

Tagungsbericht/Conference Proceedings: *Theories and Practices of the Archive*

[Graduate School at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, 16th – 20th April 2012.]

In the 146th aphorism of *Betrachtungen und Gedanken über verschiedene Gegenstände der Welt und der Literatur* (1803-5), Friedrich Maximilian Klinger writes that whoever wishes to realise the extent of man's ignorance should study metaphysics or physics, because negative definitions of phenomena apparently typify these disciplines. For intellectual history, on the other hand, 'weiter nichts fehlt als die in dem unzugänglichen Archiv verborgenen Dokumente.'¹ Such optimism about the archive in the nineteenth century, and the view that its contribution to scholarship is limited only by practical problems such as closed stacks or undiscovered, perhaps miscataloged manuscripts, has long since been challenged by archival theory. Young researchers must at least be aware of this recent thought when approaching archives for master's or doctoral projects. For should they succeed in accessing all relevant documents, their completed search may result in a less, not more coherent narrative. This Graduate School, hosted and generously funded by the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, sought to address these practical and theoretical issues, helping students in the early stages of their research navigate and canalize vast archival collections. *Theories and Practices of the Archive* was held from 16th – 20th April 2012 and was co-organized and led by three British academics: Drs. Steffan Davies (Bristol), Ben Hutchinson (Kent), and Emily Troscianko (Oxford). Eleven postgraduates of German and Comparative Literature from institutions across the U.K. and Ireland benefited from a series of seminars and behind the scenes tours, as well as from opportunities to explore the institution's resources and present their preliminary findings to the group. The interests and corpora of the participants ranged from foreign correspondents in eighteenth-century periodicals to recorded TV appearances of present-day authors who thematize feminism. These areas were matched to the expertise of Marbach's in-house staff and the knowledge of the three course leaders in order to yield tangible results within just five days.

Ben Hutchinson chaired the first of the week's three seminars, and facilitated close readings of canonical German and English texts of archival theory. This resulted in lively discussion about the extent to which archives can contain 'answers' to researchers' questions at all. Thus, the participants began the week with a more open mind to what they might expect to find on the shelves and how they might be able to use it judiciously. They revised their preconceptions – often tantamount, in the words of Yosef Yerushalmi, to an 'archival fantasy' in which information is unproblematically equated with knowledge – and equipped themselves with an overview of possible and often conflicting ideas concerning archival information. In the second seminar, Emily Troscianko addressed the relationship of archival theory to popular ways in which we conceive memory metaphorically, as a mental archive. The line of argument claiming 'mein eigentliches Archiv trage ich in Kopf [sic.]' in Johanna Schopenhauer's novel *Richard Wood* (1837) is paradigmatic for this sort of conceptual metaphor.² Troscianko voiced scepticism about the usefulness of this common description of mental storage and retrieval, and introduced the latest research from cognitive science. Her argument again stimulated animated theoretical debate. Steffan Davies' seminar, meanwhile, had a more practical focus. As the final seminar of the series, participants drew on their own experiences which they had gained over the course of the week. They also heard a guest talk by Dr. Angus Nicholls (Queen Mary) concerning the pleasures and pitfalls which he has experienced at Marbach during his archival research on Hans Blumenberg.

1 Friedrich Maximilian Klinger, *Betrachtungen und Gedanken* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1958), p. 406.

2 Johanna Schopenhauer, *Richard Wood* 2 vols. (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1837), vol. 2, p. 307.

The archivists and curators at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, meanwhile, conducted a programme of guided tours for participants, exhibiting visual and written material and encompassing artworks and memorabilia, writing instruments, and authors' annotated libraries, as well as publishers' archives such as the relatively recent addition of the Siegfried Unseld collection. The tours emphasised the types of academic and practical problems that can be incurred in the acquisition, storage, organization, presentation and, at times, dispersal of the institution's material. For instance, portraits can be of significance for authorial biography, since they not only depict how authors look (or wish to be perceived), but also connect their subjects to particular places, events and milieus. However, visual evidence may also contradict and even challenge the established chronology of a writer's life. This was illustrated by reference to a small portrait of Franz Kafka, whose ascribed date does not fit with the existing biographical picture of his literary activity. Alternatively, visual material belonging to writers' personal collections may be of literary-historical interest. The photographs taken and collected by W. G. Sebald are a case in point: they form part of the development of the author's 'photo-texts', not least because they indicate the real-life referents of the images these texts contain. In addition, the staff at Marbach spoke frankly of the most basic and day-to-day practical problems encountered in archival work. For example, a portrait of the publisher Johann Friedrich Cotta is so large that it is, quite literally, stuck in storage; and if the institution receives sheets and sheets of an author's headed notepaper, how much of it should be kept, and what proportion discarded?

The participants encountered their own problems, both theoretical and practical, as they familiarized themselves with the institution's holdings. These extended from the age-old challenge of inaccessible material that must remain sealed-off until the death of the author, to deciphering *Sütterlin* script (only to find, perhaps, that a prized letter was about nothing other than bad weather!) More abstractly, most participants had to become more selective, justify their focus and thereby refine their academic search in order to make the most of limited time, while simultaneously gaining a fuller sense of scope so as to plan future visits. For this, there were scheduled consultations with Marbach's subject specialists, as well as on-hand advice.

After an evening excursion to Stuttgart to see a performance of Schiller's *Don Karlos* (on the success of which views differed), the course concluded with a one-day conference at which participants presented their master's and doctoral projects, the material they had examined during the week, and, more generally, their thoughts on the extent to which archival research was of benefit to their arguments. Seán Williams (Oxford) focussed on the genre of the preface in the long eighteenth century, while Nick Treuherz (Manchester) and Christian Deuling (Nottingham) discussed cultural transfer between the German-speaking world and other lands, notably France, in journals of this period. Katharina Volckmer (Oxford) and Simone Klapper (Galway) thematized discourses of subjectivity, especially of the outsider and of suicide respectively, in German literature of the early twentieth century. Marina Micke (Manchester) spoke about attempts of the GDR regime and its literary institutions to instruct authors in mainstream communist ideas, whereas Ersin Münüklü (Kent) considered marginal literature with respect to W.G. Sebald. Rose Baker (Oxford) also presented research on Sebald, specifically on the strategies employed in the translation of his work into English. Birgit Mikus (Oxford) and Emily Spiers (Oxford) both discussed women's writing and their commentaries on gender and society, with reference to nineteenth- and twenty-first century authors respectively. The discipline of Archive Studies, meanwhile, was represented by Kat Peterson (UCL), who theorized the advantages of formally recording both the interaction between scholar and archive, and its published outcomes.

If the thematic concentrations of participants were thus strikingly broad, the catalogue of challenges and opportunities pertaining to the archive that were voiced in the plenary discussion was surprisingly narrow. Though the projects differed considerably, participants had common experiences in their use and evaluation of archive material. The workshop environment fostered by *Theories and Practices of the Archive* enabled the participants to exchange strategies and reflect critically on the future direction of their own archival research. The week gave access and insight into Germany's national literary archive and what it can (and cannot) offer the scholar. But contrary to Klinger's view outlined above, this did not entail the easy completion of participants' projects. Rather, the theoretical and practical problems had – excitingly – only just begun.

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