic emotions and insights in different items and categories", and whether there are overarching conceptual patterns.

Whilst elegance is something that the "empirical aestheticists" are currently tackling, Knoop notes that other concepts have proved more difficult, and that future work plans to examine the "sublime", a term which has proved complex. A possible approach to this intricate term might be to take a dual approach by considering more "traditional" approaches – that is looking at how the sublime is treated in a corpus of literature – in addition to approaching people to ask them about their understanding and experience of the term. This kind of work could,

for example, rely on interview data but also incorporate "physiological studies". Knoop notes that these studies could attempt to measure people's emotional responses or levels of arousal by, for example, measuring any increase in a person's heart rate when confronted with a particular term.

Marc Mathieu Münch similarly notes the parallels between neuroscience and the humanities but argues this is not only apparent in the study of aesthetics but also in the study of ethics. He agrees upon the significance of considering the particular affective qualities of a work of art, claiming that "art cannot be defined as the collection of words or of artists or of style, but as an interacting system" which involves not only creators but receivers as well. A consideration of affect also, Münch notes, reintroduces the concept of value.

Achim Hölter joins the discussion, focusing on the title of the roundtable, "The Arts as Universal Code", which, he argues, draws on the central theme of the congress as a whole: language. Code, he remarks, is a more universal and inclusive way to consider the dialogical relationships between varying forms of artistic production. Hölter recalls a conference titled "Comparative Arts" that he participated in with the German Comparative Literature Association in 2007. The links between Comparative Literature and the arts in general, he argues, are rooted in the "American School" of Comparative Literature, as opposed to the "French School" which laid a more significant focus on the study of literature only. While these "old school ideas", Hölter notes, have changed with time, he found that even in 2007 the conference needed to justify its intermedial focus.

He turns to a historical overview of the interest in seeking commonalities and similarities between different forms of artistic production, referring to "German idealism". The "German idealists", Hölter states, sought to build a systematic approach to mapping different artistic media. Following Kant, for example, one could seek to map every aesthetic movement as an attempt to mediate "the pleasant and the disagreeable". Around 1900, a more empirical focus emerged. The American scholar George Lansing Raymond wrote seven volumes systematising the different forms of artistic expression. Similarly, the German scholar Max Dessoir founded not only a journal on general aesthetic studies, but also held a congress on the subject in Berlin. Hölter notes, however, that this area of interest fell out of popularity in the mid-twentieth century but is now coming back into focus. Drawing on his experiences teaching at the University of Vienna, Hölter gives the example of a course he is planning to teach on the "sublime". The "sublime" as a term, Hölter notes, offers an excellent example of the considerations of the panel, by raising the questions: "Is there any such thing? Is there a universal term possible? [...] Is that a Platonic idea or just a word that we have made up?"

B: Language: The Essence of World Literature?

Chair: Achim Hölter
Participants: Sandra Bermann, Hans Bertens, Adams Bodomo, Ipshita Chanda

This panel strives to combine two main aspects of *comparatism*: the universal linguistic condition of every kind of literature, oral or written, and the worldwide migration and exchange of texts. It considers the question of hegemonic world languages in a situation that is more or less adequately described with Goethe's term or its descendants. Chaired by Achim Hölter from the University of Vienna, the discussion brings together Sandra Bermann from Princeton University, Hans Bertens from Utrecht University, Adams Bodomo from Vienna University, and Ipshita Chanda from the Department of Comparative Literature at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad.

Achim Hölter opens the debate mentioning some of the current problems in the field of world literature, in particular questions arising from languages (national, regional, professional, specialised) being the substance of all literary and critical activities, leading to permanent and currently growing problems of terminology, but also all kinds of usage. It seems that some languages have definitely reached the status of world languages, which may, apart from global communication and cultural hegemony, entail disrespect for numerous languages which have only recently emancipated. Translation as a market is, then, simultaneously on the rise and challenged, as it is at the same time overcoming boundaries and making them visible. World literature is not only the – developing and changing – core concept of comparatism, but also a term including a reference to the worldliness of texts.

