



## **CULTURAL LITERACY OF MIGRATION: AFFECTS, MEMORY, CONCEPTS**

**Warsaw 18-19 May 2016**

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by Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences

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by

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## FOREWORD

'The migrant voice, quiet and little schizophrenic' was the title of a reading due to be given by Claudia Ciobanu, Romanian exile in Warsaw and editor-in-chief of *Mămăliga de Varşovia* magazine, a migrant literature periodical. Its co-founder Teodor Ajder, scheduled to give a talk on the 'Multifaceted presence/absence of non-Polish writers living in Poland', tells us the title means something like *Cold Porridge in Warsaw*. Unable to attend the Workshop's panel session on 'Self-Representation', Claudia was literally represented by her compatriot Teodor, who introduced her as "a [Romanian] journalist who writes in English, lives in Poland and feels homeless." Claudia, whose topic is mainly ecology, had just published an article in *The Guardian* on the benefits of EU membership to Romania (16 May).<sup>1</sup> Also in *The Guardian*, in January 2016 she wrote a story on how the Romanian village of Rosia Montana fought and won against Canadian gold-mining interests,<sup>2</sup> and in 2014 she wrote about environmental activists protesting against Swedish and Polish lignite mining interests in the villages of Kerkwitz (Germany) and of Grabice (Poland) along the Niesse (Nysa in Polish) river which marks the border between the two countries.<sup>3</sup>

Reading out an extract from Claudia's essay, Teodor relates how she "retreated from Polishness into migranhood" when she started working on *Mămăliga de Varşovia*: Romanians wanted to read the magazine in Romanian, and Poles in Polish. Running a bilingual mag, always being asked what it's like to be a migrant, she felt that "to those asking me questions my migrant identity had swallowed up my whole being." Representation, even when it is self-representation, is a tricky aesthetic and moral question, all the more so in the context of the elusive, emotionally and politically charged notion of the migrant, and this topic dominated the two-day workshop held in Warsaw on the 'Cultural Literacy of Migration: Affects, Memory, Concepts'.

Hosted by the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IBL PAN), the workshop was a planning event for the forthcoming international Cultural Literacy in Europe Forum (CLEf) conference, scheduled for 10-12 May 2017, also to be hosted by IBL PAN. Maciej Maryl, the head of the organizing committee (with Anna Barcz, Dorota Jarecka, Adam Lipszyc, Karolina Felberg-Sandecka, [Nina Kancewicz-Hoffman](#), Paweł Mościcki, Justyna Tabaszewska, and Marek Zaleski) explained that IBL, which in Polish stands for Instytut Badań Literackich, was founded after the war and is unique in that it is a research institution, concentrating on long-term projects, like scholarly editions, documentation, and basic research mostly connected to history of literature but also cultural studies. The first part of the workshop, held in the magnificent Staszic Palace on Nowy Świat, a stone's throw from the Copernicus monument, introduced participants to the work of Institute researchers. CLEf Core Team members and special interest groups. Keynote speaker John Sundholm from the University of Stockholm, and representatives from cultural, political, academic and activist organizations

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/may/16/eu-corrupt-politicians>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/14/romanian-village-blocks-canadian-firm-mining-for-gold>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/25834-the-time-for-burning-coal-has-passed>

based in Poland, including the Polish Institute for International Affairs and Amnesty International, were also invited to present. The aim of the workshop, in addition to introducing and developing a working relationship between the host organization and the conference planning committee, was to identify, discuss and delineate research areas and research directions, which could then form a thematic basis for the 2017 Conference.

Organized into four panels with short, ten-minute presentations followed by discussion, this widely diverse group of participants and perspectives generated a remarkably convergent set of observations. In this report the 'Workshop Presentations' are provided verbatim as far as possible, followed by comments and insights gathered in the panel discussions and plenary. These are organized thematically in the section entitled 'Discussions' and include an exploration of their implications for the concept of cultural literacy formulated by CLEf and more generally for literary and cultural studies in higher education and academia.

## WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

Marek Zaleski (IBL) is a literature historian and head of the Literature and Culture of Late Modernity Research Group. Marek just published the book *Shattered Bodies, Resistant Bodies* with a grant received from the National Centre for Science in Poland, in which "The triad history (both History and (micro)history), body and affect provides a framework for interpretations ... The notion of representation is replaced here by that of figuration." In his opening talk, entitled 'Why are we afraid of migrants?', Marek argues that fear of migrants can be interpreted as a symptom of regression: different backgrounds determine the mechanism of social censorship in Polish and other post-communist societies. In the grip of a postcolonial mentality, the process of constructing identity based on hostility is projected on to others, a tendency more pronounced in the former Soviet bloc. "Poles were called the Cherokees of Europe, eternal troublemakers," Marek remarked, "with an inferiority complex typical of captivity," and they still operate under the long shadow of the Yalta Conference and economic poverty. Ability to feel compassion for others is therefore lower, and leads to a "politically condoned hostility towards migrants." Racist prejudices are no longer biologically based, and in Poland "we now have a new type of rhetoric, based on sociology, economics and culture, fear of an anticulture and loss of EU identity. Antisemitism without the Jews, anticommunism without communism...Hatred transformed into cultural difference, the right to be a good Pole, Belgian, etc."

While not shared by all participants, Marek's stark insights resonated with those of Draginja Nadaždin, Director of Amnesty International in Poland, whose presentation 'Avoiding the responsibility for refugees' spoke of the many EU countries where decision-makers are comfortable avoiding decisions and formulating 'sustainable' migration policies. Draginja observed that "calling [refugees] names is very common practice: we don't hear political leaders trying to stop this rhetoric. Terrorism and security worries are convenient excuses." Yet in general the large number of citizens of the world are ready to receive refugees in their countries and in their homes. According to a survey by Amnesty International published on 18

May,<sup>4</sup> three in ten people in the UK, one of the leaders of anti-immigration policy, are willing to receive refugees in their own homes, showing that political rhetoric is at odds with the views of citizens. Poland is among four countries nearest the lowest level of tolerance, along with Russia. Citing Liisa Malkki's *Purity and Exile*, the study of Hutu refugees from Burundi driven into exile in Tanzania, Draginja noted how, though based on African borders, this book is applicable in Europe in its analysis of political narratives, the language of the media, scientific research: for example the flooding metaphors, the bane, the river of refugees, which opened the door for hate speech. Parallels can be found also in the way refugees are portrayed by aid organizations, for example showing only women and children: "men tend to be invisible in visual representations." As Draginja concluded, "We are still far from finding how to speak about refugees."

Justyna Tabaszewska, from IBL, spoke on the 'Affective Ambiguity of the Migrant within Polish Cultural Discourse'. Justyna argued that Polish contemporary attitudes to migrants are closely connected to the past and to the complicated history of Jewish/Polish relations. Compared with emigration from Poland at least since the nineteenth century, now is a whole new question: Poland is no longer a country of emigration but also a destination. In comparison with migrants from Africa, for example "We [Poles] deny that we share the same experience." Books like Thomas Nail's 2015 *The Figure of the Migrant* showed that all share one common trait: movement.<sup>5</sup> Stating the universality of the migrant condition, however, doesn't solve the problem. The concept of shared experience in some cases is just too idealistic to really work, for instance in cases where similarity of experience is denied. Empathy is always connected to feeling, not just thoughts—we need to embrace and not resist feeling connected. Polish media portray migrants as strange, dividing citizens and incomers. Yet a migrant Pole is construed in a completely different way. Citing as example the working conditions of Ukrainian workers in Poland, Justyna concluded: "the more attention is paid to similarity the more resistance it faces."

The tone for the second Panel of the Workshop entitled 'Ethics and Memory', was set by John Sundholm, member of ISTME COST group and co-chair for Memory & Migration Working Group.<sup>6</sup> John's talk revolved around the argument that "Memory is where we have arrived rather than where we have left." Speaking of the working group funded by the Swedish Research Council on 'The Cultural Practice of Immigrant Filmmaking (2013-2015)', set up at the [Institutionen för mediastudier](http://www.institutionenformediestudier.se) in Stockholm, John said the group wanted to renew memory studies, which were characterized by too much focus on the past and demarcation against history. They wanted a new way of looking at memory, stressing agency and doability, and a movement in emphasis from artefacts to acts. He proposed three key words for this new framework: future, agency and acts. In terms of the future, how is the past used to renegotiate

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/new-poll-shows-overwhelming-support-uk-refugees>

<sup>5</sup> Rather than viewing migration as the exception to the rule of political fixity and citizenship, Thomas Nail reinterprets the history of political power from the perspective of the movement that defines the migrant in the first place.

