Doing German Differently: Pioneering New Research Practices and Partnerships around the UK

Rebecca Braun (Lancaster University) & Benedict Schofield (King's College London)

Introduction

In a 2016 article in *German Life and Letters*, entitled 'Leaning In: Why and How I Still Study the German', Sarah Colvin asks: 'What is the object of study of contemporary German Studies, and what *should* it be?'[1] In posing this question, Colvin is deliberately echoing Sander Gilman, who, in 1989, similarly questioned the 'hows' and 'whys' of German Studies. Gilman was arguing that individual scholars, but also the discipline as a whole, should begin to scrutinise more carefully our purpose, place, and methods.[2] Seventeen years on, Colvin suggests we still require such self-scrutiny, which 'perhaps even now does not always sufficiently inform academic practice and teaching'.[3]

Similar questions were raised in 2017 at the Association for German Studies conference, where one of the panels, convened by the editors of this article, sought to explore what 'doing German Studies differently' might look like in practice. In particular, we were interested in recent developments in interdisciplinarity and impact, and what these actually mean when seen not simply as future aspirations for German Studies, but as actual working practices that are already established. The discussion on that panel is captured in this article through six 'interventions' from the panelists. Crucially, these are not being brought together here to dictate future foci or parameters for German Studies, not least since, as Colvin has also pointed out, such attempts 'risk reducing and dulling rather than invigorating a dynamic discipline'.[4] Instead, we seek to take stock of recent projects that intellectually illustrate innovation in our discipline, but which in many cases also consider highly pragmatic issues around collaborative and interdisciplinary research, the diversification of our audience and our publications, the timescales of such work, and the impact of these changes on our teaching, our concept of the 'lone scholar', and the wider shape of our field.

Such activity of course takes place against the peculiarities and challenges of our specific moment in time; one in which the narrative of a crisis in the Arts and Humanities, and in the Modern Languages more specifically, is widespread. The annual 'Language Trends' survey makes for disheartening reading, with the yearly reduction in the number of students learning German in schools inevitably impacting on our degree programmes – a trend which has led to the 'closure of some fifty Modern Languages departments in UK universities'.[5] Current uncertainties over Brexit are not only psychological – that sense of the UK turning away from Europe and internationalism – but also intensely practical, not least when it comes to our involvement in the Erasmus programme; our access to European funding; and crucially the residence status of our European colleagues, and the residence and fee status of our European students. More broadly, as narratives of nationalism resurface across the world, and national perspectives turn inwards rather than outwards, the question of why one might study a foreign culture, and a foreign language, simultaneously becomes intellectually clearer and yet politically more fraught. Furthermore, the whys and wherefores of studying one's own language, literature and culture have also become increasingly subject to scrutiny: consider the debates around the future of literary studies in Germanistik captured in the 2015 volume of *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*, or the 'English: Shared Futures' conference in Newcastle in 2017 that sought to establish a common platform from which to articulate the position of English Studies in a changing world.[6]

Such crises are not unique to our era, of course – and as Nicola McClelland and Richard Smith have revealed in their extraordinarily extensive work on the history of language learning and teaching, the concept of crisis has repeatedly resurfaced in the story of the Modern Languages.[7] Furthermore, in what initially might appear as something of a paradox, German Studies as an intellectual discipline has, far from entering terminal decline, developed in exciting, innovative ways over the past decades, above all in moving beyond what has been termed the traditional 'literature-philosophy-history' model and beyond the boundaries of an established literary canon, but without losing sight of either that original model or the ongoing usefulness of the canon.[8] Here we might consider the range of popular 'trans-terms' as more than buzzwords, but indicative of the diversity and intellectual breadth that has always underpinned our subject: *transnational*, *transperiod*, *translingual*, *transdisciplinary*, and *translatable*. The rise of these terms has not led to the replacement of the canon, but rather to a new critical approach that recognises the hybridity and fluidity of what we study. As Sandra Richter, the recently appointed Director of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, has stressed, German-language culture 'entfaltet sich regional, interregional, international, global. So betrachtet fällt sie völlig aus dem nationalen Rahmen: Sie ist weder groß noch klein, kennt kein Zentrum, aber zahlreiche Peripherien'.[9]

This multiplicity, 'worldliness' and interdisciplinarity of our studies has in turn been enshrined in research funding programmes, most notably the Arts and Humanities Research Council's 'Translating Cultures' strand, and the recent 'Open World Research Initiative', both addressed in several of the interventions in this article (notably by Braun, Kohl, and Schofield). Both schemes are also, one might add, built on the extensive ground staked out by the traditional 'literature-philosophy-history' model, but with the express desire of returning new research insights, and particularly methods, to it that are born of a broader exchange across cultures and disciplines. Equally, while impact is intimately associated with nationally-dictated processes like the Research

Excellence Framework, the contributions to this article reveal how our work generates impact in spite of, not because of, the culture of REF. Instead, impact is shown as both contributing to knowledge within the very core of German Studies and as changing people's perceptions far beyond academia, in a mutually supportive manner (particularly in the work of Bradley, Hodkinson and Williams).

All of the interventions in this article are thus concerned with what our object of study is, and what it should (or could) be. They explore these questions across the fields of research, impact, discipline and pedagogy, with projects that demand that we not only ask new questions, but find new ways of answering them too. They ask us to reconsider where the borders of our work as 'Germanists' may or may not lie; to think further on who the different audiences are who show interest in our work and how we might best communicate with them; and to explore further how German Studies is networked, with other languages, with other subjects, and with other countries. In this sense, the interventions in this article share Colvin's battle cry that we should 'proclaim assertively the creative, innovative potential of the complexity and plurality that are necessarily central to studying the German', showcasing interdisciplinary, multi-audience and transnational approaches that at once challenge traditional disciplinary boundaries, but also help us assert our disciplinary value in ever more confident ways.[10] All interventions also underscore the transformative step for each individual researcher in placing their expertise into a broader collaborative framework. As they do so, German Studies is revealed in no way to be a static discipline, but rather as remarkably agile in its ability to 'do things differently' precisely in order to promote a clearer sense of what our core business is and why the wider world should take note.