Reflecting on literature and language, Ipshita Chanda states that "the specifically human ability to use language to create what does not exist, and the special ability that human language affords as a medium of our intersubjectivity, are arguably best exemplified by literature regardless of where and in what language it is composed". This leads Chanda to consider the pairing of "world" with "literature", as "surely we do not mean that language is the essence of world literature only, rather than of literature as a whole". She then acknowledges Dionýz Ďurišin's conceptualisation of "language as national, and world literature as a sum total of national language literatures". This leads her to consider recent developments in scholarship surrounding world literature, where some have sought to "designate some world languages into which literature must be translated in order to be made available to, or gain the status of, world literature".

The term world literature, Chanda notes, "was brought into the literary discourse of the western world as a universal to challenge the parochialism of rampant jingoistic nationalism and to subvert the powerplays of nineteenth century

Europe". While "[t]he monocultural, monolingual nineteenth century nation reduced language to territory", Goethe believed that literature "transcended" these boundaries. Thus, "literature embodied the plurality of the world in its external difference, a singular but universal phenomenon that could pose the human question and reveal the human condition from many different locations".

Chanda notes that literature reflects the diversity of languages, which poses complex questions about how to define world literature, as well as who creates this definition. A definition dependent on translatability and circulation, she argues, "serves to limit the idea of literature to what is accessible to some arbitrarily imagined world for reasons that are commercial, non-literary, and tied to the apron strings of global capital". Chanda quotes Rabindranath Tagore, in his intention to "translate Comparative Literature from English into Bengali, and call it world literature". She explains that Tagore "had already elsewhere clarified the etymology of *sahitya*, the word used for literature in many Indian languages, including Bengali, the language in which he wrote. *Sahitya* is derived from the Sanskrit *sahit*, meaning with or together. For Tagore the essence of literature was being with the other, connecting to the feelings and sympathies of those who are different from us".

Tagore problematised the notion of a "monolingual, monocultural nation derived from nineteenth century European nationalist discourse", noting that plurality invites a re-conceptualisation of ideas of the nation. "This unfinished endeavour," Chanda observes, "which we are still living and working towards in the Asian subcontinent today, prompts me to question the idea of a national literature aligned with a single language and of world literature theorised through the dynamics of translation and circulation of individual national language literatures. If you are located in a nation with twenty three official languages, in which literature and orature have been composed for centuries, it becomes obvious that literature is a universal category unlimited by territory or language". Humans, Chanda acknowledges, have a long history of "contact with other languages and cultures" and "comparison as method moves us away from collapsing languages and the literatures written in them into territorial confinement, and towards a willingness to engage with alterity and plurality as existential conditions". World literature, thus, must reflect "a world formed through contactual relations" rather than the "circulation and translation of national language literatures".

"Comparative", however, highlights difference which, Chanda argues, points to "the theoretical and ethical strength of Comparative Literature" in its "willing attempt to reach out across difference". Chanda further notes that "beyond the easy and appropriative solutions of domestication, circulation, or representation through translation, lie untranslatability, and the possible failure of understanding. Actual engagement with plurality and the alterity that characterise the world require hu-

mility and respect for difference". This is crucial in current "times of majoritarian, authoritarian, aggressive, and exclusionary laws on migration and citizenship". Chanda, therefore, argues that "we must recall that our discipline has tenaciously survived scepticism, crises, rejections, accusations of irrationality, and some obituaries from well-meaning family members, simply because it acknowledges literature's ability to embody difference across the world, and reaches out beyond a familiar language and culture, to grasp this difference". Chanda concludes that "literature which presents, and sometimes refuses to unravel, these mysteries is our companion, teacher, and guide in that quest".

Adams Bodomo states that his "main interest on the question of language as an important aspect of comparative or global literature is to chart a twenty-first century agenda that sees the development of African language literature" or "Afriphone literature", and to show how "African languages can play a role in this new conceptualisation of multilinguality as an important aspect of Comparative Literature". Bodomo turns to David Damrosch, who has "already testified to the importance of language in Comparative Literature in claiming that language is a key justifying the existence of Comparative Literature as a separate discipline".