<sup>6</sup> <http://transculturalmemoryineurope.net/WGs>

a place in the present in order to have a future? Representation leads to normative discourse, and this raises the issue of agency: what are 'they' doing? The voice of the migrant is always taken as collective enunciation, speaking for all. A good sign of acceptance is when broken English or Polish or whatever is acceptable in a country or a region: the deterritorialization of language. Finally, looking for some kind of theory of cultural production in terms of acts, John argued for temporary makings in different contexts and present-oriented practices.

This working group is building an archive of films made by migrants themselves as a way of giving them voice, allowing 'them' to address 'us' directly. By way of example, John screened one such film, the haunting *Five minutes for America* in Quechua/Spanish, with subtitles in Swedish, based on a Cesar Galindopa poem. John is also currently involved in the COST network "In Search of Transcultural Memory in Europe" (2013-2016).

Reminding the audience that the EU is a war child —“the stench of human bodies still in the air” — Patrycja Sasnal from the Polish Institute of International Affairs, both an Arabist and a Policy Researcher, is theoretically interested in whether ethical migration policy is possible and for this Panel she explored the concept of 'Ethical Migration as a Challenge for the EU'. Citing the *The Idea of Justice*, the 2009 treatise by economist [Amartya Sen](#) on the ethics of responsibility, Patrycja questioned that of richer Northern countries: “we do not choose where we are born. Are [Northern countries] responsible for this advantage? Was Poland entitled to receive the most help of any nation in post WWII rebuilding?” Germany and Sweden are the natural target for Syrians and Turkish nationals because that is where the majority of migrants from these countries currently live. Noting that migration is a demographic inevitability, let alone conflict-derived, as well as climate-change driven, should refugees be allowed to apply for asylum in a country other than first entry? What if newcomers endanger the wellbeing of the host country? Can or should the utilitarian approach overcome libertarian or egalitarian norms, or vice-versa? Citing the artificial refugee/economic migrant binary, Patrycja asks, what is the true difference? Are we entitled to make judgments of relative deprivation?

Patrycja concludes, however, on a more positive note, that diversity produces creativity, invoking the premise from *The Undivided Past: History beyond our Differences* by David Cannadine (2013). As David Priestland summed it up, reviewing Cannadine relates, “historians have done much to divide humanity into 'us and them' – though their particular ideas of who the 'us and them' are has changed markedly.”<sup>7</sup>

Andrzej Leder, from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, postulated that the fact that the Holocaust was not worked through determines the attitudes of Poles towards immigrants: “We can hear this in the discourse about immigration; often 'not our problem', 'we are not guilty', all the sentences are testimony of a sense of helplessness and escape from responsibility.” When a group is deprived of political sovereignty, argued Andrzej, this kind of attitude to responsibility develops, along with a deep

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/11/undivided-past-history-cannadine-review>  
Review by David Priestland

distrust of political hegemony and institutions — this is the post-communist narrative and this political shunning of responsibility then applies also to the moral dimension.

From the 1960s onwards, recognizing past crimes, guilt and common agency has become part of the political narrative of the most powerful countries: America, France, Germany – “this capacity became a touchstone of institutional maturity, but never in Poland.” Being capable of shame has become something hegemonic politics asks of everybody who wants to be in the club, for example EU demands that Turkey recognizes the Armenian genocide. For weaker societies, this is a new kind of oppression by the most powerful countries. Yet, observed Andrzej, even countries practising this kind of narrative are starting to experience pushback, for example in France the Front National, and its defence of the Vichy or Donald Trump’s rhetoric in the USA.

