**Report: CLE/SIG/ISF Workshop Tuesday 14th June, 2016,**

**Free Word Centre, London.**

**'Cultural Literacy and Creative Futures'**

**PRESENT**: Robert Crawshaw (Lancaster/CLE/SIG/ISF), Rebecca Braun (Lancaster/ISF), Loredana Polezzi (Cardiff/CLE), Emily Spiers (Lancaster/ISF), Piotr Wcislik (Polish Academy of Sciences), Nathalie Carré (INALCO, Paris), Amanda Bayley (Bath Spa), Joanna Kosmalska (Lodz), Charles Forsdick (Liverpool/AHRC), Galin Tihanov (QMULondon/IACL).

**APOLOGIES**: Fred Girod (*Kulturwissenschaftliches Kolleg*, Konstanz), Ben Schofield (Kings London), Lara Feigel (Kings London), Beth Harland (Lancaster/ISF), Lyndsey Stoneybridge (UEA), John Sundholm (Stockholm).

Institutions and representatives corresponding to an investigative network in the field of 'Cultural Literacy' met on Tuesday 14th June in London. The workshop was sponsored by *The Institute for Social Futures* at Lancaster University (ISF) and the Special Interest Group of the *Cultural Literacy in Europe* Programme (SIG/CLE). In addition to institutional representation, the meeting was attended by two expert advisors: Charles Forsdick - CF (Arts and Humanities Research Council) and Galin Tihanov - GT (International Comparative Literature Association).

**1. Rationale**

The rationale behind the workshop was to establish an international, Europe-led network to develop and benchmark the concept of 'Cultural Literacy' (CL). CL was to be the focus of theoretical and practice-led research combining approaches from the humanities and social sciences. The reference point was a working document (see Appendix) which defined the term 'Cultural Literacy' according to criteria emerging from an international conference held at Birkbeck College University of London in April 2015. The conference had led to a research programme under the title 'Cultural Literacy in Europe' (CLE) and the setting up of five Special Interest Groups or SIGs. The SIG represented by the participants in the current workshop was designed to exemplify what research into Cultural Literacy implied in practice at a point when the inter-disciplinary 'coming together' of humanities and social science research under the banner of 'cultural studies' had reached a state of maturity internationally and was, as reiterated by Eagleton et al and anticipated by During more than fifteen years ago, 'examining its own constitutive borders and divisions'.

The objective of the workshop was to establish a research network consisting of representatives with complementary areas of expertise from highly reputed, research-led institutions. Each would correspond to a particular field of the arts and would examine the interpretative approach required to understand the way in which it represented society and its role in specific contexts as a catalyst for social change, now and in the future. Each representative/ institution would lead a sub-project: corresponding either to a particular form of artefact as the 'lens' through which a wider cultural context could be 'read' or to an 'instrument', such as an electronic bibliography, which would facilitate the research and serve as an information source to others. Other participant institutions might address more general, thematically based questions such as the future of cultural theory or the incorporation of trans-cultural studies into university curricula.

**2. Presentations**

The following research 'domains', or 'projects' had been thought to reflect the focus of each institution:

* Writing, authorship and society (Lancaster/ISF)
* Performance Poetry, Music and Dance (Bath Spa)
* Translation and Transculturalism (Cardiff/School of Translation Studies)
* The didactic implications of transcultural literary and cultural research (INALCO/PLIDAM)
* Bibliographical formulation, archive and culture (Institute for Literary Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw)
* \*Film and Media (Stockholm/School of Media Studies)
* \*Creative Practice and Social Impact (Lancaster Institute for the Creative Arts/ISF)
* \*Cultural politics and history (Kings College London)
* \*Cultural Theory (Konstanz/Kulturwissenschafliches Kolleg)

*[\*the representatives of these strands were absent from the meeting]*

**Representatives of five of the nine strands presented their current and prospective projects:**

**-** **Writing, authorship and society** (Rebecca Braun, Lancaster University/ISF; Joanna Kosmalska, University of Lodz)

This sub-project would build on the recently completed AHRC leadership project 'Authors and the World' which had emphasised the changing role of the author in the context of global markets and the increasing emphasis placed on 'celebrity' <http://www.authorsandtheworld.com/>. Discussions and outputs from a workshop series had explored such phenomena as digital writing, joint authorship, the cultural construction of authors in the past, translation, re-writing and the publishing process. Current activities included planning a large-scale bid which would focus on writing and creative agency in the future world environment.