Rebecca Braun (Lancaster University): On finding new Partners and Audiences

I recently attended a Social Sciences conference where one of the speakers played us a YouTube clip of lightning. He used the way it forked and branched as a metaphor to help us think about the potential for different futures: each of the smaller forks are paths that the lightning tries out, potential that is literally held in the air, before it alights on the principal branch that defines its overall shape. But the earth that is witness to these celestial pyrotechnics also plays an integral part in their genesis. The earth pulls the lightning towards it, causing it to prioritize one route over another. Transformative potential is held not just in the dynamic process represented by the flash of light, nor in the immediate context it illuminates, but also in the space that will go on to receive it.

This metaphor has stayed with me as I have thought about the pathways traced by my own work and where it might go next. So far, it has taken me from specialising in the literary work of Günter Grass at the beginning of the millennium to becoming Co-Director of Lancaster's Institute for Social Futures, with a particular responsibility for developing futures thinking across the arts, languages, and literature, in 2017. As diverse as these research activities may appear, they have all unfolded along the same initial flash of inspiration: that the analytical literary category of authorship is not at all dead, neither for German literature nor for the wider world. It just needs to be redirected to new partners and new audiences.

My first attempt to do this happened within the context of a 2-year AHRC Leadership Fellowship, which I received in 2014 to develop interdisciplinary research around the general area of literary authorship, and which was subsequently affiliated to the AHRC's 'Translating Cultures' theme. I chose 'literary celebrity' as the pilot strand for the 'Authors & the World' research hub that I created (http://www.authorsandtheworld.com), because the topic lent itself to different approaches that highlighted the importance of developing research with colleagues not just from other language areas and disciplines, but also from the practical end of authorship - writers, translators, editors, reviewers, all liaising across multiple countries. From a purely personal research perspective, I wanted to find new ways of exploring what it means to write and be read in the world in order to make sure I was asking the right questions in my monograph on contemporary German-language authorship. The resulting series of interdisciplinary seminars and practice-focused workshops did do all of this, but the branch has since forked on multiple occasions, and each forking has entailed a new set of partners and methodologies, as well as a new set of challenges.

Firstly, it has led to a handbook on 'World Authorship', co-edited with Tobias Boes and Emily Spiers, that is currently in preparation with Oxford University Press. The structure of this replicates the principal impact-inspired insight from the hub, namely that if you want to identify the most significant trends within contemporary literature, then you should work alongside creative practitioners in order to do so. The handbook's 30 chapters cover all five continents, and over a third of our contributors are professionals from these very different worlds of publishing. We have received invaluable help from them in refining the scope and purpose of the book. But you cannot ask people who make their living from what they write or publish to give you their time and energy for nothing, and academic publishing is poorly set up to allow for this. So we have had to do some creative thinking here, for example by making the genre of the public lecture / conversation work for us. This is a good way of paying a fee, extending hospitality and intellectual exchanges that are valued for their own sake, and finding a subsequent written format, based on transcripts, that we, as editors, can steer towards academic discourse, without asking people to speak and think in a way that is not theirs.

A second prong of the fork has led to a dedicated research strand on digital literature, headed up by my colleague in French, Erika Fülöp, which has gained particular traction with online writing communities. This has meant that Erika has undergone a fast-track introduction to both digital humanities research methods and digitally-facilitated literary practices that can help us, for example, think about distinctions between professional and amateur authorship in a variety of different countries and cultures. Over the space of some eighteen months, she has opened a new research window onto virtual and multilingual writing communities that has attracted both internal, faculty-level impact funding and external OWRI funding. As these projects develop apace, we are all learning together about how to employ techniques much more readily used in the social sciences: focus groups, corpus discourse analysis and speculative design figure alongside close-textual analysis and archival research in our methodological tool box. The key to doing this kind of work convincingly has been our ability to draw on the different disciplinary skill sets represented first in the Authors & the World hub and then also in the Institute for Social Futures.

A third, and perhaps the most unexpected, prong has led to work commissioned by the Ministry of Defence to inform their Global Strategic Trends programme out to 2050. This was not a commission that either I or my colleague and fellow Germanist, Emily Spiers, initially felt in the least trained to deliver. In their own words, the MoD's series of publications 'describes a strategic context for those in the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and wider Government who are involved in developing long term plans, policies and capabilities'.[11] The idea that the insights we had gleaned from our work in the hub on the collaborative nature of authorship, starting with Goethe and ending with blogs, might have a role to play in securing the UK's defence and security priorities for the next thirty years was not a natural one for us. Nevertheless, like the earth pulling in the directionless energy of the lightning, the MoD had come looking for the fruits of humanities research like ours. They had specifically drawn the attention of AHRC-funded researchers to their call and stressed their desire to learn from 'historical trends analysis'. When Emily and I thought about it, this could perfectly well mean learning from the history of how and why communities form around practices of writing and reading. German authors have played a key role in facilitating this discourse of intercultural exchange, not least in the very concept of 'Weltliteratur'. This is a narrative we have both been telling in our own way for at least a decade.