The topics for the second day of the workshop were ‘Self-representation’ and ‘Representing Migration’. Joanna Kosmalka, who studied at University College Dublin and teaches literary translation at the University of Łódź, spoke on the ‘Transnational Dimensions of Polish Migrant Literature’. Joanna writes about the experience of Polish migrants living in Britain and Ireland. Citing as examples *The New Dubliners* by Daniel Żuchowski, *Conductum Lifae* by Piotr Czerwiński or plays by Polish Theatre Ireland, founded by Anna Wolf, she is interested in the creation of transnational literature and art that embraces multicultural identity, and many such works are hosted at the University of Łódź in a virtual archive of Polish migrant literature in Britain and Ireland.<sup>8</sup>

There is a similarity between migrant writings and blogs, observed Joanna: short topic-oriented sections that are reminiscent of blog postings, numerous excerpts of Skype conversations, photos, and emails among others. Blogs and online diaries benefit from reader response, and they are already shaped by readership when taken up by publishing houses. The 2011 *Pamięć Smieny/Smena’s Memory*, started out as a blog by a Polish poet who lives on the Isle of Wight, Wioletta Grzegorzewska (her surname abbreviated to Greg for the British public). Selected poems from *Smena’s Memory* were included in her 2014 collection, *Finite Formulae and Theories of Chance*, translated by Marek Kazmierski and published by Arc Publications in the UK. The book was shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize in Canada in 2015.

Publications like *Smena’s Memory* travel full circle from creation in virtual space to publishing house to Internet for advertising and distribution. Their language is characterized by neologisms, acronyms, abbreviations, short sentences, linguistic hybridity, creolisation, polonised English words, interjections in a variety of languages, literal translations of foreign idioms, etc.. Such publications, Joanna argues, are emblematic of a new kind of cross-cultural, cross-linguistic exchange, and there is a surge of such migrant writing. It is full of social and cultural information, but arguably of little aesthetic value. Yet low brow can only be seen as

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<sup>8</sup> <http://archiwum-emigracja.uni.lodz.pl>



such in the current context, for example *Frankenstein* was once considered low brow and is now a classic.

Mary Gallagher, University College Dublin, spoke on 'Teaching and Researching so-called "Migrant Writing"'. She is a Caribbeanist, a field that by definition arises out of displacement. Her classic teaching would be about, for example, migrants from Haïti, writing in French in Quebec – quadruply displaced writers, migrant but not necessarily immigrant, because there is "too much settlement implied in the latter term." To interrogate the notion of settlement, Mary suggests the works of a mainstream writer such as Marguerite Duras' *L'Amant*, who is more embedded than Samuel Beckett and writes about Vietnam and Cambodia, or Nobel Prize winner Jean-Marie Le Clézio from Mauritius who wrote about Mauritian migrant experience in France.

Robert Crawshaw, from the University of Lancaster, in a talk entitled 'Text, Inter-semiosis, Affect and Impact', noted the problem for theory posed by Ariane Mnouchkine's *Le dernier caravanserail* which was very definitely an artefact, yet with its six hours of virtual/real time, was a case of so-called reality being replicated. The opening scene was a reenactment of migrant travel across the ocean, and the movement of sheets rendered it very life-like. The play, which was turned into a film that was screened at La Cartoucherie in Paris in 2006, consisted of little episodes in which the artificiality and amateur performances were patently clear, but it nevertheless evoked a Brechtian identification while maintaining a distance from the audience. How to approach such forms of representation is a very significant issue for higher education: "what is," he asks, "its impact, is it greater than a news broadcast?" The question arises as to how such virtual texts are to be read, where materiality and fictionality are confounded, neither literature not metaphorical, yet symbolic. This is very unlike, Robert remarked, *Five Minutes for America*, where a mysterious horse rider is glimpsed through billowing smoke, meandering back and forth between the viewer and Quechua musicians through a scene of carnage: he could be a conquistador, a crusader, or an American football player.

Dorota Jarecka, researcher at IBL, cooperates with different art institutions (she is curator of the Galeria Studio in Warsaw), teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts and writes about art. Dorota gave a talk on 'Representing Migration in Contemporary Art: the Artist's Dilemma'. The question Dorota proposed to explore was: "how do artists deal with representation when meeting 'the other', which is a form of power, [when] not representing is turning one's back?" Postulating that it is primarily a question of distance and perspective, she compared modes of representation adopted by two very different contemporary artists: the Chinese dissident Ai Weiwei and the British artist and filmmaker Isaac Julien.