This raises questions in the multilingual context of African and Comparative Literature as to how to deal with such a variety of languages. Bodomo notes his preferred approach is that of "parallel texting", defined "as a set of texts in which literary expressions in two or more languages are mediated in the form of translation at various levels, including the graphemic, the morphological, the syntactic, the phonological, and certainly the semantic". Bodomo notes that his own poem, which centres on the death of Nelson Mandela, is an example of such "parallel texting", in that it is written both in Dagaare (a language of northern Ghana) and in English. This allows the reader to "get the same message in two languages, which is a more inclusive approach than a monolingual text". The first and last stanzas of this poem are reproduced below:

N bakori mine woi	Friends
N mabiiri woi	Children of one Mother
Zenɛ Dizemba beraanuu bebiri	Today December 5
Te yelpaala na ba taa nimiri	News coming in bodes not well
[…]	
A zɛle tammo ne logiri	Bow, army of arrows in tow
A te kulo o yiri	He is on his way home
A kyaare sapare	Facing East
A te gɛrɛ Dapare	On the ultimate journey to Dapare

This leads Bodomo to questions of terminology as "a Comparative Literature agenda necessitates a clear language of comparatism". Bodomo, therefore, argues that "we need a certain meta-language in which to express concepts. How do we say sonnet, author, novel, poem etc in African languages; how do we express established theoretical notions in literature in less commonly taught languages?".

Hans Bertens turns to *The Evenings: A Winter's Tale* (2016) by the Dutch author Gerard Reve, which was published to much acclaim in the UK. Bertens quotes *The Guardian*, who described the novel as "not only a masterpiece but a cornerstone manqué of European literature"; the *Sunday Telegraph*, who called it "an undisputed classic"; *The Economist*, who named it "an existential masterwork"; *The Observer*, for whom it was "a dark masterpiece"; and the *TLS*, who described it as "an orphaned masterpiece". Bertens notes the significance of "orphaned" here as "its original, *De avonden: een winterverhaal*, had been published in 1947 and in 2016 Reve had been dead for ten years". Bertens points out that Reve's work only came into English translation through a subsidy from the Dutch Foundation for Literature which is funded by the Dutch government. Without this support, Bertens notes, "*The Evenings* would still be wholly unknown in the Anglophone world".

This, for Bertens, exemplifies the problems of the literary market, as "if things were completely left to the market, writers who write in one of Europe's smaller languages would have little chance of making their way into the halls of world literature". This in turn means, for Bertens, that it is "English being the *lingua franca* that makes the theory and practice of world literature possible". Bertens notes the difficulties faced by French and German authors who wish to see their work translated into English, demonstrated by the fact that only around 2% of novels published in English were translated works in the year 2014, compared to 27% in France. Bertens, however does "not expect parity – the Anglophone world is much larger than the Francophone one", but instead argues that this still reveals "a problem that faces all of us who work in world literature. Other than Comparative Literature, the term world literature – because of the scope that it suggests – demands a sort of literary justice. It does not demand a world literature canon based on this or that specific quality, but it implies a moral imperative to see all texts, from wherever they originate and whenever they were produced, as potential members of a truly global world literature family – even if one can only read them in an English translation". As English translations are produced only rarely, "world literature asks of our colleagues who are able to read languages that most of us don't understand to signal texts that they think deserve our attention. It also asks of our literary and scholarly journals – run by ourselves – to be daring and to accept perhaps risky contributions on materials that we have never heard of and that we can't really judge". While "we might fall for the occasional hoax and publish a computer-

generated piece on a putative masterpiece that never existed", Bertens believes this "surely would be worth the risk".

Sandra Bermann offers a "perspective of the Americas in Comparative Literature", although she begins by "adding two 's's' to the title of the panel, rendering it: 'Languages—the Essence of World Literatures'". Bermann notes the globality of English as a language, adding that "we know a good deal about the past and current power of English, and that its hegemony has been acquired largely through media, politics, publishing, and a colonial past. Its power clearly affects our present as well as our historical understanding of world literatures". Bermann points out the contributions of comparatists across the world who "have offered invaluable reflections on English, the global and the world". Bermann states that, building on these previous interventions, "perhaps the moment has nonetheless come to give more theoretical and practical weight to local languages and cultures, to look more carefully at non-hegemonic literatures and how they interact with one another as well as with forces of international capitalism and cultural hegemony". This would represent a "working from below, as it were, keeping our gaze on the local, the peripheral, the vernacular, as well as the dominant" so that "we might better conceptualise literatures dialogically – in their varied interrelations, and their diverse imaginings of the world". Bermann argues that "we might thereby transform our conception of the global into an idea more multiple and alive – a cluster rather than a unity, an action rather than an entity". This, Bermann concludes, would further highlight "the importance of languages within and across national borders, of translation – and of polylingual collaborations".