Writing our paper, for which we merged historical narrative with contemporary statistics, and then derived three future scenarios for the future of UK literary culture from this analysis that we tried out on various focus groups, has proved transformational for us both. The discipline of presenting a topic we know in microscopic detail, but with a new twist, to a series of very different audiences and in a quick turn-around time, proved surprisingly liberating: we have begun to think quite differently about what we are doing, and at what point we might have something worth saying and sharing. The portfolio of collaborative methods we tried out for that piece of work has yielded further links too that have made our other projects easier to execute. As a result, we have also become bolder in whom we approach with our research. Indeed, my fellow co-director at Lancaster's Institute for Social Futures, Richard Harper, once put it like this to me: 'You spend too much time talking about your research to people in your own discipline, that's why you can't see how exciting it is'. There may be some truth to this, and it certainly reminds us to believe more in the fundamental interest to the wider world of what we are doing. However, as the other project reports from AGS 2017 also demonstrate, the discipline of German Studies is exciting too. Even as it continues to explain key cultural achievements through the virtues of close-reading and historical argument, it is also tracing new paths and forking in new ways that are showing us all how to be in touch with so much more of the potential in the world around us.

Katrin Kohl (Jesus College, University of Oxford): On Management and Metaphor – Responding to a Major State-Funded Research Initiative

Since 1st July 2016 I have been running a research programme entitled 'Creative Multilingualism' (https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk). It is one of four major AHRC-funded Open World Research Initiative (OWRI) programmes that are intended to have a 'transformational impact on Modern Languages research in the UK'.[12] The timing was not auspicious – a week before, the EU Referendum outcome had made the UK's perceived identity even more monolingual than it had been before.

On the face of it, the career move transformed me at a stroke from a German lecturer into a research manager. Whereas the research fixes of my previous project came from discovering gems of German poetry in obscure archive sources, I now find myself on a journey that has taken me way out of my comfort zone into the world of multilingualism. I coordinate the work of twenty-one fantastic researchers who leave me linguistically out-classed with their collective expertise in some forty languages. My work involves such tasks as discussing with our wonderful programme manager what we should be putting into Researchfish so it can gobble up our lovely activities and turn them into processable data; figuring out with our equally excellent web and social media manager how to reach media channels and diverse publics who have no desire to be reached; and puzzling over the challenge of how to direct our research into 'pathways to impact' that remain all too metaphorical.

So what pathway transported me to this place? And has it brought rewards beyond giving me a Prince2 Project Management qualification?[13]

The AHRC's OWRI call was distinctive in that it was directed at the entire tertiary Modern Languages community and designed to incentivise researchers to reverse the trajectory of a subject in decline. Moreover, a key challenge was a hidden one: how to come up with a vision convincingly focused on research that would address an erosion of the subject that was happening above all in schools. For me, this went to the heart of a problem I had become increasingly aware of since the late 1980s: the loss of identity in an academic subject that was bifurcating into an 'applied' discipline and a 'theoretical' one not just within courses but between schools and universities. Whereas previously, there had been a shared understanding across the educational system that Modern Languages consisted of literature and language, integrated through nationally constructed cultural traditions and taught mainly through the medium of English, schools and the exam boards have been focusing more and more exclusively on practical language skills taught in the target language, loosening the connection between MFL and the humanities.[14] While university departments have tended to dismiss the shift in schools as inappropriate, OWRI put the spotlight on the failure of universities to develop a coherent and compelling vision of the subject.

The bifurcation in fact matched two sides of my own career, which began with teaching English in Madrid and work on BBC multi-media German courses alongside my research on German literature. I have retained a strong interest in language teaching and the role of languages in schools. The OWRI challenge has prompted me to think that the twentieth-century model is no longer appropriate and that we should on the one hand invigorate the connection with the humanities and on the other develop interdisciplinary responses to a changing context for languages that is characterised by the rise of global English, globalisation and multiculturalism.

So where do my own research interests fit in? The OWRI call offered the perfect opportunity to build on an area I had discovered during a part-time MA in General Linguistics – metaphor. It was a phenomenon I had explored in a dissertation on English and German business language, in a general introduction for German readers, and in a monograph on the role of metaphor in German poetics. It had become clear to me that taking this interest further would require expertise in non-European languages of which I had no knowledge whatsoever. OWRI has given me access to a phenomenal range of languages, and two postdocs in Psycholinguistics into the bargain. While drawing on their expertise, my aim is to write a monograph on 'The Creative Power of Metaphor' that exemplifies the freedom of Modern Languages to move between different methodologies and approaches. As a discipline that is intrinsically interdisciplinary, Modern Languages is uniquely suited to elucidating the vital importance of linguistic diversity in metaphor, a phenomenon that connects thought, language and culture.

The concept of creativity that is at the centre of my personal research contribution is also the force at the centre of our whole programme. In the difficult process of finding shared ground between what eventually became seven complementary research strands, the 'brand' that emerged was 'Creative Multilingualism' – a concept we owe to our Co-I Jane Hiddleston. Building our research programme around the interaction between creativity and linguistic diversity gives us a convincing and enjoyable way to demonstrate the value of languages beyond their transactional purpose. It has generated a sense of common purpose, and it has given us the scope to experiment – no one expects creative work to be safe or predictable.

OWRI exemplifies the kind of top-down directed research I have long been deeply suspicious of, and it demands a concern with impact that is problematic for the humanities. It invites the dead hand of administrators who want researchers to 'align' their projects with the needs of society, as a HEFCE representative recently put it at an event concerned with public engagement. If we are to avoid Gleichschaltung, we need to be wary of the impact agenda.

However, I have also discovered a productive side to engaging with 'pathways to impact'. This concept used by the AHRC is much more open than the proof of impact required by the REF, and much better suited to the humanities. Rather than channelling research success into a tick box at the end, it facilitates innovative engagement with the research process and encourages ambitious objectives without requiring that they must be safely met. It is proving valuable for us because it makes us think about the contexts of our research and its contribution to different types of conversation. Having to turn it into coherent narratives can stimulate unexpected connections and open up important new questions.