Weiwei is an ardent supporter of refugees. He has travelled to Lesbos, volunteered, taken photos there, placing himself among them, that he shared on Instagram. Dorota sees this as a gesture of inclusion, a sort of selfie, at once in the picture and outside of it while this is of course also a condition for the image. This raises the question as to how representation can be

accurate. In January 2016, Weiwei crafted a photo of himself in the position of the drowned Syrian child Aylan Kurdi, found on a beach in Turkey after the boat his family took capsized on their journey to Kos. The family had been turned down for asylum in Canada. In Rabat, dozens of people laid down in the sand to pay tribute. But Weiwei's image spread throughout the world. Paradoxically, such an image is representation because it is not direct – "[it] identifies with the other because Weiwei is someone else, yet he is also the other, also a refugee."

Dorota contrasted Weiwei's work with Isaac Julien's representation of Lampedusa in his multi-screen 2007 installation *Small Boats, Slave Ships* showing images symbolizing clandestine migration in the Mediterranean. Viewing such a lot of montage, transfers to other screens, black and white bodies appearing, some helped, some not, produces a feeling of detachment. On first impression it is embarrassing in aesthetic terms, appears devoid of any critical aspect. One could read this installation as a message, bombastic allegory, and worse. Yet, asks Dorota, what if Isaac Julien is aware of the political entanglement, what if he is, as second generation Caribbean, black and gay, playing out the difference? In another film called *True North*<sup>9</sup> (2004), looking out on an ice-white setting reminiscent of a Caspar David Friedrich landscape, Julien claimed the medium as his tool to master the view. Thus, concludes Dorota, while Weiwei tries to make distance shorter, Julien tries to make it his, "as if postcolonial perspective was giving new life to the perspective as such."

The final presentation was given by Paweł Mościcki (IBL) on the 'Fleeing Visibility of the Refugees'. Paweł, who has a background in philosophy/visual arts/cinema/theatre says he is "not keen to specialize." He is currently working on two projects relevant to the theme of migration: visual representations of refugees and a book on images of migration. He focused here on the 2004 film *Border* by Laura Waddington about illegal immigrants from Calais trying to get to UK,<sup>10</sup> noting the paradoxical truth of their situation where invisibility equates to an ability to move. Waddington's technique was to film under the same conditions as the refugees, so she needed a handy camera that wouldn't influence or challenge or expose their situation. The camera was therefore not very sensitive, and the very situation of recording was thereby also recorded, reflecting the paradoxical existence where being in the world is constantly reduced and even the image doesn't come from this place. Waddington's film, Paweł suggests, is a poetic montage which shows not so much the direct reality as the relation between the filmer and 'them', with a voice-over in which she poses questions about the status of the film image in this situation.

Representation in *Border*, Paweł argues, is a chance to travel, the opposite of illegal immigrant status: how can this be useful to migrants? Paweł raises the issue that, in order to represent someone "we have to make him still, in a fixed frame, or even in film, it is immobilization — isn't this exactly the same as mainstream media, transporting their presences in all sorts of spaces, an act of closing their existence? Ready-made, disposable." Yet Waddington's

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.isaacjulien.com/installations/truenorth>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X42CxOomqQ>



contribution avoids clarification, which would expose the migrants to the police taking action, instead Waddington is trying to share, shift from representation to sharing, an ethical decision to stay with the refugees, not enclosing them in a suffocating identity. In the film there is also e-motion, movement of the affect, Paweł concluded, and as such these emotions can be shared.<sup>11</sup>

## DISCUSSIONS

There were four panel discussion and a plenary, and these are reported below under several thematically organized sections. 'Implications of the Workshop for Cultural Literacy', regardless of the order in which comments were made, are grouped under the first section, including a sub-section on the topic of aesthetic representation. Further 'Panel Discussions and Emerging Themes' over the two days are grouped under the broad categories of 'Discourse of Migration, Nationhood and Guilt', 'The Migrant's Voice' and 'Language', while 'Specific Readings of Artefacts' such as the Amnesty International Film, Ai Weiwei's and Isaac Julien's work, are separated out in the final section. Naturally there is some overlap between each of these and the first section, 'Implications of the Workshop for Cultural Literacy'.

### Implications of the Workshop for Cultural Literacy

In the context of Naomi's introduction to the aims of CLEf and its mission to further the development of cultural literacy in Europe, Maciej asked for input from all whether the topic of migration has potential to expand for the 2017 Conference: should it address similar themes or broader ones, or are 'migration' conferences too numerous already, and also what is the outcome of this workshop? Have we reached any conclusions? Is the concept of cultural literacy relevant as defined?