An example of current trends in transcultural authorship was demonstrated by Joanna Kosmalska, University of Lodz, whose presentation revealed the extent of published writing by Polish migrant writers in Britain and Ireland and the mixed- language style of their works:

<http://archiwum-emigracia.uni.lodz.pl/en>

Much of the writing was semi-autobiographical and, as such, offered a realistic representation of the dynamic of immigrant urban life in the metropolis while exemplifying the interlingual hybridity of writing styles adopted by migrant authors.

**-** **Mixed-media, trans-cultural performance: poetry, music and dance (**Amanda Bayley, Bath Spa University)

One initiative, funded by the European Research Council (ERC), had involved collaboration between musicians, dancers, writers and directors from the UK and Turkey. It had resulted in a total music theatre production at the Istanbul Music Festival (11th June 2016), followed by a research symposium at Istanbul Technical University: 'Beyond East and West: Turkish instruments and voices in contemporary music'.

A second initiative demonstrated processes of developing dialogues in intercultural music-making. A short video showed a production funded by Arts Council England in which players from Zimbabwean and Western musical traditions combined mbira, string quartet and dance in a single performance. Rhythms, sounds, instruments and actors' roles fulfilled different functions in rehearsal from those specified by their norms of origin, leading to a performance outcome based on integration rather than appropriation (see you-tube website link). It was intended to expand the scope of this experimental work which exemplified the aims and objectives of the Transnational Creativity and Research Cetnre at Batch spa University, by embedding it in educational and community environments in the UK and abroad.

**- Translation, translanguaging and transculturalism** (Loredana Polezzi, Cardiff University)

Building on the current work of the AHRC-funded project 'Transnationalising Modern Languages' <http://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/> , the Centre for translation studies at Cardiff University was extending its research into the relationship between language policy, translation studies, migration and culture such that the act of translation was understood in translingual terms: that is that the field should move beyond viewing translation as a bi-lingual scholastic exercise within the context of modern language curricula. Rather it should be studied as transcultural practice which reflected the linguistic pluralism and mobility of populations in the contemporary global environment. Translanguaging was becoming an increasingly prominent cultural phenomenon which was likely to increase in the future and needed to be seen in holistic terms with reference to specific contexts and social groups, both in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

- **Cultural and Literary Research in a Trans-lingual Environment: didactic implications** Nathalie Carré (PLIDAM/INALCO, Paris)

The mission of the research unit *'Pluralité des Langues et des Identités: didactique, acquisition, médiations'* (PLIDAM) <http://www.plidam.org/> within the *Institut National des Langues et Cultures Orientales* (INALCO), Paris was to pursue research into the interrelationship between language, culture and pedagogy in multicultural environments in different parts of the world, taking full account of the geo-political contexts which conditioned the structure and delivery of curricula in secondary and higher education. The role of literary text and its interpretation as a vehicle for understanding cultural difference was an important aspect of PLIDAM's research. The unit offered knowledge and expertise on the generation of contemporary textual artefacts in Africa, Eastern Europe and The Middle East which had the potential to be developed as a project within a prospective network. It could also review the way in which such material was taught as well as its implications for the role which it might play within HE in Europe.

- **Culture and the Archive** Piotr Wcislik; Macjei Maryl (Polish Academy of Science, Warsaw)

One of the current strands in the research conducted by the Institute for Literary Studies in the Polish Academy of Science was to establish an electronic archive of Polish writers. This work had, however, extended well beyond building a compendium of names or titles for reference purposes. It was considering the archive from a socio-cultural perspective as a powerful discursive instrument which established the legacies of creative artists and defined culture, conditioning the way in which a society would be understood, internally and externally, in the future. The challenge of relating archival sources of information to digital methods of data storage and retrieval was already central to literacy practices on the part of different populations and was affected by a multiplicity of factors, including the ways in which generically diverse forms of expression were stored and accessed.

**3. Reflections**

The presentations gave rise to a number of questions. The position and specific contribution of the institutions which had not been represented at the workshop needed to be clarified, as did the relationship between the projects in which participants were already engaged and those which would be generated by membership of the network. The potential overlap between the strands was acknowledged, as was the fact that certain fundamental themes, such as the impact of digitalisation, the multimodality of modern communication, transculturalism, the tension between theory and practice and the balance between agency and determinism ran across all domains. These 'vertical' dimensions should be openly recognised and addressed in the design of the network's operations at the collective and individual levels.

The background to the development of the SIGs was described. There were five in all, including the present one: 'Cultural Literacy and Creative Futures', the others being 'the body', 'cultural memory', 'inter-semiotic translation' and 'the HE curriculum'. The aim of the present SIG was generic: to benchmark current practice as a means of laying foundations for the future, and to achieve this by showcasing good practice. As such, it had a 'meta' function which aimed to identify and carry forward new theoretical perspectives on the analysis and interpretation of cultural artefacts.