The story of my own career has received a strong injection of serendipity from OWRI, which has connected up different bits of plot that would otherwise probably have remained fairly separate. The blue-skies thinking I am currently engaged in (when I get round to it) is mostly not arising from my own head but developing out of a complex process of engaging with external impulses. Some of the challenges make my brain hurt, but I can involve a wonderful group of colleagues to address the difficulties.

Is OWRI going to achieve a transformational impact? We should not expect miracles – German was already declining as we entered the Single Market, and the UK is now obsessing about Brexit rather than thinking about how we might make more of the richly varied languages in our multicultural midst. What OWRI can and will do is build on existing interdisciplinary research in Modern Languages to give snapshots of what our subject can encompass and what makes it exciting.

In a very real sense we have already achieved the transformation that is required of us: we are working with people we have not worked with before, across disciplines. We are exploring topics that no one has looked at in quite this way before, and seeing languages and their cultural and social roles and manifestations in new ways. For me, German has not diminished in importance or interest, and I am as fascinated by literature as ever. But the picture they form part of has become more vibrant and diverse, and I am becoming rather better equipped to articulate effectively why languages really do matter, and why we need to understand their creative interplay with cultural processes.

Laura Bradley (University of Edinburgh): Applying Research to Creative Practice

While researching a monograph on East German theatre censorship, I spent many weeks in German theatre archives, seeing dramaturges prepare new productions as I investigated historical ones.[15] The idea of commissioning a play about this research arose when I was back in my office, filling out a survey for the AHRC. It was the final question that really made me stop and think: if time and money were no object, what public engagement project would you undertake? That opening 'if' clause gave me permission to let my imagination fly. The archives contained traces of so many dramatic situations and conflicts, and I could see how the tensions between the aspirations of German theatre – as Schiller's 'moralische Anstalt' – and the reality could make for a fascinating play, opening up the subject matter to audiences beyond academia.[16]

This idea proved difficult to dislodge, and in 2014 my colleague, Susan Kemp, and I applied successfully to the AHRC Follow-On Funding for Impact and Engagement scheme for £80,000 to commission a play and a documentary film about the research, the playwright's creative process, and audiences' responses to the script. We were confident that we had assembled a team with the right professional expertise: Peter Arnott is one of Scotland's leading playwrights, with over fifty plays to his name and prior experience of working with academia; Susan Kemp is a filmmaker and former BBC producer with a long list of film and television credits; and Nicola McCartney, who had agreed to advise on the script, is a dramaturge, director, and playwright. Like Susan, Nicola is a colleague of mine at Edinburgh, and being able to discuss ideas with them at an early stage was crucial. We also benefited from working with Michael Wood, who had recently completed a PhD on Heiner Müller and was the project assistant, and Rebecca Raab, who assisted with filming in Germany. Our partner organization was the Playwrights' Studio Scotland, and its Creative Director, Fiona Sturgeon Shea, and General Manager, Emma McKee, felt that the project filled a gap: there is a lot of support for new playwrights, but fewer development opportunities exist for experienced playwrights. The project's aim of involving audiences in the script development process and using the film to reflect on playwriting dovetailed neatly with the Studio's own mission statement.

As well as providing Peter with my publications, I curated about 26,000 words of archive sources for him and had them translated into English so that he could see the language used in functionaries' reports, theatre practitioners' letters, and Stasi informants' files. When illness prevented Peter from accompanying us to Germany to interview eyewitnesses from the former GDR, I arranged for the interviews to be transcribed and translated for him. I took part in script development workshops and answered Peter's questions about the GDR, providing new material at his request. I also commented on three drafts of the script; for example, in one version I thought it was clichéd to have a playwright smuggling out a script in a false-bottomed suitcase when he was ransomed out of the GDR, and so Peter came up with the idea of the playwright sitting in a hotel room on his first night in the West, scribbling what he could remember of the play on a pad of hotel notepaper.

Peter's first draft was an experiment in verbatim theatre that cut and spliced together material from interview transcripts and archive sources. It sparked a lively and at times heated discussion at the first rehearsed reading; there was a strong interest in the material's authenticity and its relevance to contemporary debates about privacy and surveillance, but some audience members found the juxtaposition of quotations from theatre practitioners with material about repression and surveillance problematic. After engaging with this feedback, Peter set his next draft in a fictional East German theatre in January 1990, after the excitement of the fall of the Berlin Wall and before reunification. In the world of the play, this is a time when nothing is certain – a time of opportunity and loss, when it is no longer clear what the theatre is for, or if it will even have an audience. As the theatre practitioners debate what material to programme, they try out material from a banned play and improvise scenes based on their lives in the GDR. This format allows the characters to argue over their experiences and the ways in which they might be represented, capturing different ways of looking at the past and the roles which theatre practitioners played in it – issues that had dominated discussions at the first rehearsed reading. We staged a rehearsed reading of this draft at the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2015, before holding rehearsed readings of the final draft in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and St Andrews the following month. At the Fringe, we used the rehearsed reading as a springboard for a roundtable discussion of contemporary experiences of theatre censorship, featuring the British theatre director Lisa Goldman and Julia Farringdon, Associate Arts Producer for Index on Censorship. In total, we staged eight events over ten months, and we opened up the project to audiences further afield via a blogsite (www.whoiswatchingwho.org), which included monthly postings by Peter.

The film, *Writing Ensemble*, was shot over eight months in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Berlin, Dresden, and Bautzen. Susan Kemp read my publications, and I discussed my research with her on camera, identified locations for filming, and secured permissions to film. The documentary follows the story of the research process through to the first rehearsed reading and audience reactions, interspersed with archive footage from the GDR. It premiered at the Glasgow Film Theatre in November 2016, and it has since been screened at the Edinburgh Filmhouse and Leeds Picture House, and reviewed in the national broadsheet *The Herald*, which described it as a 'fascinating insight into the artistic process'.[17] We also screened the film at a symposium on 'Creating Impact: Theatre and Universities', which I co-organized in 2017 with the Playwrights' Studio Scotland; we plan to arrange further cinema screenings – and indeed welcome invitations – before we release the film online.

