

INTERNATIONAL WINTER SCHOOL “CIRCULATION AND COLLABORATION: PERSPECTIVES FOR/IN INTERDISCIPLINARITY”

One of the factors in establishing the position of the humanities in the research landscape is interdisciplinarity, i.e., purposeful perception and application of diverse possibilities and search for new cooperation forms and opportunities. Cooperation requires both learning and teaching, but also a pragmatic basis in the form of economic and institutional leverage. The Estonian Graduate School of Culture Studies and Arts (GSCSA), established in the autumn of 2009, is supported by the European Union Structural Funds and integrates graduate students of the humanities and their supervisors from the University of Tartu, Tallinn University, the Estonian Academy of Arts, and the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. The graduate school covers more than a dozen curricula and organises over twenty interdisciplinary scientific events annually. Institutionally, the graduate school cooperates with the Estonian Literary Museum, the Under and Tuglas Literature Centre of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Estonian Arnold Schönberg Society, the Center of Modern Humanities (Zentrum für Theorie und Methodik der Kulturwissenschaften) at the University of Göttingen, and the Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory in Estonia. In addition to smaller and more specifically oriented intensive seminars, the majority of graduate school members get together for the annual winter school, which is alternately organised by Tartu and Tallinn Universities. Different fields of research are integrated in view of a diverse selection of courses on cultural analysis and involvement of foreign competence; yet, bearing in mind similar theoretical and methodological problems.

The 5th International Winter School organised jointly with the Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory, under the heading “Circulation and Collaboration: Perspectives for/ in Interdisciplinarity” took place in Tartu on February 2–6, 2015, and attracted more than a hundred researchers and graduate students. The winter school focused on the keywords ‘circulation’ and ‘collaboration’, as well as cooperation opportunities between different disciplines, and issues concerned with the visibility of research results. We witness today a growth of networks, new infrastructures and channels, which circulate knowledge and in which information moves with previously unthinkable speed. A critical consideration of the processes of circulation and cooperation, as well as cross-disciplinary theorising and methodological discussions on the issues involved provides us with innovative analytical space for both synchronic and diachronic research. The seminars and workshops of the winter school discussed the advantages and benefits of interdisciplinary cooperation, but also pointed out possible obstacles; for example, it was stated that taking over theories, methodologies or terminology of another discipline may suggest innovative symbioses but also pose problems in understanding, for which we should be prepared.

The winter school programme included lectures by Estonian and foreign academics, targeted at a wider audience, as well as workshops in smaller groups, with in-depth discussion of the topics presented in lectures. One of the days was dedicated to practical group work, with a choice between four topical themes. A workshop led by anthropologist Laura Siragusa (University of Tartu / University of Aberdeen) discussed publishing opportunities for early career researchers; the participants were able to test different



Collaboration in a workshop. Photograph by Aivo Põlluäär.

ways of interdisciplinary research involvement while being also prepped by editors-in-chief of two journals, *Journal of American Folklore* (Thomas DuBois) and *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* (Ergo-Hart Västriik), who gave an overview of the editing process of scholarly articles. The workshop participants came to the conclusion that both in the framework of one or in cooperation between several disciplines one of the most challenging and unpredictable aspects is the compatibility of concrete researchers.

The workshop “Digital Humanities: Data and Metadata from a Semiotic Perspective” demonstrated points of intersection between semiotic data models and digital approaches. Indrek Ibrus (Tallinn University) spoke, in a Skype presentation, about the digitisation plans of Estonian film heritage in the context of similar developments in Europe and analysed the addition of metadata from a semiotic viewpoint. The groups led by Katre Pärn (University of Tartu) discussed the metadata sought by different user groups and possibilities for their mediation. The ever-significant issues of ethics and morality in the context of interdisciplinary research were taken up in the workshop run by Stavroula Pipyrou (St. Andrews University) and Daniel M. Knight (Durham University). Among other things the participants discussed ethic dilemmas that are confronted when conducting anthropological research among controversial social groups, such as right extremists or imprisoned criminals. The workshop led by Monika Tasa (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory) dealt with the issues concerned with making qualitative research visible, understandable and available.

All the lectures with their following discussions, as well as seminars, offered an inspiring range of ideas and approaches. Matti Sintonen, Professor of Philosophy

at Helsinki University, delivered a more general theoretical lecture on interdisciplinarity in the humanities. The lecturer noted that arguments arise already when defining the research discipline, as new disciplines and discipline conglomerates keep emerging due to professional, institutional and financial reasons. Sintonen suggested that we should speak about research fields rather than disciplines. Also, the lecturer maintained that interdisciplinary cooperation is understood in different ways: either by continuing everyday work under the umbrella of a collaboration project or by formulating new common objectives and gaining scientific added value with the help of newly elaborated theoretical and analytical framework. Regina Bendix, Professor of European Ethnology from Göttingen University, also pointed out the primary challenge of finding consensus during the process of interdisciplinary collaboration. She contended that although the funding policy usually favours innovative forms of cooperation between different research fields, in the case of malfunctioning collaboration the project partners have to cope with arising problems on their own. On the other hand, the complex cultural and communication networks of the globalising world feature an increasing number of research issues, which require the contribution of more than one discipline. In order for researchers to better understand the expectations and resources of their cooperation partners, distinguishing between different ways of cooperation (e.g. multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary) is needed from the very beginning.