The CLEf's London Statement defined cultural literacy as "an ability to view the social and cultural phenomena that shape our lives—bodies of knowledge, fields of social action, individuals or groups, and of course cultural artefacts — as being essentially readable. Cultural literacy engages with interdisciplinarity, multilingualism and collaboration." This readability, Naomi explained, can be elaborated through the lens of four distinct but related perspectives: *textuality*, which involves describing, explaining, contextualizing the shape of an artefact; *fictionality*, the way truth effects are achieved as opposed to referentiality; *rhetoricity*, or how artefacts are employed for purpose and effect and *historicity*, the quality of narrative told and heard in contextual time.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> And if the image is superb, at times pushing Border towards the boundaries of video dance and thus annoying certain guards of the temple of ethics, this is primarily due to a technical necessity, the DV camera's shutter wide open to compensate for the lack of light, resulting in a large trembling grain, an impression of slow motion, movements like so many imprints. "

Bertrand Loutte, LES INROCKUPTIBLES, Paris

<http://www.laurawaddington.com/film.php?film=1>

<sup>12</sup> More information on these elements and a working definition of cultural literacy can be found in ESF-COST Science Policy Briefing 48, *Cultural Literacy in Europe Today*

A common question arising from most of the papers presented over the two days relates to how representation mediates the way we look at things. Another theme that emerged was the potential significance in understanding culture today of the more fluid phenomenon of movement, mobility, process (of beings, concepts, borders), which was contrasted with a narrower definition of migration, encumbered as it is with mediatized, socio-politically charged narratives: we live in a culture characterized by mobility, and in terms of cultural literacy this means that different acts of text are put in different contexts we don't understand. Thus although the theme envisaged for the 2017 conference was initially migration, the proposed outcome was to shift this theme out of its essentializing connotations to encompass broader notions of movement, motion and emotion on multiple intersecting planes: affect, the body and disability, the physical and digital movement of languages, concepts and images across social, geographical or national borders, and the defining elements of distance and perspective in reading or understanding the mobility of cultural acts and artefacts.

Robert Crawshaw reflected the general perception of participants when he said that the mix of the political, the historical and the present in the opening discussions, the current policy issues in Poland and the EU, gave real teeth to the workshop, encompassing both the interdisciplinary dimension and an international relations component. Picking up on John's focus on process, mobility and change, Robert reiterated the question of the death of theory, the new era of 'after-theory', an acknowledgment that post-modernism has to go somewhere: "everything leads to a focus on process and raises questions about how you understand, and whether that is even the right approach."

This notion of theory, this 'after-theory', asks Maciej does it make us obsolete? The pressure is on to theorize, and yet the fragmentation and plethora of specific interests that take as point of departure the interests of minority groups...

Mary voiced reservation about the moniker 'cultural literacy' if it bypasses the multi-language question, asking how cultural literacy fits into the struggle for languages to be respected and taken seriously and for literacy in languages to be fostered. It is a question of making economies: language is considered a big waste. Citing the war on languages in Ireland, on schools of language, on teaching, learning languages, but not only in Ireland. A patent example of what is under threat is when ERASMUS students in France are taught in English. The knowledge economy is the enemy. How can cultural literacy help resist the knowledge economy? Whereas, Mary continued, if we look at Naomi's four dimensions, then cultural literacy in contrast values thickness, depth of field, context. Cultural literacy leaves space for diversity, plurality.

The moderator of the final panel, Anna Barcz, remarked that very important metaphors, both inside and outside, could be seen in the films and images discussed at the workshop, and

posed the question "how [can we] define distance and closeness of texts, of culture, and when do they disappear?"

Paweł noted that he tried to avoid the binary terms visibility and invisibility, because they are representative of the process of making images obvious and transport from one extreme to the other, as if the very process of making images was transparent. Asking "how can aesthetic representation be useful," he proposed that "it is better to talk about *kinds* of visual, sound, literary *experiences* that can cope with specificity rather than fixed places of visibility."

John reminded us that you can't study culture without realizing that you are studying processes and changes, therefore cannot study representation: "One must talk about impact, effects in context."

Just as the Waddington film was "not so much representation of reality as representation of relation," this 'representation of relation' may also be relevant to cultural literacy.