This project gave me the opportunity to return to research that I had enjoyed and to examine it from new angles, through other people's eyes. As a dramatist, Peter was actually less interested in the major conflicts that had made their mark on GDR theatre history, and more in the ways in which the personal meshed with the political – such as the informant who asked the Stasi for help finding her aunt a place in an old people's home. This gave me a sense of how details that might only have been peripheral to my research, or might never have made it into my publications, could function as 'hooks' for public engagement. The project also gave me a direct insight into Peter's working practices and the ways in which artistic, practical and commercial considerations intersect in playwriting: adding or removing a character had real consequences for our casting budget for rehearsed readings, and also for the chances of the play being taken up and performed by professional theatres. For me, one of the most encouraging aspects of the project was the fact that my role felt – most of the time – like a natural extension of my academic activity. I brought my research expertise, and Peter, Susan, and Nicola brought their decades of professional expertise as practitioners. This has encouraged me to think not so much in terms of public engagement projects that are within my own capabilities, but in terms of who I might approach and have discussions with outside the University, in order to generate ideas for new and exciting activities.

James Hodkinson (Warwick University): Involving and Learning From Communities

Over the last decade I have been researching representations of Islam in German culture from around 1770 to the end of the First World War. I have been dealing with diverse materials, including high literature, travelogues, philosophy, theology, popular journalism, as well as visual culture, fine art, photography, and even travel guides. Given the apparently fraught nature of Muslim/Non-Muslim relations globally today, any study examining critically how Western cultures have conceived and represented Islam across history is not only potentially topical, but also ripe for forms of public engagement and impact work. As I began my public work in 2015 questions remained, though, about which ideas I could most productively foreground and, more crucially, which audiences I would seek to reach, and how I would seek to engage them.

My engagement work draws upon a growing body of my published research, which has brought with it methodological refinement of the scholarly debate initially set in binary terms by Edward Said. I investigate how, in the German context, Islam was equally represented in terms of its relative 'similarity' to European culture. This more nuanced model opens out the possibility of examining contiguous cultures both in terms of their shared heritage and common values, whilst also preserving a sense of their mutual distinctiveness. Throughout, though, my work has maintained a healthy cynicism about what Islam's relative 'similarity' was being used for across history – it at one time promoted the possibility of harmonious transnational relationships grounded in an ideal cultural compatibility between former foes, while precisely the same idea was used as a cynical propaganda tool to forge military alliances between the German Reich and the Ottoman Empire in WWI. Islam's represented similarity, in other words, remained ambivalent.

It is precisely that ambivalence in these historical contexts that provided a key point of departure for my public work. Contemporary media representations, as well as large swathes of political discourse, trade in images of Islam as a threatening form of extremism, offset against notions of 'acceptable' Muslims who are, by nature, problematically domesticated and compliant with the values of mainstream society. The materials I have worked with show similar binaries to have been generated across German history: Muslims being made to appear 'similar' to or compatible with Western society, often in the service of less than Enlightened ideals. Using selective, usually visual examples, I have run a series of public lectures and developed a mobile banner exhibition that continues to tour UK faith centres, universities and schools. Both the lectures and exhibition expose the audience to the apparently historical and culturally remote materials from Germany, yet close by establishing explicit connections between history and the situation today – with the added benefit that the very remoteness of the material has helped in engaging some sectors of the public who might otherwise avoid events dedicated to such explosive topics. These events were, though, still attended by the predominantly white, middle class, educated public – or comprised a liberal interfaith contingent of minority faiths and communities. Impact, I have found, is somewhat blunted if the audience is already deemed to be ‘on message'. So I have been thinking how to reach communities more remote from academic work.

The most recent phase of the project has been my attempt to bridge that gap. Here, the *Hafis-Goethe Denkmal*, which was inaugurated on the Beethovenplatz in Weimar in 2001, has played a key role. The monument is an artistic re-imagining of the already imaginary encounter Johann Wolfgang Goethe presented between himself and his Muslim interlocutor the fourteenth-century Poet, Hafez of Shiraz, as described in his poetry collection *West-Östlicher Divan* (1819). The monument comprises two stone chairs, arranged to face each other as if engaged in dialogue. The obviously common material from which both chairs are cut, implies a relationship that stretches beyond binary identities and dialogical exchange, and explores the possibility of complex relationships that express notions of common humanity, shared traditions and points of correspondence that cut across historical and cultural divides, whilst preserving the idea of cultural distinctiveness and diversity: there is one substance, but two chairs. The chairs become a concise, visual and memorable way of expressing these ideas of cross-cultural similarity to a range of audiences.

I have used the Two Chairs effectively as a kind of cross disciplinary ‘meme’ in schools. Working with teachers of MFL and Religious Studies I have helped to plan sequences of lessons and project work for GCSE and A-Level groups that use the meme to stimulate more sophisticated, non-binary thinking on intercultural and interfaith relations. Together with Karen Leeder (Oxford) I have widened the appeal of this idea by running a creative writing competition, asking students to write creatively, in English or German, in response to the ideas bound up in the image of the chairs. Pursuing further the idea of stimulating and capturing the artistic responses of non-academic audiences, I have most recently started working with Birmingham-based community arts group Soul City Arts. Working with two key figures throughout 2018, the British-Bangladeshi urban artist and activist Mohammed Ali MBE and British-Iranian painter Mohsen Keiany, I will be working with local Muslim and Non-Muslim communities to create a mobile, multi-media art installation to sit in Midlands art galleries and urban spaces: again the guiding concept is to foster a sense of cultural similarity that articulates common beliefs and values and heritage whilst simultaneously cultural specificity. Crucial, though, will be our intention to capture and use community voices in the sonic and visual components of the installation. While the earlier exhibitions and public lectures used questionnaires and feedback cards to capture quantitative and qualitative data from audiences, and the schools project generated an archive of student work as evidence of shifting patterns of thinking, this latest venture seeks to frame impact by engaging the community as a collaborator, respecting the distinctiveness of their voices, while breaking down distinctions between artist and audience.

