Preface

In July 2003 the German Studies Association of Australia (GSAA) held its inaugural conference. The theme of the conference was the future of German Studies.

The decision to form an association of university teachers of German in Australia was made against the backdrop of rising challenges to the discipline over many years. Earlier associations, such as the society of Australian and New Zealand tertiary teachers of German in the 1970s and 1980s, had developed in an era of optimism about the future of German Studies. Alongside French and Russian, German at that time was considered a language of significance in the world, just as the export-driven German economy was understood as the motor of an emerging community of European nations. Most larger tertiary institutions in Australia and New Zealand had marked that significance by according departmental status to studies in German and full professorial status to the heads of these German departments. German was accordingly recognised as a valid academic discipline.

It cannot be said that a single event brought the era of optimism about studies in German to an end. Rather, a number of changes affecting German throughout the world occurred more or less simultaneously. One of these changes in Australia and New Zealand was the awareness that German was but one of many languages in the world that deserved attention. What began to bulk larger in the imagination in these countries was the new importance of the Asian region in view of Great Britain's decision to join the European Economy Community in January 1973. This decision underscored the physical separation of Australia and New Zealand from the British and European cultures from which in large measure they had sprung. The decision of Britain to look to its own region to secure its economic future meant that is was imperative for Australia and New Zealand to do the same in their part of the world. From the late 1970s, therefore, a new focus emerged in Australia and New Zealand on

the countries and cultures of the Asian region, beginning with Japan, by now the second largest economy in the world after the United States. Interest in the Japanese language, and then other Asian languages such as Indonesian (in Australia) and Chinese (in both Australia and New Zealand), soon followed.

With new language kids on the block, the situation for the study of foreign languages became more complex. It was clear, for one thing, that languages could not continue to be administered in former ways, since there were many more languages now to be considered. French and German could no longer rely simply on their being the traditional modern languages that undergraduates chose to study. For another thing, dramatic growth in the size of universities began to occur from the mid to late 1980s as governments throughout the world responded to intimations of a new world order and a new age of information that would make this order transparent. As the new era of information led to new areas of specialty within the university, foreign languages had to find a place among many new challenging areas of specialty. As systems theorists of all persuasions have well understood, modernity is premised, more than anything, on proliferating complexity and the concomitant need to manage it through systemic forms of complexity reduction.[1] The proliferation of diverse types of knowledge and ways in which they are organised leads to the institutional complexity with which the modern university must now contend.

From the early 1990s the need was felt to reduce the administrative complexity by re-examining the divide between European and Asian languages, despite the different demands they faced. Character-based Asian languages appeared to require a different pedagogy from European languages (and even from the Cyrillic-based Russian language) and could not be assumed to bring about equivalent levels of mastery for Anglophone speakers within the constrained university curriculum. Content studies in Asian and European languages pursued, in any case, quite dif-

[1] See, for example, Niklas Luhmann: *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, Vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1997, 134-144.

ferent goals: scholars of Indonesian, for example, tended to be focused on political issues relating to the circumstances of post-Sukarno Indonesia, whereas students of French, German and Russian were educated in the traditional way through an exposure to, and grounding in, the "high" literature of these countries. As a result, a German language scholar, after three or four years of study, looked much like her counterpart in a literature department, and not at all like a graduate of similar standing from an Asian language section. Assumptions about commonalities between European and Asian languages therefore had to take account of this fundamentally dissimilar pedagogical reality. Given these differences, it is fair to say that only limited progress has been made in forging links between Asian and European languages.

The challenges confronting the study and teaching of German in the twenty-first century are therefore formidable. On the one hand, there is the question of institutional context that is answered differently depending on the institution. While German in Australia and New Zealand is subsumed in some institutions under schools of language, acknowledging no formal difference between the study of European and Asian languages, it is separated from Asian languages in other institutions under the banner of a department of European languages. Still other institutions put foreign languages into groupings alongside applied linguistics, while it is common in American institutions to forge links between foreign languages such as German and departments of literature at the graduate and post-graduate level. Since each institutional arrangement requires adaptation to the particular exigencies of local circumstances where a common institutional experience can no longer be assumed, it is inevitable that the study of German becomes more and more diverse.

