

## **Conference Report on "The Making of the Humanities III: The Making of the Modern Humanities"**

Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome (KNIR, Koninklijk Nederlands Instituut Rome), November 1 – 3, 2012

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## Conference Report on "The Making of the Humanities III: The Making of the Modern Humanities"

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The international conference "The Making of the Humanities III – The Making of the Modern Humanities" was organized by Rens Bod, Jaap Maat (University of Amsterdam), and Thijs Weststeijn (University of Amsterdam & Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin) and the Working Group History of the Humanities of the Huizinga Institute, in cooperation with the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome (KNIR), the Institute for Logic, Language and Computation of the University of Amsterdam, the University of Amsterdam, the Huizinga Institute of Cultural History and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek, NWO). The entire event took place at the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome and aimed at hosting contributions to "a comparative history of the humanities", following the model of what has long been done with the history of (natural) science. After the first two conferences on the making of the humanities, held at the University of Amsterdam in 2008 and 2010 and dealing respectively with early modernity (1400-1800) and the transition from early modern to modern disciplines (1600-1900), this third follow-up focused on the period from the 19th century to the present day. It embraced a great deal of disciplines and topics, including history of philology, history of science, linguistics, literary studies, archaeology, musicology, historiography, art history, theatre studies, philosophy and history of philosophy, media studies, and oriental studies, "with an emphasis on their mutual influences, and their interaction with the other sciences".

### The Humanities and the Sciences

The conference started with a keynote lecture by LORRAINE DASTON (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin), in which she argued that, while "objectivity" emerged as a common "epistemic virtue" in both the natural sciences and the humanities in the 19th century, "impartiality" had already featured as an "epistemic virtue" in the humanities before objectivity, especially in history. Objectivity and impartiality have not always been considered to be identical: to the contrary, Nietzsche, for instance, conceived of them as different and

even opposite, since impartiality did not imply "value-neutrality". As noticed in the discussion following Daston's lecture, not only Nietzsche, but also Dilthey, Friedrich Ueberweg, and the disciples of Schleiermacher in general rejected objectivity as an epistemic value.

After three talks about the interaction between the natural sciences and the humanities in the 17th, 18th, and late 20th century, the following three papers, presented in the session moderated by Arthur Weststeijn (KNIR), concentrated on single scientists, whose work exemplifies the connections between methods and traditions of the humanities and of the natural sciences in the second half of the 19th and the early 20th century.

Questioning the separation between 'hermeneutic' and 'physicalist' tradition, CHRISTIAN DAMBÖCK (University of Vienna) explained the influence of Wilhelm Dilthey's philosophy on Rudolf Carnap's *Aufbau* (The Logical Structure of the World, 1928), where "geistige Gegenstände" (mental objects) play a central role. He observed that "the initial conceptions of the 'hermeneutic' tradition, in particular, Dilthey's conception of the Humanities, show rather strong affinities with the empiricist and positivist philosophical tradition", whereas Carnap's *Aufbau* is basically "not concerned with a defense of a reductionist and physicalistic conception of the sciences that rules out all kinds of nonphysical notions as 'Scheinbegriffe'", but rather attempts to "'rationally reconstruct' a whole universe of metaphysical and mental objects". This reviewed perspective on Dilthey's and Carnap's role for the foundation of the modern humanities lead to the highly interesting conclusion that Dilthey's humanities are "empirical", whereas Carnap's humanities in the *Aufbau* are "empirical and geistig"; in both cases, the humanities are fully compatible with the empirical sciences and can even collaborate, thereby influencing each other.