The entire process was chronicled in my reflective blog: http://jameshodkinson.silvrback.com. The effects so far have been two-directional. By engaging in pilot meetings with local community representatives, I have already been able to extend and finesse their understanding of German culture and its value in the UK in a way that is relevant to them: many communities had absorbed the resolutely negative image of German culture still propagated by the British media and were surprised to hear of how Germany's particular encounter with Islam enriched their own sense of Muslim/ non-Muslim relations in the West. This was evidenced from interviews with and testimonials from participants collected from the outset of the project. The idea of critically explored 'similarity' chimed well with the experience of a pressure to assimilate, to accept Western cultural norms, and become ever-more similar to white majority culture articulated by many communities in a post 9/11 world. Conversely, the dialogue on similarity drove me to seek out an academic apparatus for foregrounding these issues in my own published work, and the timely appearance of *Ähnlichkeit: Ein kulturtheoretisches Paradigma* (Konstanz 2015), ed. Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich, provided just that and has become a key research tool. The impact project has, then, also helped to hone the conceptual framework of my writing and taken it away from the arguably complex and overly taxonomic terminology to be found in established postcolonial criticism.

Seán Williams (The University of Sheffield): Doing 'Actual Work'

Since becoming an AHRC/BBC New Generation Thinker in 2016, media work has been an integral part of my research activity, which concerns cultural legacies of the division of labour since the eighteenth century and related subjects. I have appeared on television (BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Arts), and more substantially on radio speaking about my research, and chairing discussions with other academics, too: locally (BBC Shropshire and BBC Sheffield), nationally (BBC Radio 3 - *Freethinking, The Essay, The Sunday Feature, Jazz Record Requests* - and independent online programming), and internationally: the BBC World Service and Swiss national radio (SRF2 Kultur). Whenever I conceive a new research article, I now imagine from the outset its relevance to public discourse via the media, in addition to its original contribution to scholarship. This is not only or primarily because of 'impact' considerations as understood by the REF, but an essential part of my academic practice that motivates me and is in keeping with the scholarly method I have come to adopt.

In late 2017, an otherwise supportive and congenial colleague wrote to me having found entertaining a Radio 3 *Sunday Feature* on Lieder that I had co-written and presented, but asked whether I had done any 'actual' work of late. Others have asked if I really have time for this ‘extra’ work, with the implication that I should not *make* time for it. As fun as it was, the programme had in fact entailed effort that I, the BBC and fortunately my University considered work: writing the script and discussing the topic at length with the producer, deciding on interviewees (as befits a feature rather than a lecture format), travelling to London and Birmingham to interview my guests — not to mention driving in circles in a car park for a cameo of my car, while I attempted to pull the programme together in as casual and 'listenerly' a way as possible. Within the context of the modern, British university, I consider such activities not only work, but fundamentally also part of my identity as a working ‘researcher’. What my colleagues meant by work, though, was a particular and supposedly higher kind of intellectual and institutionalized effort: the peer-reviewed publication.

Scholarship can and should be historicized. And within the history of scholarship, a professionalization of the academic that privileges the peer-reviewed publication at the expense of other forms of dissemination is a recent and, by now, short-lived phenomenon - thanks in part to the revised structure of the UK’s Research Excellence Framework for 2021. Many of the critics we cite in so many of our peer-reviewer reports were or are themselves public intellectuals, or academics as well known for being an entertaining 'talking head' as they were or are for writing insightful and substantial prose. I do not only mean those who have become celebrities: where would Cultural Studies or public discourse be without Adorno - who spoke on TV about the uncritical potential of pop songs about the Vietnam war - or Slavoj Žižek? I also mean those lesser-known but award-winning presenters, who at the same time remain active and respected academics: notably, Amanda Vickery. Publishing for peers is crucial if our discipline is to advance intellectually; but writing and speaking for a broader public is as important, not least for a vulnerable discipline’s survival. Would Classics in UK universities have survived as well without a Mary Beard? Personally, I doubt it.

What is more, in subjects such as ours, the greatest intellectual paradigm shifts have been prompted, consciously or not, in the cultural, lived experience of academics — and the everyday conversations of which those academics were a part. The worldwide 1968 movement, fifty years ago, caused just such a radical re-thinking of academic work: the topics studied, the methods and style adopted, in short a new British Cultural Studies and renewed interest in the everyday and material culture came about that is now so canonical. German Cultural Studies, or *Kulturwissenschaft*, has a much a longer history than its British counterpart (and to its credit a more

Formatted: English (United Kingdom)

politically heterogeneous approach), but again emerged from thinkers' rootedness in what is popularly, oppressively called the 'real world'.