A number of points were emphasised in discussion: the centrality of language, seen from a translingual, intercultural perspective, even if language was deployed in different ways and to different extents in different media; the variety of theoretical approaches and interpretative methods required to analyse artefacts of different types. It was likely that the focus of analysis, supported by theory, would be twofold: (a) on the processes of generation and production of the artefact concerned and (b) on its internal structural dynamic as capturing a given historical/cultural context.

**4. Comment**

**Charles Forsdick (AHRC)**

Charles reiterated the central significance of 'language' as the central pillar of cultural representation. Intercultural communication was generating trans-lingual forms (cf the presentation by Joanna Kosmalska [JK] on migrant Polish writing). The 'reference points' which featured as an appendix to the Agenda (see below) echoed the range of 'key words' which crystallised current trends in cultural research and extended beyond writing and text as traditionally understood to include such terms as 'the sensory' – a reminder of its diversity and the methodological complexity of the field. Other prominent challenges included digitalisation and global outreach. All were the subject of intense debate surrounding the future of the humanities-led research in the UK.

**Galin Tihanov (ICLA)**

Galin emphasised the importance of the proposed programme's structural mechanism: the discreet nature of the strands, their potential overlap, the actions which would be necessary to guarantee practical outcomes. Following the discussion on language (above), he stressed the need to incorporate oral, functional (frequently telegraphic) and more elaborate forms of linguistic expression, all of which should be taken into account when attempting to define 'cultural literacy'. He also raised the issue of the CLE's focus on Europe in the current porous climate, dominated as it was by mobility of populations and global electronic communication. At the same time, he warned against losing sight of the relationship between culture and the nation state – or more broadly of the notion of 'boundary', at whatever scalar level.

**5. Action and infrastructure**

In clarifying the aims and outcomes of the workshop, RC outlined a potential infrastructure for the SIG and the actions which would be needed if its objectives were to be achieved.

**ACTION 1 – all active participants**:

*Confirm internal institutional support for participation in the network and summarise project (actual or intended) with reference to an individual who will act as contact/institutional co-ordinator. Submit draft of summary (including prognosis) to RC by end August for subsequent circulation and posting on the SIG website.*

As stated, the aspiration of the SIG was that specific individuals as representatives of particular Schools, Institutes or Clusters within a network of European Universities pursue a 'project' which would, in different ways, illustrate 'Cultural Literacy Research in action' and map future pathways for research. For this to happen, a formal commitment on the part of the 'Cluster' to make a definable contribution to the work of the network, together with an outline description of the project in which they were already engaged or were proposing to engage would be necessary. Clearly the project should respond to a research direction already adopted by the Institution/Cluster and should correspond to its existing strategic interests.

It was understood that in most cases, projects were already 'up and running', whereas, in a few, a future project was still being put together for which external funding would be sought. This raised inevitable questions of confidentiality, though it was hoped that it might be possible to describe the general direction of a research programme without specifying the precise nature of the project concerned.

*In the immediate future, RC to renew contact with all prospective partners, including those absent from the meeting, to discuss the viability of the ab ove proposals.*

**ACTION 2 - all active participants**:

*Draw up a preliminary list of references which support the theoretical approach to be taken by the project. End-August.*

An important element in highlighting 'good practice' in CL research was theoretical literature. One of the objectives of the SIG should therefore be to generate a set of references which would offer prospective coverage to others and illustrate clearly the future direction of interdisciplinary research combining humanities and social science. While it was hoped that there would be a central record held on behalf of the SIG as a whole, the generation of references would devolve onto the individual sub-projects and would be updated on the website throughout the life of the network.

**ACTION 3 – all active participants:**

*Consider mounting an interim workshop which would pave the way for the CLE conference to be held in the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, between May 10th-12th 2017. This to be left entirely to the discretion and initiative of individual sub-projects on the understanding that other members of the SIG (including those absent on 14th June 2016) would be invited to attend. Inform RC and other SIG members.*

It would assist the SIG and the CLE if independent sources of funds could be found to support such an event (events). A degree of complementary funding might also be sought from the CLE through its Treasurer, Loredana Polezzi. In the meantime, application to external sources of funding (Institutional/National/European) would be warmly encouraged. All such proposals would be acknowledged on the CLE/SIG/ISF website(s). It was likely that one workshop (by invitation) to review progress between now and the Warsaw conference (May 2017) would be sufficient, though this should not discourage individual participants from taking any feasible initiative in the near future.

CF and GT subsequently acknowledged their readiness to continue to advise the group.

The Meeting ended at 1600.

Robert Crawshaw

Lancaster

30th June 2016 (edited 19th August 2016)