The topic of a mutual cooperation between sciences and humanities has been approached in LAURA MENEGHELLO's (GCSC, University of Giessen) paper through a study on the conception of the 'humanities' in Jacob Moleschott's 'scientific materialism'. Born in 's-Hertogenbosch in 1822, Moleschott died in Rome in 1893, having studied medicine in Heidelberg and having taught physiology in Heidelberg and Zürich; he was appointed Professor at the University of Turin in 1861, became a senator of the newly established Italian Kingdom in 1876 and professor at La Sapienza in Rome in 1878. As demonstrated throughout this talk, Moleschott conceived of the scientific and humanistic domains as reciprocally dependent on each other rather than as radically separated: philosophy, ethics, history, and religion were included in the worldview of scientific materialism as necessarily integrating the approach of the natural sciences, whereas single disciplines were characterized by interaction rather than by a rigid demarcation. Meneghello examined in particular some of Moleschott's official speeches, held at the University of Turin (*Della causalità nella biologia*, 1867) and at the Italian senate (1876-1877), underlining the intertwinement of epistemological and political levels in these discourses. She focused on the concept of 'unity of science', on the role of the 'Philosophical Faculty' in the proposals for a



reform of the national educational system, on the unifying task of philosophy and on the importance of history in Moleschott's worldview; the result of the analysis was that Moleschott aimed at an "absorption" of the humanities in his scientific-materialist system of knowledge and pled for their collaboration with the natural sciences.

Both Damböck's and Meneghello's talks tried to show that Neo-Positivism and Positivism, respectively, can be interpreted as aiming at integration rather than separation of the natural sciences and the humanities, and that a claim of 'empiricity' as unifying method is central to both movements (for their conception not only of the sciences, but also of the humanities); however, this claim of empiricity does not amount to reductionism, i.e. it does not imply any reduction of the object of the humanities to the one of the natural sciences.

Similar results were provided in the panel "Philosophy and the Humanities" by CARLO IERNA (Utrecht University), who talked about the foundation of the humanities and of their 'scientificity' in Franz Brentano's thought, underlining how the division of labour and the reciprocal cooperation between various disciplines was a key concept in the structure of scientific research for Brentano's school. Ierna showed that Brentano's thesis, that "the true method of philosophy" would be the method of the natural sciences, constituted a "scientific foundation" of the humanities: once again, the project of a unifying method for the sciences and the humanities, which also constitutes a solid scientific basis for the humanities and the realization of a "unity of science", appears to be a core theme around 1900. This happens, however, without aiming at a reduction of the human to the natural: in Brentano, indeed, the object of the humanities is 'consciousness'; this means that their method was conceived as empirical without being reductionist, subjective without being "introspective".

In order to analyse the connection between methods proper of the humanities and their application to the natural sciences, it is worth drawing attention also to the position of "one of the 'losers' of the history of science", as VIRGINIA RICHTER (University of Bern) showed in her paper. She spoke about how Christian Philip Henry Gosse "employed rhetorical strategies borrowed from the humanities to make what for him was an essentially scientific argument" in *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* (1857), where he argued that God "had created the earth with fossils and all, thus giving the (false) impression not only of a great age of the earth, but of the mutability of species". The strength of this talk lay exactly in illustrating, through Gosse's work, the modalities and functions of "negotiations of authority, epistemological validity and the discursive rules of scientific communities".

## Classical Studies and Philology

After a keynote lecture by GLENN MOST (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa), concentrating on the origins, history, and significance of *Quellenforschung*, the session on "Classical Studies and Philology" continued with ELINE SCHEERLINCK's (Ghent University) talk on the role of the Belgian classicist and historian Franz Cumont (1868-1929) for the rise of history of religion as "independent academic discipline" between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Scheerlinck considered particularly Cumont's thesis of an active influence of the Near

East "in the moral and religious evolution of the Roman Empire" in the context of the "intensification of European political and scientific interest in the Middle East".

ANNETTE M. BAERTSCHI (Bryn Mawr College) dealt with "selected large-scale research projects in Classics that were launched by the Prussian Academy of Arts and Sciences in Berlin in the second half of the 19th century", arguing that they not only made available, for the first time, ancient literary and material primary sources, "but also established new forms of institutional organization and scholarly collaboration, which proved to be groundbreaking for academic enterprises, both in the humanities and in the sciences". Moreover, "the enormous expansion of the material required different methodologies as well as increasingly specialized knowledge", which catalyzed "the division of Classics into its various sub-disciplines".