Such a genesis of critical thought has a very long, even 'enlightened' tradition. Schiller announces his journal *Die Horen* in 1794 with the following aim: 'So weit es tunlich ist, wird man die Resultate der Wissenschaft von ihrer scholastischen Form zu befreien und in einer reizenden, wenigstens einfachen, Hülle dem Gemeinsinn verständlich zu machen suchen'.[18] The journal contained some of Schiller's most profound essays. However, Schiller's aim was not the democratisation or enfranchisement of knowledge through what we would now call 'public engagement'; indeed, in his invitation earlier that year, he explicitly bans topics that merely 'interest' the learned reader or 'satisfy' the non-learned one (as well as, more famously, religious and political matters). No, the point of the publication — and the purpose of Schiller writing and publishing for the public — is instruction, education, and, for the scholarly world, a *freer* means of research and a *fruitful* exchange of ideas.[19] In other words, opening oneself up to the world enriches one's own thinking, even if this is presented in an accessible form. The irony of Schiller's project is that it shortly collapsed precisely because it turned out to be less open to its public than it claimed: presenting readers with what they ought, not what they might also want, to read. If we turn to writers in late eighteenth-century England, meanwhile, Samuel Johnson's character Imlac in *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia (*1759) says: 'To talk in publick, to think in solitude, to read and to hear, to inquire, and answer inquiries, is the business of the scholar'.[20]

In my view as in Johnson's practice or Schiller's theory, it is not the role of academics of the humanities in the media merely to pass on information in a comprehensible way, embodying expertise. Rather, we can today, as in the eighteenth century, think out loud, listen, and argue — much as many of us like to do with our students in seminars, or at conferences. In this way, contemporary media engagement is merely a reflection and extension of everyday interactions, in a non-academic sphere. Good programming, producers like to remind us, is *conversational*.

To return to practicalities, within the modern, bureaucratic university it is welcome that the latest incarnation of the impact agenda promotes professional recognition for such activities that were once, and are again, part of what it could mean to be a scholar. Critics — and cynics — may well respond that when an activity becomes professionally recognised, it quickly becomes subject to institutional audit. And that is true: I am asked by Impact Consultants for the listener figures for a programme (about 100,000 for the average *Sunday Feature*), or I am supposed to document whenever a continuity presenter introduces a Haydn song by reference to a fact concerning the composer's cultural context that was mentioned in my programme, which in turn should link back to a publication. The diligence that is required can be mildly irritating, but it is not invidious. Metrics

Formatted: German (Germany)

Formatted: German (Germany)

Formatted: German (Germany)

Formatted: English (United Kingdom)

Formatted: English (United Kingdom)

Formatted: English (United Kingdom)

mean cash in the impact game (and thus our institutional survival as Germanists), but they do not have to be the real reason we play it. And whatever our motivations, they do not have any influence on what we can or cannot say when researching or making a programme. Institutions can impinge on our critical and creative thinking, to be sure, but they also value, and pay us for, the research activity that is our vocation. It remains the responsibility of the academic to make clear that impactful activity such as media work is an integral part of one's own research, the success of which depends on the academic's own relationship with the sector and public. Media work is not, and should not be conceived as, (mere) promotion of a completed or ongoing project.

Benedict Schofield (King's College London): German In and Across the World

What does 'doing German Studies differently' mean, not only for our research methods and modes of dissemination, but also for our sense of German Studies as a discipline, and our ability to communicate that sense to our students? How can we build a bridge between the creative, collaborative and interdisciplinary work outlined in the interventions above, and the teaching we undertake? If our research is changing, does, in turn, our understanding of research-based teaching also need to evolve? What else might need to change if we question not only how we 'do' and how we 'present' German Studies, but also reconsider what counts as German Studies in the first place?

These are questions I have been considering along with thirty other colleagues, drawn from twelve different countries, in two forthcoming volumes: *German in the World: A Culture in National, Transnational and Global Contexts* (co-edited with James Hodkinson), and *Transnational German Studies* (co-edited with Rebecca Braun).[21] As their titles suggest, both volumes explore the place of the 'transnational' within German Studies – that is to say, they are concerned with what happens when we try to think about German Studies in global as well as local contexts, and how that transnational perspective can help us redefine, and potentially strengthen, our disciplinary identity as German Studies.

The transnational is, of course, a buzzword – indeed, it has gained enough traction to become a 'transnational turn', moving from the Social Sciences into the Arts and Humanities.[22] It has established itself quickly as a trope in Modern Languages research; one that was recently institutionalised by the AHRC's 'Open World Research Initiative', which placed the 'world' at the heart of a major funding scheme and which thus appeared to challenge us as Modern Linguists to think beyond the nation as a core framework for our studies – to move beyond, then, what Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande termed academe's 'methodological nationalism'.[23] Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that transnational tropes such as ‘multilingualism’, ‘world-making’, and ‘world literature’, have become key themes across all four successful OWRI projects (such as that discussed by Katrin Kohl above), but it is also worth remembering that OWRI itself built on aims that underpinned the AHRCs ‘Translating Cultures’ theme, first identified in 2009, and which also led to large-scale projects such as ‘Transnationalizing Modern Languages’, ‘Translation and Translanguaging’, and ‘Researching Multilingually’.[24]

It is against this wider background that both *German and the World* and *Transnational German Studies* have developed. *German and the World* is partly derived from ideas explored at a symposium held in London in the summer of 2014, which brought together German Studies scholars from around the world to explore how we might develop a more transnational vision for German Studies in response to the perceived crisis in the discipline.[25] It is a research volume, which, through case studies by scholars from around the world, reveals ways in which German Studies could and should embrace an innovative extension of our field of study. This ‘worlding’ of German does not replace a more specific understanding of German-language culture. Instead, what is revealed is how that culture is something '*through* which traditions circulate, originating both *within* but also *beyond* any geographic entity called "Germany”'.[26] The book looks first at the place of the world within German culture and the positioning of German culture in its global context; secondly at the shape of German Studies as a discipline across multiple global locations; and thirdly at the impact of German Studies on worlds beyond academe, such as the fields of art, culture and society. In doing so, it attempts to avoid any simplistic opposition between the national and the transnational, and seeks instead to see German in action across multiple sectors, or ‘worlds’.