Bermann questions the perception of the USA as "English and monolingual", noting that over 400 languages are spoken in this USA: "some indigenous, others brought by enslaved peoples, colonists, and immigrants from around the globe". In addition, Bermann notes the presence of "creoles, dialects, and hybrid languages". She, therefore, argues that "bringing multiple languages and vernacular cultures into our teaching and scholarship produces more variegated, open, and temporally nuanced views of the American language(s)". Bermann notes that, while the USA serves as an example, "we find throughout the Americas highly complex, historically distinct, polylingual literatures and cultures".

Bermann points to the importance of studying "literatures – within and across national borders" in learning languages. She notes that, despite there being around 6500 languages, few scholars of Comparative Literature achieve a knowledge of more than five, with only a talented few reaching ten or twelve. This, for Bermann, highlights the importance of translation. Bermann quotes Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in that "'translation between the dominant languages and marginalised languages; translation between marginalised languages; translation as the common language

of languages should go a long way towards enabling dialogues among the different world cultures, large or small.'". Here, Bermann argues, the internet opens up new possibilities: "through databases, websites, discussion groups, and online dissemination, the possibility of reading (and discussing) translations from many languages and cultures is rapidly expanding – and changing the educational landscape".

Bermann notes that a "focus on the local and vernacular as well as dominant literatures" can make "the task of sharing terminologies, dictionaries, and languages of comparatism among them [...] seem particularly daunting". She argues, however, that "to make serious headway, a global collaboration of polylingual scholars (some perhaps from the AILC/ICLA) would be especially effective. If results of their work could be translated into several local or peripheral as well as dominant languages – and disseminated online – they would," she expects, "generate innovative reflections among a rising generation of comparatists".

C: Has Comparatism Turned into Worldwide Cultural Studies?

Chair: Dorothy Figueira

Participants: Isabel Capeloa Gil, Zhang Longxi

This panel explores the way in which the discipline of Comparative Literature can be both defined and differentiated from related fields, such as Cultural Studies or world literature. It is chaired by Dorothy Figueira from the University of Georgia. Isabel Capeloa Gil from the Catholic University of Portugal and Zhang Longxi from the City University of Hong Kong participate in the discussion.

Dorothy Figueira begins the panel by offering a historical perspective on the development of the fields of Comparative Literature, world literature, and Cultural Studies. Figueira states that, before the founding of the ICLA, world literature was frequently a broad term used with the intention of expanding literary studies within the Western academy to be more inclusive of non-Western literatures, and of shifting the focus to include a more expansive study of cross-cultural reception studies. In the late twentieth century, Figueira argues, Comparative Literature has established itself with dedicated departments and publications and, in the United States in particular, the field of General Literature emerged with a special focus on reading texts in translation in order to incorporate literatures which the institution was not able to teach in the original language into study. In more recent years, Figueira explains, world literature has emerged, primarily from English language departments, in order to include non-Western literatures which, certain proponents of world literature felt, had been ignored in Comparative Literature departments. Figueira, how-

ever, disputes this assumption and asserts that, in her view, "world literature is no substitute for the more demanding field of Comparative Literature", and also questions the representativeness of various languages within the wider field. This political function of world literature – to promote inclusion that is deemed to be lacking – Figueira asserts, likens it to Cultural Studies.

Cultural Studies, Figueira explains, emerged in the UK in the 1960s and sought to critique and challenge the hierarchies and value judgements present in academic institutions and practice. This interrogation of structures of power within academic and cultural institutions was central to the founding of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. British Cultural Studies was, therefore, concerned with staging an intervention into the structuring of culture and society and exposing structural inequalities. American Cultural Studies, Figueira notes, followed the socialist predications of British Cultural Studies, but tended to lay a stronger focus on the embeddedness of cultural production within capitalist exploitation, with a particular interest in popular culture.