Joanna suggested cultural literacy should look at multilingualism in narrative, for example the play *Bloody East Europeans*, by Uilleam Blacker and the Molodyi Teatr, English is intertwined with Ukrainian, Polish, Russian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Belarusian, Serbian, Hungarian and Georgian. E-books are also new means of expression: how does this change how we read these, how can a multilingual text be received in the EU? Also a multiplicity of means of expression, many forms merged into one, for example art, music and poetry combined, this is more appealing to society. When discussing attitude to migrants in Poland, someone remarked that the strongest prejudice is among young people: a related question may be what is the identity of young people who live in multicultural societies, what do they identify with? Do they still feel some national attachment? What is the influence of electronic media and social networks on fragmentation of identity, when many spend four to five hours a day in social networks? What are they reading, listening to?

Teodor suggested, in terms of conference planning, that we should recognize that decision-making by academic environments, such as universities, can be exploited by the institutions. One could actually invite other kinds of players in public discourse, incorporate various spheres for example migrants, ghettoized at the moment, e.g. collaborators of the Multicultural Center in Warsaw (Centrum Wielokulturowe),<sup>13</sup> or also those who are active at ethnic restaurants-cultural centres located on Francuska Street in Warsaw<sup>14</sup>, bringing them into this context, giving them a place of expression, Amnesty International too, and involve artists as well, giving them a voice; also local activists, both right and left wing, and politicians, mass media, journalists; those who take innovative approaches to methodology and art, publishing houses in Poland that publish journalistic work much of it by non-Poles — for example the book *Crossing the Sea: With Syrians on the Exodus to Europe* by Wolfgang Bauer, there is an interesting question here as to why they consider it literature. There are Polish-based

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<sup>13</sup> <http://cw.org.pl/en/>

<sup>14</sup> For example a centre for African culture at Café Baobab <http://baobab-spotkania.pl/>

magazines published in all sorts of non-Polish languages, the conference could have a panel where only these languages are used.

Robert: the extent to which we are culturally literate implies not just a multi- or interlingual approach but also one that takes account of much wider geopolitical zones than the nation state. A participant from IBL replied: "we would like to live in a post-national world, but basic words like 'we', 'our' in the media reinforce this problem. And non-Polish writers are not present in the discussion. In collaboration with Germans, in Poland we have difficulty avoiding nationalizing the research – we are trying to work with regions instead."

Mary flagged that it was not in her interest as a researcher to separate off research from teaching: "[You] can't separate what's happening to our institutions at home, the restriction of academic freedom." Mary also remarked on the resonances of the discourse, both employed by and commented on at the workshop: an important element is "where do we speak from, where do we read from?" The selfie by Weiwei, for example raises so many resonances, by putting the maker in the frame. It brings two very different perspectives to mind: China has a huge problem with migrant workers. And this resonates, depending on where you read the picture from. Secondly, Africa is overrun by Chinese investment and this has ethical and political resonances. Citing another Ariane Mnouchkine play about the blood contamination scandal, Mary recounted how the audience had to walk through lots of puddles to reach the theatre: "*on a du se mouiller avant d'entrer*" (*se mouiller* has the dual meaning of getting wet and to become complicit, share guilt, be implicated): in terms of cultural literacy, there is a very pertinent question as to "How do you teach/read something in which you partake?"

### **How can aesthetic representation be useful?**

Dorota stressed the need not to confuse aesthetics, and aesthetization, conceding that there is of course also an element of propaganda, but perhaps we need some.

Robert completely agreed on the distinction between aesthetics and aesthetization: all artistic production is situated, ideologically, historically. We as 'culturally literate' have a challenge in going under the skin of the works of art, where the high brow and low brow distinction no longer applies, and perhaps the aesthetic question is not relevant to cultural literacy. Paweł added that there is no such thing as an unaesthetic film, even TV reportage, but responsibility lies with the makers, exactly because all of it is aesthetic. Theirs, and our decisions are of an ethical, historical, political nature.

Dorota asked who needs monuments? A very simple example, Roma people in Berlin were fighting for monuments to the Roma genocide. Who is speaking, from what position.