The presentation of Penelope Harvey, Professor of Anthropology from Manchester University, focused on the 'political economy' of materials and material agency, as well as their potent vitality, including animistic attitudes related to them. Harvey suggested that here we can speak about collaboration between material and its shapers, as the communicative aspect is mutual in such interaction. Using the example of stone and concrete, she showed how the same material conveyed different messages in different eras; for instance, symbolising strength, power and perpetuity, but also corruption and decline.

Alexei Yurchak, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of California-Berkeley, gave an intriguing lecture on the 'bodies' of Lenin, which, to a certain extent, touched upon similar issues. He provided a captivating visual demonstration of how depictions of Lenin and metaphors used in political rhetoric (e.g. the rhetoric of the utmost truth) were in correlation with social changes. Notions of Lenin as the embodiment of wisdom and morality started to crumble only as late as during perestroika, when facts about his sexual orientation, illnesses, nationality, and financial sources were gradually disclosed. Yurchak proposed an ultimate deconstruction of Lenin's cult to have occurred in a TV show which linked Lenin's fondness of mushrooming to consuming their psychedelic properties, with a conclusion that thus the entire October Revolution and the subsequent Soviet regime had been based on perceptual anomalies. The post-lecture discussions drew parallels between the cults of political dictators and religious leaders on the example of the motif of rebirth and resurrection and the widely spread religious custom to honour, instead of the physical relics of spiritual leaders, the texts authored by them. The following seminar continuing on this topic ran an hour longer than scheduled, with endless questions about current political issues. It was debated whether Russia, an enormous country from remote villages to huge metropolises, should be treated as a uniform research object. Yurchak considered it feasible because the juridical framework and economic opportunities or restrictions are nevertheless the same.

Pärtel Piirimäe, Associate Professor of History at the University of Tartu, spoke about the historical evolution of the perception of 'own' and 'alien' in nations and ethnic groups, discussing civilisation and barbarism in early modern international law. Piirimäe maintained that international law well reflects the attitudes and ideals of the era. Since the very beginning, international law has been an interdisciplinary sphere, as in its early days, in the 16th century, it was thought to be the domain of theologians, and later on that of philosophers; by advocating the idea of the superiority of civilised people natural sciences were also referred to. Piirimäe emphasised that the labelling of non-European peoples as 'barbarian' did not necessarily present justification for their colonisation but could rather have been the way they were subjectively perceived by their colonisers. Examples of depicting the adversaries as barbaric and incapable of development were also presented from present-day military conflicts.

Similar mechanisms have also determined attitudes towards minorities more recently and, as was shown in the presentation by Thomas A. DuBois, folklorist and Professor of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, on the example of the North-American Chippewa/Ojibwe/Anishinaabe or the Scandinavian Sami, representatives of these peoples contest but also argue about the prevailing stereotypes and representations. For instance, they disagree about whether the use of modern electrical tools in making traditional artefacts marks the decline of old culture or, vice versa, its vitality and capability to evolve. In his following seminar DuBois introduced the use of the new media (e.g. Internet forums, social media communities, digital gaming) for the purposes of preservation and revitalisation of the identity and culture of ethnic minorities, illustrating it with colourful examples.

Lars Elleström, Professor of Comparative Literature from Linnæus University, discussed old and new communication forms from the point of view of intermediality. The lecturer interrogated why certain communication forms are flexible and easily transmitted to other media, yet some others are not. Elleström suggested theoretical means for studying different communicative situations and phenomena.

Martin Stokes, Professor of Musicology at King's College London, contemplated about music as a creative form carrying a communicative message, or, more specifically, expressive ways of sentimentality in the music of different cultures. Often the medium for expressing feelings in a concrete culture is an instrument of iconic significance (e.g. the accordion in tango music), manner of performance, or body language (e.g. in Portuguese *fado*). Among other things, Stokes highlighted era-specific changes in expressing sentimentality. For instance, in the 1950s singers were reproved for using the microphone because it distorted the voice and authentic expression of feelings, whereas today electronic distortion and artificiality are characteristic of certain popular music trends and artificial sound is in turn a means to express the moods inherent in the style.

In addition to lectures and seminars, the winter school offered opportunities for socialising and establishing new contacts, hopefully forming a basis for some future interdisciplinary collaboration projects.

Reet Hiimäe, Kristin Kuutma