The increasing diversity of German as an academic discipline is further influenced by changes within the discipline itself. With the emergence of new philosophies and methodologies throughout the humanities, new theories of culture have flooded across the university, profoundly altering the approach to the study of literature long considered the mainstay of scholarship in German. These new notions of culture have made literary study, especially the study of "high" literature, appear a marginal

undertaking in the foreign language curriculum where the need to equip students with a functional skills competence seems the overwhelming priority. Where contextual studies are offered in German, the movement away from literature into film and media studies, as well as studies of popular culture connecting with the vernacular language, has been palpable. Since scholarship is informed, and in some cases determined, by the requirements of teaching, there is no longer any certainty that scholars of German Studies will be able to take for granted the literary interests that once connected them. Rather, German scholars, particularly those who teach in institutions outside Germany, will increasingly have very different academic profiles, with areas of specialty ranging from foreign language pedagogy, which seeks to optimise the results of the language classroom, through to film and media studies and literature, which arise out of the contextual content studies now pursued in the diverse German Studies programmes across the world. Literary scholars in German Studies, while perhaps still focused on contributing to the understanding of a national literary culture in the same manner as their colleagues in departments of German in Germany, also find themselves cultivating a broader understanding of literature in view of the arrival of a more democratised, less hierarchical notion of "cultural studies" in the modern university.

For these reasons, the present volume explores possibilities for a new context for German Studies, and also a new future. It features a selection of presentations to the inaugural conference of the German Studies Association of Australia, reworked and blind peer-reviewed for the purposes of publication. The papers are grouped into thematic sections; introductory essays by the editors summarise and appraise the main arguments the papers put forward. Papers in the volume's first section reflect on what has been proclaimed throughout the world as a crisis of German Studies. The contributions of Patricia Herminghouse, Tim Mehigan and Thomas Pekar consider the situation of German Studies in the United States, Australia, Germany and Japan and make suggestions about how the present crisis might be addressed. As these authors argue, to some extent addressing the crisis will involve reconsidering the canon of literary studies and widening the remit of traditionally understood German Studies.

One result of such reconsideration - the emergence of a feminist German Studies - is appraised in the volume's second section. Three advocates of this area of study, Sara Lennox, Alison Lewis and Ortrud Gutjahr, consider recent developments that have occurred in German-focused feminist scholarship in the United States, Australia and Germany.

The third section of the volume considers the situation of the German language classroom in this complex and changing environment. The contributions of Bettina Boss, Erika Diehl, Britta Schneider and Louise Jansen demonstrate the high level of critical attention now directed toward the problem of imparting language and communicative skills in the foreign language class, where teaching is no longer content-driven, but increasingly learner-sensitive and learner-aware.

Uschi Felix's contribution rounds out the volume. That she highlights the importance of understanding the opportunities attaching to the new multi-media learning environment again underscores how profoundly the contemporary practice of German Studies differs from the practice of the past.

The contributions to this volume therefore make clear that the future of German Studies will have none of the certainty underpinning the instructional context of European languages in the university of the past. Rather, the future will require the flexibility of scholars in responding to the new situation of German in the world. It will also require the flexibility of both scholars and administrators in meeting those organisational exigencies in particular institutions that now govern the way German is offered to its student clientele. The present volume sets out to illuminate this new context of "interdisciplinarity," just as it aims to highlight the opportunities that flow from the new situation at a moment when the need to forge connections in the face of the complexity of diversity is perhaps greater than it has ever been.

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Note on References

The articles in Sections I and II are referenced by way of footnotes. The articles in Sections III and IV follow the referencing conventions for language and linguistic papers, that is to say, Chicago style. Lists of references for these two sections appear on pages 167 and 186 respectively.