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Abstracts

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Writing the Past in the Present: An Anglo-Saxon Perspective

Stefan Berger

This article reviews some of the major developments in the field of historical studies from the late 1970s onwards. It argues that many of these developments take their cue from the emergence of the narrative or linguistic turn which can be dated back to the 1970s. Foucauldian ideas were also very influential in giving historical studies a new direction from the 1970s onwards. In particular the article looks at the development of gender history, the history from below and memory history. Subsequently it reviews the diverse impact the narrative and linguistic turn had on traditional areas of history writing, including political, social, economic and cultural history. In particular the rise of the new cultural history from the 1980s onwards was deeply connected to the linguistic turn and resulted in a visual turn and in the opening up of new areas for research, among which the turn to material culture was of particular importance over the last decade or so. The article concludes by discussing the increasing move towards forms of interdisciplinarity and intertextuality and the popularity of transnational history writing (including comparative history and the history of cultural transfers), among which world and global history have had the strongest appeal of late.

Linguistics: The Study of the Language Capacity and Its Functions

Elizabeth Closs Traugott

Language is considered a defining property of humanity in ancient myths and in contemporary humanities disciplines such as philosophy and in linguistics. But there are competing views about what constitutes the capacity for language. One approach, known as the formal generative approach, regards the language capacity as autonomous from other cognitive abilities, and equates it with the syntactic ability to form an infinite number of sentences from finite means. Another, known as the functional approach, regards the language capacity as a non-autonomous symbolic system. From this perspective factors such as speech acts, narrative discourses, and frequency effects are as important as syntax for understanding the language capacity. Implications of work from these two perspectives for a broad range of disciplines, especially literary studies, are suggested.

Archaeology in the Humanities

Norman Yoffee and Severin Fowles

Since archaeology is fundamentally the study of the human past, which is what the word "archaeology" connotes according to its Greek etymology, it is part of the humanities. However,

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archaeologists work in teams with scientists and employ quantitative techniques and comparative methods of the social sciences; archaeologists are thus an academic hybrid and are pleased to live in the interstices of many disciplines. In this article we review the history of archaeology in the humanities and explore some new directions in archaeological research. We discuss the enduring questions of origins of the antiquity of humanity, religion and art, the first agricultural villages, and the earliest cities, states, and civilizations. We also consider new agendas in archaeology: historical archaeology, landscapes in the past and present, material studies of the present, and how archaeologists are engaged in modern politics.

The Role of the Archaeologist in Present-Day Society

François Djindjian

The present paper is aimed to reveal the useful role that the archaeologist, evading from the ivory tower of his erudition of the societies of the past, may play for the change of the societies in the future. From two examples chosen in the XIX° century, we are focalizing on the very deep impact the archaeology may have in the society at a regional scale (the museum of Lubny in Ukraine) and at a worldwide scale (the Universal Exhibitions in Paris) for the evolution of the societies. Resulting from crisis due to internal mechanisms specific to our operation, the contemporary societies may collapse like the societies of the past. Such mechanisms have a systemic and non historical nature, which are involving us to discover the main processes, responsible of collapses. Then, the archaeologist, like the climatologist, may operate the knowledge of the past to forecast the happy or unhappy evolutions of the future. The archaeologist, servicing the contemporaneous society, may be useful, not only in discovering the remains of the past but also in making the inventory of the contemporary cultures as in forecasting the evolutions of the societies.

