

Monday
24 June 2013
7:30 pm
In English

»One can become a Jew, like one can become a human being; one can Jewify, and, I would like to add, from experience: today most of all in German... Becoming Jewish: that is becoming other.«

This sentence in Paul Celan's preliminary notes for his "Meridian" speech performs the paradoxical gesture of naming a universal human capacity in terms of a particular culture, tradition or ethnic group. The complexity arising from Celan's lines pertains to what Jacques Derrida, in his "Philosophical Nationality" seminars calls the "paradox of exemplarity." For Derrida such statements present a welcome tertium datur that would resolve both the ego-centric chauvinism of particularism and the disregard of cultural differences characteristic of universalist discourses. Derrida sees in what he calls "the German-Jewish phenomenon" an especially powerful expression of this dynamic. Based on texts by Derrida, Celan, Freud and others, this lecture will explore the German-Jewish situation in terms of the question of exemplarity and, more generally, the specific potential of literature to confront the dichotomy between the universal and the particular.

Vivian Liska is full Professor of German Literature and Director of the Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. Her research focuses on German and comparative modernist literature, German-Jewish literature and thought and literary theory. Recent Book Publications: As editor or co-editor: *Modernism* (2007), *The Power of the Sirens* (2007), *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Europe* (2007); *What does the Veil Know?* (2009). As author: *Giorgio Agambens leerer Messianismus* (2008); *When Kafka says We. Uncommon Communities in German-Jewish Literature* (2009), and *Fremde Gemeinschaft. Deutsch-jüdische Literatur der Moderne* (2011).

Constituting Wholes

Wholes are said to be more than the sum of their parts. This 'more' contains both a promise and a threat. When different elements – disciplines, methods, cultures, individuals – form a whole, they not only join forces, but also generate effects of synergy and a surplus from which also the parts can benefit. Being part of a whole is a way to acquire meaning and to extend oneself beyond one's limited existence; and having a part in the whole is to have an enlarged agency. But wholes are also more powerful than the sum of their parts. Wholes constitute their parts, determining what is a part and what is apart, what has a part and what is deprived of agency. Becoming a part requires submission and although parts may not pre-exist the whole, there may still be something in the elements that exceeds being a part – even if only the possibility of being part of a different whole. While a desire for being whole or part of a whole seems all-too-natural, organic metaphors, which are often used to think part-whole relationships, have been criticized precisely for naturalizing relations of hierarchy and power. Yet, entirely abandoning the whole in favour of the part(icular) is also problematic. After the disenchantments of the postmodern post-cold-war period and in the face of global crises – be they financial, economic, political, or ecological – the critical need to include a holistic perspective is felt with renewed urgency, as is the concern that the situatedness of any such perspective and the multiple, incommensurable ways of constituting wholes may be forgotten.

The lecture is the last one in the **ICI Lecture Series Constituting Wholes**, which explores the double, both active and passive, aspect of "Constituting Wholes" within the framework of the multi-disciplinary ICI Research Focus **Complementarity and Wholes Which Are Not One**.

Vivian Liska

»Man kann verjuden.«
Paradoxes of Exemplarity