Figueira sees initial parallels between world literature and Cultural Studies, both fields, she believes, lack a methodological structure; take a free approach to borrowing their theories, methods, and principles from other disciplines; claim to occupy a space that Comparative Literature neglects; and both originate primarily from English Literature departments. Both, Figueira asserts, are fundamentally based on fallacies: that Comparative Literature neglects non-Western literatures and that the Humanities lack an interdisciplinary focus in the case of Cultural Studies. Figueira disputes both these foundations, arguing that an interdisciplinary focus has been central to her training in Comparative Literature. Both world literature and Cultural Studies, she pertains, claim to add things which have long been present within the discipline of Comparative Literature. Figueira asserts that, as she argued in her book *Otherwise Occupied. Theories and Pedagogies of Alterity*, world literature is that latest "in a series of pedagogies dealing with the Other in American Academia [...] [including] Postcolonial Studies, Identity Studies, Multiculturalism" which have all, she believes, followed similar trajectories within the academy of prioritising English-language studies at the expense of non-Anglophone literatures.

It is on this basis that Figueira criticises scholars of Cultural Studies who, she asserts, produce only a "simulacrum of the social sciences, enough to impress narrow-focused colleagues and students in an English department" but lacking academic rigour. This, Figueira argues, is mirrored in world literature departments "which appropriate authors and works from other languages rather than defer to the general expertise of other departments". This, Figueira argues, both perpetuates structural inequalities with the academy and simultaneously lessens the rigour and quality of the courses taught in these departments, which has the economic benefit

for university management of allowing non-specialist teaching assistants to be drafted in to teach such courses at lower staffing costs. It also places the study of literatures from across the world solely in hands of English departments.

Isabel Capeloa Gil joins the discussion to draw a distinction between British Cultural Studies and what is often in Europe termed Cultural Analysis, as it is practice, for example, at the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis. Cultural Analysis, Capeloa Gil argues, is more hermeneutic in style and less sociological in focus. She returns to the central question of the roundtable – "Has Comparatism Turned Into Worldwide Cultural Studies?"– and says she believes it has not, although acknowledges a growing concern about this question. She notes that in more recent decades there has been increased emphasis within Comparative Literature to move beyond European literatures, while also taking on the Cultural Studies commitment to socio-cultural intervention; to the interrogation of power structures based on class, gender, and race; and to a consideration of the study of popular culture. Comparative Literature's reliance on importing methods, themes, and approaches from other disciplines, Capeloa Gil notes, perhaps inevitably leads to anxieties about the place of the discipline within the wider Humanities.

The cultural turn within literary studies over the past three decades, Capeloa Gil believes, results from two key factors: a crisis of the discipline and the transformation of a socio-political agenda. This disciplinary crisis is rooted in a need to justify the discipline itself, while the socio-political agenda frequently calls for the incorporation of underrepresented perspectives. This has led to Comparative Literature – a discipline already concerned with crossing disciplinary borders – to widen its focus yet further to include fields such as law, neuroscience, and computer science. This has even led to the incorporation of big data and analytics into comparative research, something which troubles Capeloa Gil, as she believes it posits artificial intelligence above human creativity.

Capeloa Gil further points out a paradoxical tension within the field in the urge to both de-territorialise and re-territorialise the discipline. She believes the discipline has been sufficiently de-territorialised to incorporate the study of a wide range of cultural expression. She, however, points out that this may have been at the expense of the "literature" element of the discipline. If everything is to be included as literature, however, then it is to render the term literature meaningless. Therein lies the concern to re-territorialise, with a renewed emphasis on literary analysis. Clearly it is not possible, Capeloa Gil notes, to satisfy both the urge to widen the field of cultural analysis, and to narrow the field into the study of literature. Capeloa Gil argues that, while all literature is part of culture, not all culture is part of literature and, ultimately, if "we are to designate ourselves as practitioners of Comparative Literature, our mandate is to practice comparisons *with* literature". While Cultural Studies can be concerned with using text

to understand the functioning of culture, Comparative Literature – Capeloa Gil asserts – should be concerned with using text to understand the functioning of the text itself. The two fields – while closely related – are not, therefore, interchangeable.