The Humanities: Their Value, Defence, Crisis, and Future

Zhang Longxi

The humanities, particularly literature and the arts, seem always to have to justify their value and legitimacy vis-à-vis some other, more practical, more useful, or more authoritative aspects of human life and activities. In ancient Greece, Plato dismissed poetry as being untrue and irrational, but beginning with Aristotle, there has been a long tradition of defense of poetry in the West. Traditionally the most effective defense was to emphasize the moral values the humanities can teach and the exemplary significance of the classics. In the late nineteenth century, science began to challenge the value of the humanities, and in the twentieth century, that resulted in the "two cultures" debate in the 1960s. In more recent time, however, a real crisis of the humanities arises not from challenges from the outside but from within, as scholars in the humanities—particularly in literary and cultural studies—question the basic values of the humanities and "decanonize" the classics. The utilitarian tendency of modern society makes it difficult for the humanities to prove their practical use and worth. To argue for the value of the humanities, therefore, it is very important to refuse the utilitarian terms of debate, to reclaim the values of the humanities, and to re-emphasize the exemplary significance of the classic in order to work toward a better future not only of the humanities, but of our world at large.

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New Pathways for Rethinking Literary Studies in the 21st Century

Sylvie André

This paper is to re-think the goals of literary studies at the hedge of the 21° century, questioning the idea of literature itself. Literature, as it is defined in Europe, is an ethnocentric notion, related to the theory of nation-state from the 19° century. National literatures are also the major frame for comparative studies. So literature and literary studies must change and focus on contemporary challenges: globalization and new media. Nowadays, literary studies and teaching can not anymore be so tightly linked with nation or democratic state building. Teaching has to offer a wider range of cultural marks for young people. From now on, the major goals of researchers might be a theoretical analyze of the process of representation by language itself (very similar for all human sciences) and an analyze of literature as a aesthetic activity (very similar in all types of societies).

The Place of Philosophy between Science and the Humanities

Young Ahn Kang

We hear frequently about the crisis of the humanities. The crisis of the humanities we experience nowadays is due to the economic logic of the capitalist system that everything is evaluated according to economic and social utility. Deeper reason for the crisis could be found in modern and contemporary humanities which lost their ideal of cultivating humanity for better life by nourishing human heart and mind. Philosophy confronts the same crisis by becoming a science, or the science providing ground for other sciences, and stopping to ask and reflect on the meaning of life. Other extreme is to make philosophy just a writing. At this point Kant is invited to suggest the way for philosophy between science and writing. Philosophy has at least three necessary conditions: human's thinking ability (arguments and counterarguments), the practice of this talent on available texts, and a vast field of concrete life. Philosophy is not merely a science, a doctrine and not merely an edifying discourse, but also and primarily a way of life to control one's passion, to rectify one's heart and mind and to reflect on the meaning of life.

The Status of Knowledge and New Directions for the Humanities

Daihyun Chung

A new notion of language can play an important role in developing a new understanding of knowledge and the humanities. I believe that language gives rise to pluralism not only because different verbal languages force us to see the world differently, but also because any object that can be perceived by humans or can be processed digitally is in need of interpretation. Consequently, our notion of knowledge needs to be communal rather than absolutistic, and our response to the contemporary human predicament needs to invoke active rather than passive freedom. These two conditions appear to suggest the possibility of building a bridge between the humanities in the academic world and the humanities in the cultural markets.

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The Study of Arabic

Michael Carter

Arabic is an important language in several respects, and there is a long history of contact between Muslims and the non-Muslim West which justifies the study of Islamic culture. The relations between the two are briefly described, as a background to the consequences of 19th century imperialism. The paper then examines the dual linguistic status of Arabic, as a language both of revelation and everyday intercourse. The unique rôle of the Islamic Adam as the first speaker of Arabic leads to a discussion of the power vested in Arabic by virtue of its religious function. To maintain its power an educational system was developed to train scholars to preserve the enormous archive of literary material which records the history of Islam and guarantees its survival, increasing the dependence of Islam upon Arabic. However, the religion does not suppress individuality, and the paper argues that Arabic literature is full of humanist observations on the strengths and weakness of mankind, all of us sons of Adam. The current situation of Classical Arabic is then reviewed: because it cannot change there cannot be (or not yet) a Reformation of the kind which happened in Europe, although contemporary written Arabic is gradually drifting away from the Classical standard. But the written language retains its power as the final recourse for all Islamic matters, and is now also playing a political rôle at the UN. Some recent studies of the use of Arabic in various domains are briefly mentioned, and the influence of Western linguistics on the teaching of Arabic, together with a fleeting glance at the effect of computers on the way the Qur'an is now experienced. The paper concludes by asking whether dialogue is possible or even necessary, with a negative answer. Instead a humanist approach is recommended, one in which Arabic culture is studied not for its intellectual challenges alone, but to enable us to recognise fellow sons of Adam across the borders of language.