## Writing History

The keynote by JO TOLLEBEEK (Catholic University Leuven) dealt with the interesting process of the humanities becoming scientific and "more academic" around 1900, and at the same time having a "homely character" in the form of their material settings. This was the case, for instance, with seminars, held in small rooms, sometimes belonging to the spaces of a library, as opposed to the amphithéâtre, but it was also the case with the *exercitationes historicae* (closed sessions in which students were "initiated to self-criticism", and which were also "combined with forms of sociability such as drinking and smoking") held in *Privatzimmer* (where, by the way, women started to play a "more than ordinary role" in the process of scientific work). Students came into contact with their professor's family, so that boundaries between the private and the public sphere of research can hardly be drawn: it was in this 'homely' sphere, that they learnt the ethical and epistemic virtues which were considered fundamental to science. During the discussion, Lorraine Daston pointed out that this "homely character" of the humanities around 1900 should not be seen as juxtaposed with the more institutionalized setting of the natural sciences (the laboratory), since there as well the 'familiar' or 'homely' environment was still a central element in the everyday life of scientists and their disciples: scientists often lived above their labs, and students could sleep there if needed, while their daughters were "trained to be the wives of the best students".

From the homely environment and spatial settings of research, CHRISTINE OTTNER's (Austrian Academy of Science, Vienna) paper switched focus to the role of scholarly periodicals "in the process of academic professionalization and institutionalization", whose importance is due to the fact that they both "reflect developments within scientific disciplines" and at the same time "decidedly influence such developments by way of an active editorial policy". Comparing methodologies and patterns of three Austrian scholarly periodicals in the period between the 1840s and the early 20th century (namely: *Der österreichische Geschichtsforscher*, the *Archiv für Österreichische Geschichte*, and the *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*), Ottner provided an interesting perspective on the professionalization of history as a scholarly discipline in Austria. One could learn about "the development of specific philological methods for collecting, preparing and editing historical sources", as well

as about the attempt of writing an Austrian 'national history' in the context of the heterogeneous and multicultural Habsburg Empire.

In the same session, which was entitled "Writing History", the talks held by BART KARSTENS and by HERMAN PAUL (both from Leiden University), dealt respectively with: a) an outline of the historiography of science (in particular, of its institutionalization in the 20th century); b) the importance of "ideals of scholarly virtue" (such as "objectivity, honesty, carefulness, and attentiveness") and their relation to the history of the humanities in the late 19th and early 20th century, illustrated on the basis of two case-studies (Hans Tietze's *Die Methode der Kunstgeschichte*, 1913, and Guido Adler's *Methode der Musikgeschichte*, 1919).

### Literary and Theatre Studies

The theme of experimentalism was taken up during the section on "Literary and Theatre Studies", where GUNHILD BERG (University of Konstanz) explained how, from 1850 to 1900, the concept of 'experiment' became a *Kampfruf* (as Ludwik Fleck showed with regard to the notion of experiment in the natural sciences, in particular in bacteriology) also in the field of the humanities. Gustav Theodor Fechner, influenced by Lorenz Oken and Romantic Naturphilosophie, pled for an implementation of the experimental method in the human sciences (for example, in aesthetics, with the analysing of the relation between stimulus and perception with the methods of physics and mathematics and expressing it through proportions). In the field of literature, Émile Zola, influenced by the experimental physiologist Claude Bernard, presented the 'experimental novel' as a way of studying the human mind and its behaviour. This implied a redefinition of the concept of 'experiment', whose meaning was no more the same as in the natural sciences, and "sharpened the methodological framework of the modern fine arts and the humanities".

By contrast, Theatre Studies, emerging as an autonomous discipline at the beginning of the 20th century, failed to develop a specific methodology. CHIARA MARIA BUGLIONI (University of Milan) clarified here the role of the German scholars Max Hermann (Berlin) and Artur Kutscher (Munich) in the foundation of Theaterwissenschaften: she underlined that they demarcated the field of Theatre Studies from other disciplines, but did not deal with the particular methods which should be adopted, thereby leaving a lack that significantly influenced the progress of the discipline.