Zhang Longxi joins the discussion to emphasise the strength that a position of "in- betweenness" can hold within the discipline of Comparative Literature, drawing on his own experience of working in both the USA and in Hong Kong. Comparative Literature, he argues, also occupies an "in-between" position within cultures, literatures, and languages, which looks beyond monolingualism and national borders. Zhang notes that while Figueira's insights related to the North American academy, and Capeloa Gil's to the European, he would like to offer an "in-between" perspective from his current professional position in Hong Kong. He returns to the central question of "Has Comparatism Turned Into Worldwide Cultural Studies?" by offering a definition of both comparatism and cultural studies. Comparatism, he argues, is not exclusive to the discipline of Comparative Literature but is a fundamental process in how we make sense of the world, with all of our actions, thoughts, and decisions contextual and relational.

Zhang refers back to the early years of the discipline of Comparative Literature when there was a requirement to compare at least two literatures and cultures. Comparative Literature, Zhang argues, has a tendency to be global, multilingual, and inclusive, something it shares with world literature. Zhang disagrees with Figueira in his belief that world literature is both important and necessary to Comparative Literature. This lies, firstly, in the renewed emphasis world literature has offered to the study of literature itself. Zhang draws on his own personal experience on the editorial board of a journal to note that many submissions claiming to be literary criticism did not consider literature at all. World literature, he argues, has addressed this issue by refocusing the discipline on the study of literature. The second positive development offered by world literature, Zhang argues, is a renewed focus on the "world". Zhang does not read world literature as a project which necessarily prioritises English, but can be a route to discovering new literatures. This could be a means to address the imbalance in cultural capital and increase the circulation of literatures which are less well known within the Western academy.

Zhang argues that Cultural Studies, particularly in the American context, offer a special focus on issues of class, gender, and race, which are socially and politically important for the Humanities as a whole. Zhang, however, believes that Cultural Studies have a particular aversion to the study of well-established literary works, resulting in the emergence of literary scholars who, in Zhang's opinion, do not necessarily favour literature. Zhang stresses that this gives rise to the difference between Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, with Cul-

tural Studies using the socio-political and cultural context as its starting point while Comparative Literature foregrounds literature itself. Zhang argues that, while there is certainly a place for Cultural Studies within the academy, Comparative Literature needs to reaffirm its disciplinary foundation and, therefore, reassert its own place within the Humanities through a renewed focus on literature itself, particularly beyond the Western canon.

D: The Language of Thematics

Chair: Hendrik Birus
Participants: Achim Hölter, Takauki Yokota-Murakami, Gianna Zocco

This panel explores the study of themes and motifs within the field of Comparative Literature. It features Achim Hölter from the University of Vienna, Takauki Yokota-Murakami from Osaka University, and Gianna Zocco from the University of Vienna (now: Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, Berlin). It is chaired by Hendrik Birus from Jacobs University Bremen.

Hendrik Birus opens the panel by identifying three German terms used in relation to the study of themes and motifs: *Stoffgeschichte*, *Motivgeschichte*, and *Thema*. He asks how we can best define these terms and identify their significance to the field of Comparative Literature and notes how complex it can be to form such definitions. Birus notes that "in the German tradition, there never was a direct connection between *Stoff-* and *Motivgeschichte* on the one hand and *Problemgeschichte* on the other". In the early twentieth century, German philosophy tended to seek to understand "the history of philosophy as a history of problems". This leads Birus to ask if *Problemgeschichte* should be an area of study within the study of thematics. Returning to the question of the importance of thematics to Comparative Literature specifically, Birus notes that the process of comparing aims not only to find similarities, but also to identify differences.