Art History in Japan and Its Future Development

Shigetoshi Osano

Commencing with the argument that modern art history is rooted in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy, a period of unusual primacy for the 'eye', the author provides an overview of the history of art history: from its foundation as a university discipline to its recent bipolarity. In the 1980s art history devolved into a state of confusion. At the same time, connoisseurship, a primary and indispensable foundation for training in art history, went into decline. This state of affairs resulted from the penetration of the language-based disciplines into the realm of art historical study, since their approaches are not predicated upon direct access to the art object. Counter to this trend, however, the author argues that art history is a humanistic discipline that begins with the careful viewing of an individual work of art or visual object, and works outward toward the building up of a historical, geographical and worldwide map of art.

A close examination of the limitations of a globally-oriented approach (that is, world art studies or world art history) and a regionally-oriented practice that could be categorized as a traditional form of art history, leads the author to consider the future of art history in Japan. He proposes a comparative approach as a promising way of bridging Western and Japanese art history, as practiced both inside and outside Japan, in future years.

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The Humanities under Siege?

Theo D'haen

Everywhere in Europe the humanities, and within the humanities particularly the study of languages and literatures, are increasingly under pressure from reductions in staff numbers and research funding. This is a pity, because the capital – both cultural and economic - the humanities, and the study of languages and literatures, represent is considerable. Moreover, boosting the humanities requires relatively little investment, certainly in comparison to the pure and exact sciences. However, the humanities should not expect to be saved by simply continuing in the tracks of the last century or so. Instead, they should aim to better 'sell' themselves in the era of globalization.

From Eurocentrism to a Polycentric Vision of the World: Advocacy for a Paradigm Shift

Adama Samassékou

Humanities and social sciences have so far adopted an approach keeping Europe at the heart of the scientific debates, to the detriment of the other continents and thus, of the other cultures in the world, relegated to the periphery of the dynamics of intellectual reflection and production. This Eurocentrism is also evident in the economic, socio-cultural, political and religious fields. The case of the relationships between Africa and Europe is quite enlightening.

The recent crisis, which is not only financial and economic but also cultural and more generally societal, reveals a loss of sense reinforced by the attempt to standardize the world's cultures induced by the accelerated globalization leading to a real dehumanization of the relationships between individuals, peoples and States.

It is urgent to make a paradigm shift through the reconstruction of humanities and social sciences, in the perspective of a polycentrism based on cultural and linguistic diversity in the world and capable of strengthening the dialogue between cultures and civilizations, and therefore, peace in the world.

Hard and Soft Obscurantism in the Humanities and Social Sciences

Jon Elster

The paper argues that the contemporary social sciences and humanities are in a deep crisis, due to the prevalence of obscurantist arguments. Whereas many have denounced the "soft obscurantism" derived from what is sometimes called "French theory", the "hard obscurantism" of many forms of mathematical and statistical social science also deserves to be singled out for criticism. The paper further argues that obscurantism does not merely represent a waste of intellectual effort, but has caused harm to countless individuals, ranging from parents of autistic children to market investors. Finally the paper considers some of the psychological mechanisms that may sustain obscurantism and constitute obstacles to overcoming it.

Is a Pragmatics of Collective Action Possible?

Jacques Poulain

This paper is a review of Francisco Naishtat's volume *Action et Langage* (Paris, 2010).

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