### Linguistics, Oriental Studies, and Archeology

In his keynote lecture about the emergence of modern linguistics, JOHN E. JOSEPH (University of Edinburgh) showed how the "naturalization of language", typical for 'modern' linguistics, was still based on the early modern idea of the "genius of a language", although apparently rejecting it. This led, in his opinion, to what he called "the enchantment of modern linguistics", where all irrational elements are overtly rejected, but implicitly survive in "what [Bruno] Latour calls 'hybrid' concepts, with the irrational and enchanted elements camouflaged by innovations in terminology and metaphor". The result is that modern

linguistics, even after its "self-consciously 'scientific' phase" starting around 1850, "has never been modern".

In the field of Oriental Studies, STEFFI MARUNG and KATJA NAUMANN (University of Leipzig) presented an inspiring overview of the international networks of scholars which characterized the birth and development of Oriental Studies in Russia, Europe, and the United States. Tsarist Russia was, as Katja Naumann argued, the "vanguard of Oriental Studies around 1900" (the Petersburg Faculty of Oriental Studies was founded in 1855), where the East was viewed not as "the other", but as "part of itself", and where the exchanges with European scholars were continuous and fruitful. After the revolution in 1917, several Russian Orientalists continued their career in the U.S., thereby strongly influencing the development of Oriental Studies on the other side of the Atlantic, as was shown by Steffi Marung: this circulation of scholars and the transnational and transatlantic networks which were formed decisively contributed to the making of Oriental Studies as an academic discipline.

A transnational approach was also at the centre of the presentation by JOSÉ MARÍA LANZAROTE-GUIRAL (EUI Florence & Paris 1), which focused on cultural transfer and transdisciplinarity in the making of Prehistoric Archeology on the Iberian peninsula between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. He showed that scientific and nationalist arguments, as well as the interaction between anthropology, natural sciences, and archaeology, contributed to the making of the discipline, while the contrasting juxtaposition of biblical scholarship and secular science seems not to be adequate in this context (e.g. the French Henri Breuil and the German Hugo Obermaier, professors at the Institut de Paléontologie Humaine in Paris, were both Catholic priests).

### Concluding Remarks: Towards a "Comparative History of the Humanities"?

In the speech he held during the closing session, RENS BOD (University of Amsterdam) pled for a general history of knowledge which would embrace the natural sciences as well as the humanities, but which will first be possible after the history of the humanities has been more broadly investigated through comparison of methods and patterns across disciplines. He also discussed the main problems and questions he encountered in writing his book *De Vergeten Wetenschappen: Een Geschiedenis van de Humaniora* (The Forgotten Sciences: A History of the Humanities, 2010).

Throughout the concluding plenary session, the keynote speakers and all the other participants had the possibility to comment on the whole conference: Lorraine Daston underlined the importance of the "incarnations" (such as the place of books in libraries) of the sciences and humanities for the study of their history, whereas Glenn Most affirmed that, in writing such a history of the humanities, more attention should be paid to the organization of curricula and examinations in schools and universities. Jo Tollebeek pled for an "anthropological" and "transdisciplinary" perspective that would take into consideration global processes of community-building, as well as the interconnectedness of scholarship, media, and technology. Finally, John Joseph recommended a clearer focus in defining the themes presented and discussed in the various panels, since "different scales serve different

purposes". At the same time, it has been noticed that it would be worth thinking about a way to get disciplines really in conversation with each other by systematizing the panels, instead of putting them, once again, "into boxes". Notwithstanding the (necessary?) division into subjects or general themes during the different sessions, "The Making of the Modern Humanities" proved very effective in creating an international and interdisciplinary environment where scholars with diverse backgrounds had the opportunity to get in contact with each other, to exchange their ideas, and even to make projects for future collaborations. The proceedings of this heterogeneous, highly interesting conference will be published before autumn 2014 by Amsterdam University Press (AUP); this will be the third volume in the series "The Making of the Humanities" and will be distributed by the University of Chicago Press.