Achim Hölter joins the conversation by identifying his particular interest with the study of thematics, something that, he argues, everybody researching in the field of Comparative Literature engages with either directly, indirectly, or both. He references his postdoctoral research project which focused on disabled soldiers, war invalids, who had lost their ability to walk due to injuries sustained in warfare, as they are represented across nineteenth century European literature. In addition to writing this project, his postdoctoral position required him to prepare a lecture on a topic of choice. Hölter selected *Bücherschlachten* – or the "Battle of Books"/ "Battle with Books" – for his lecture, once again drawing him back into the study of thematics. Hölter agrees with Birus on the complexities of

attempting to define terminology. While "thematic studies" is a fairly self-explanatory way to describe research concerning themes, the German usage of *Thematologie*, borrowed from French and Italian, is more complex. This borrowing led to "lively discussions" in the 1980s and 1990s as the French and Italian usage included aspects of study which were not covered by the German term *Thema*. This, Hölter explains, "is the object of speech and has a current social or political relevance". *Motiv*, on the other hand "can be something which is only interesting within the tradition of literary texts". *Stoff*, in comparison, "is much more difficult to be expressed in English". Here, Hölter argues, dictionaries can still be of use, although there is only a very limited number of dictionaries of thematic studies in publication: in Italian, French, German, and English.

Considering the role of thematics for Comparative Literature in general, Hölter notes a certain impulse within the discipline to look for and "identify common denominators, to find rules that exist more or less in all cultures". And while it is plausible, Hölter argues, to create cross-cultural classifications on a range of motifs or even sub-motifs, the issue of linguistic differences complicates the project. Different languages express different concepts in different ways or "express the same things differently". However, Wikipedia, Hölter notes, will become a useful resource for addressing the issue, with multiple articles linking concepts across languages. Intermediality is also an important approach for Comparative Literature and thematics, alongside an investigation of themes across both literary and mass-media discourse and the "interaction of fictional texts and the facts out there in the real world". This includes not only the question of how literary texts are shaped by events in the real world, but how literary texts shape our interpretation of these events, something that is especially compelling in our current digital age.

Gianna Zocco joins the discussion, stating her interest in the study of thematics came from her recently completed PhD project. Her doctoral research explored the motif of the window, which allowed her to use the concrete starting image of the window to explore a "relatively advanced number of complex and fascinating topics, having to do with projection, visuality and imagination, surveillance, identity and gender, cultural theories of space", amongst others. This, Zocco explains, rooted her work in the study of thematics but allowed her to draw on the methodology of a broad area of studies thus making it relevant for more contemporary issues. Zocco, therefore, argues for thinking "of literary motifs and themes not – as it was done – in a positivistic tradition" but rather to consider each of these small units as having an "analytical structure of its own, that not only partakes in the larger form of the particular text, but also relates this particular text to aspects of the actual world [...] and possibly to other literary or cultural products with thematic similarities". This, Zocco argues, points to

the importance of intertextual and intermedial approaches to the study of thematics. Returning to her PhD project, Zocco notes that the practical elements were often challenging. She, for example, has been frequently asked about how she found all of the literary texts on which her research centred. She notes the possibility that her study missed certain important texts, simply because she did not uncover them in the course of her research. This is particularly challenging when looking outside of the "canon" to less well-known texts and authors which might represent "hidden diamonds" for such research.

Takauki Yakota-Murakami joins the conversation by referring to his own previous research in this area as his first book considered the *Don Juan* figure in both Eastern and Western traditions. Yakota-Murakami picks up on Zocco's intermedial focus by pointing out the potential dialogues between thematics and adaptation studies. Yakota-Murakami notes, however, that a cross-cultural approach, while revealing fascinating insights, can be complex. Taking Zocco's previous work as an example, he notes that a cross-cultural study would require the researcher to decide on what translation would be appropriate for "window" to begin with, but could also raise more complex issues surrounding architecture in different cultural contexts. These issues are even more intricate when considering more abstract concepts. The poststructuralists, Yakota-Murakami argues, have successfully demonstrated the instability of signifiers and that "we deconstruct on the same level as we construct". Yakota-Murakami praises the importance of continuing this process of deconstruction and, in terms of Comparative Literature, focusing on differences as well as similarities. Following poststructuralist argument, Yakota-Murakami argues that "we should emphasise the signifier rather than the signified". Referencing again Zocco's research, Yakota-Murakami notes that while a study of windows in literature from various cultures has clear merit, he would warn against the impulse "to find the meaning of windows in various cultures" and instead focus on how they are constructed.