Transnational German Studies, too, has a long genesis: its roots can be traced to the AHRC-funded ‘Transnationalizing Modern Languages’ project mentioned above and to work on an OWRI application. This has resulted in seven initial volumes to be published by Liverpool University Press from late 2018: *Transnational Modern Languages: A Handbook*, and six area volumes (German, French, Italian, Hispanic, Portuguese and Russian). Importantly, this series is specifically targeted at students as well as colleagues, with the hope of supporting curriculum innovation. This posed a number of editorial challenges, since chapters needed to provide new ideas and approaches for German Studies, but ones which also worked with-and-alongside existing curricula. At the same time, it also felt important to avoid giving students the impression that exciting things in ‘German’ happen everywhere but in Germany and Austria. A balance, then, had to be found. Our resolution was to ensure that each chapter not only proposed to students an example of a transnational phenomenon in German culture, but also provided a model of how to undertake research in these areas – thus enabling students to make new, independent discoveries of their own by applying these methods to a large range of texts, not just those covered in the book.

Despite their different audiences, both volumes thus share a desire to help define the transnational – not as a label or descriptive term, but as a mode of enquiry which is fundamental to what we do as Germanists and Modern Linguists. In doing so, they argue that there is a specifically Modern Languages inflected model of the transnational. Above all, they reject the frequent insistence of the Social Sciences that the transnational is a contemporary phenomenon, that is, a 'manifestation of Globalisation'.[27] Instead, they argue for an understanding of the transnational that is also ‘transperiod’, insisting that the global flow of peoples, goods and ideas seen by the Social Sciences as a necessary precursor of the transnational is nothing new. Indeed, here we pose a vital assertion that the transnational is not just the *result* of the nation, it is also the *precursor* to the nation, thus ensuring the transnational can act as a concept for all periods of German Studies.

Taken as a whole, then, these two projects encourage us to consider further how German-language culture was conceptualised *before* the nation, *as* a national entity, and *beyond* the nation, and what the consequences of this might be for our discipline. This will involve new methods, and a wider sense of what German Studies might be. In turn, it will involve new partners, new audiences, and new forms of research and teaching, as showcased in the other contributions to this article. It is a vision of German Studies that is interdisciplinary, collaborative and comparative, hybrid and relational – in other words, it entails taking seriously the desire to place 'German' fully in 'the world'.

---

[1] Sarah Colvin, 'Leaning In: Why and How I Still Study the German', *German Life and Letters*, 69/1 (2016), 123-41 (125, my italics).

[2] Sander L. Gilman, 'How and Why I Study the German', *The German Quarterly*, 62 (1989), 192-204.

[3] Colvin, 'Leaning In', 124.

[4] Colvin, 'Leaning In', 131.

[5] Katrin Kohl, 'Modern Languages in the UK', online: http://www.ox.ac.uk/news-and-events/oxford-and-brexit/brexit-analysis/modern-languages-uk (last accessed 12 January 2018).

[6] *DVjs*, 89 (2015), 485-683; http://www.englishsharedfutures.uk (last accessed 26 February 2018)

[7] See: Nicola McLelland and Richard Smith, *The History of Language Learning and Teaching*, 3. vols., Cambridge 2018.

[8] Colvin, 'Leaning In', 125.

[9] Sandra Richter, *Eine Weltgeschichte der deutschen Literatur,* Munich 2017, 19.

---

[10] Colvin, 'Leaning In', 141.

[11] See the published description of the fifth edition: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-strategic-trends-out-to-2045 (last accessed 18 December 2017).

[12] http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/fundedthemesandprogrammes/themes/owri.

[13] PRINCE2 (an acronym for PRojects IN Controlled Environments) is a de facto process-based method for effective project management. It is used extensively by the UK Government, and is also widely recognised and used in the private sector, both in the UK and internationally. The PRINCE2 method is in the public domain, and offers non-proprietorial best practice guidance on project management. See https://www.prince2.com/uk (last accessed 26 February 2018).

[14] The *GCE AS and A Level Subject Criteria for Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)* prescribed for exam boards by Ofqual in September 2011 (now superseded by the reformed specifications) included no set texts and specified only Assessment Objectives focused on language skills. The reformed A level specification has reintroduced set texts and more broadly based Assessment Objectives.

[15] Laura Bradley, *Cooperation and Conflict: GDR Theatre Censorship, 1961-1989,* Oxford 2010.

[16] Friedrich Schiller, 'Was kann eine gute stehende Schaubühne eigentlich wirken?', in Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*, 2nd rev. edn., 5 vols, Munich 1960, v: 818–31.

[17] Marianne Taylor, 'Art and performance versus censorship in East Germany', *The Herald* (Glasgow), 3 November 2016.

[18] Friedrich Schiller, *Vermischte Schriften*, ed. by Herbert Meyer, Weimar 1958 (*Nationalausgabe*, vol. 22), p. 107.

[19] Ibid., p. 103.

[20] Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, ed. by J P Hardy, Oxford 1988, p. 18.

[21] *German in the World. A Culture in National, Transnational and Global Contexts*, ed. by James Hodkinson and Benedict Schofield, Rochester NY, forthcoming 2019; *Transnational German Studies*, ed. by Rebecca Braun and Benedict Schofield, Liverpool, forthcoming 2018.

[22] Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism,* London 2009, p. 13.

[23] Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande, 'Beyond Methodological Nationalism. Extra-European and European Varieties of Second Modernity', in *Soziale Welt*, 61/2 (2010), 329-31.

[24] See: http://translatingcultures.org.uk/awards/large-grants, last accessed 5 January 2018.

[25] See: James Hodkinson, 'German in the World. A One-Day Symposium', at: https://talkinghumanities.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2014/10/16/german-in-the-world-a-one-day-symposium/, last accessed 5 January 2018.

---

[26] Hodkinson and Schofield, ‘Introduction’ (Draft), in Hodkinson and Schofield, *German in the World* (n.p.).

[27] Vertovic, *Transnationalism*, p. 2.