E: Comparative Literature and the *Practical Turn*

Chair: Achim Hölter
Participants: Steven Sondrup [†], Cho Sung-Won

This panel explores practical aspects of comparative literary studies and covers differing yet interlinked concerns: hierarchies of language and how they can be challenging, advantages and challenges of digital tools, and the creation and maintenance of libraries as systems of knowledge. It is chaired by Achim Hölter

from the University of Vienna. Steven Sondrup from Brigham Young University and Cho Sung-Won from Seoul Women's University participate in the discussion.

Achim Hölter opens the panel by presenting "three waves" within Comparative Literature. He terms the first wave as a period of "self-description" in the 1980s which focused on producing historical accounts of particular disciplines and their developments. This, he argues, was followed by the second wave – "The Poetics of Knowledge" – which began around the turn of the millennium and still continues today, which turns away from history in favour of discussions on how we can both perceive and communicate objects of investigation. In recent years, Hölter argues, a third wave has emerged: a "practical turn" which forms the subject of the round-table's discussion. Hölter draws on his teaching experience to recount student discussions over how to define and demarcate Comparative Literature as a discipline and turns to his fellow-panellists to explore this question.

Steven Sondrup expresses his own interest in exploring digital media and how digitisation has impacted literary studies. Sondrup argues that the online search engines offer a "global library" of literatures, with the impact of digital developments of literary studies offering both opportunities and challenges for academia. In particular, the circulation and dissemination of texts has been significantly increased through digital technologies. Hölter adds that comparatist practices of using digital search engines are an interesting line of inquiry and the impact this has had on our ways of both producing and communication research.

Cho Sung-Won introducing a further discussion topic by drawing on personal experience to argue that scholars of Comparative Literature must ask themselves questions about their own motivation in practicing the discipline. For Cho, an important element in her studies was a desire to make Korean literature visible with comparative literary studies and position herself against Euro-centric tendencies within the discipline. Cho argues that while digital technologies and the increased cross-border circulation which they have enabled, do allow for greater recognition of a wider variety of literatures, they also expose their own limitations. She argues that an in-depth understanding of the language in which literature is written is crucial to its understanding and critiques monolinguist tendencies within Comparative Literature and the problematic power relations which the dominance of the English language have compounded. Technology, Cho contends, further escalated these developments, as technological tools frequently require the user to have an understanding of relevant English. She advocates for a multilingual focus in Comparatist studies.

Hölter acknowledges the importance of Cho's argument and responds with two related questions that root the discussion firmly in the practical aspects of comparative literary studies: how many languages and which languages are necessary for comparatist study? Cho argues that these decisions, although difficult,

should be rooted in research objectives: a comparatist scholar, she argues, should prepare as many languages as their research demands and the discipline as a whole should strengthen their focus on language learning. Hölter, however, asks if even in a multi-lingual academic discipline a "common" language of English can actually improve international communication by facilitating mutual dialogue and understanding and turns to Sondrup to elaborate.

Sondrup notes that most Comparative Literature programmes in the USA do require foreign-language learning, with rigorous degree pathways requiring at least three additional languages to English, often including a classical language. Hölter, however, notes that deciding which languages to offer as a department can prove problematic and acknowledges that the increasing marketisation has further impacted academia and has often required the Arts and Humanities to take a defensive position in demonstrating their practical application within contemporary job markets, something for which language acquisition makes a strong case. Following these contemporary developments, the panellists turn their focus to digital developments within the field. Digital developments, Sondrup notes, have had an important impact on access and engagement – making texts available to audiences that would have otherwise have difficulty accessing them. Cho acknowledges the opportunities search engines can offer in systematic studies but argues that they present only a limited perspective and cannot always be used as a substitute for physical presence. Following questions of categorising and disseminating knowledge, Hölter turns to the topic of libraries.

The creation, maintenance, and usage of libraries, in particular multi-lingual libraries, raise interesting questions regarding research in the discipline, Hölter argues. In particular, which texts are made available in a particular collection and in what language these texts are offered raises compelling questions. Cho notes that both digital and physical libraries highlight crucial questions about hierarchies of language: which knowledge of European languages often required in order to navigate collections. The lack of transparency surrounding digital algorithms is a further concern, she notes, and leaves us with a limited understanding of how the results we see are collated.