Robert underlined the important element of affect, perhaps understated in the presentations and discussion, that played a part in setting up this workshop. The idea of identifying with suffering is one of the underlying themes of most of the artefacts shown. This question of affect, identification and understanding should be addressed in cultural literacy. Weiwei's still

photograph travels the world not just for its iconic status, but it's also a symbol that requires deciphering. Its stillness makes it such. Each genre demands its own form of interpretation before it can have the sort of visibility and understanding we are looking for.

Naomi aptly concluded that this workshop had "covered the penumbra of migration," that is, all the areas that cover, surround, or obscure this complex theme, or perhaps the workshop offered a space of partial illumination between the perfect shadow on all sides and the full light.<sup>15</sup>

## Panel Discussions and Other Emerging Themes

### Discourse of Migration, Nationhood and Guilt

Patrycja argued that "There are Arabs and there are 'others'. Attitudes to the latter are improving, but not the former."

A participant from Poland stressed that Strangeness and Otherness are not the same thing. The '*homo sovieticus*' mentality is a throwback from authoritarian regimes and applies in other regions: for example *L'Étranger* by Albert Camus, how it took fifty years for Kamel Daoud to write a counter-narrative. But the *homo sovieticus* argument is perhaps a convenient scapegoat, and a myth – the real problem comes from the Centre, the official government.

Another participant concurred that facts and presences are not the deciding factor, in Poland it is more a matter of a set of fantasies about the 'other', Jews, Germans, Russians, and these attitudes are connected with hegemonic narratives of politicians. For example the term 'savages' used against an ethnic group can easily have an effect, in stark contrast to the reality and empirical evidence.

It was suggested that, in the discourse of migration, the problem is to escape from economic language. Patrycja had used the word 'management': alternative narratives in politics need to be found to replace this economic discourse, for example in terms of fiction... In answer to this, Andrzej felt the Polish word 'cope with' is better than 'manage'. In fact this is an ongoing process of colonialism, and worse, it is touching on the very centre of colonialism: a very strong concentration on past guilt shields from the present. This kind of self-accusatory narrative is not to be confused with factual admissions. John remarked that in this kind of guilt discourse, we treat the nation as a subject and victim. "At some point we have to stop being teenage nations." Teodor also noted that this is what happens now in Europe, for example, not calling racially motivated crime [an actual] crime.

### The Migrant's Voice

Only white people can speak for themselves, migrants speak for the whole community.

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<sup>15</sup> Borrowing this definition from the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

Refugees are treated as children, we only want to hear them when they say thank you, or tell their story of woe.

John Sundholm is creating an archive of films by migrants. The Quechua film he showed was made by someone with no education, etc. Why are these films not being shown?

## Language

Øyvind Eide, who lectures at the University of Cologne, remarked that “where you stand depends on where you sit, we cannot ever be monolingual.” Responding to Mary’s statement on the war on languages, he said it is true that French and German are losing dominance, whereas Spanish scholars can be academic entirely in their native language. In the case of Norwegian and other local languages, these don’t allow international work. It is a question of world dominance (English) versus regional dominance in Arabic, Spanish or Chinese. When discussing language, it is not just a refugee or migrant issue but also a more general issue for everyone, and scholars are a case in point.

In the nineteenth century, there was a gathering up of national cultures. Now there is a lot more interest in the migration of languages.

Nina Hoffman, who was the European Science Foundation (ESF) Officer for the Humanities and has been working on the CLEf project since 2009, noted that the question of use of several languages at once shows a move away from the notion of keeping purity of language. Is this a theme to consider? Øyvind remarked that the purity of Norwegian, for example, is still a pertinent issue in Norway.

Heather Bradshaw, who has a PhD in bioethics and is now working for Jaguar Land Rover as a software engineer, was born in Iran and has lived in Pakistan and many other cultures. She took three perspectives in her PhD: human enhancement, disability literature and continental philosophy. Her chapter in [From Literature to Cultural Literacy](#), (2014, coedited by Naomi Segal and Daniela Koleva), looks at fictionality and how this can be turned into a technology product. The culture at Jaguar Land Rover now comprises many excellent engineers from all over the world — there is no shared literary/cultural background. Some are able to adapt and others cannot understand how to be effective in their work environment. Those who adapt best have wider cultural interests.

Heather commented on what Mary was saying, that languages are not respected, and asked what happens to culture if you don’t have this focus on language. In the UK there is Welsh, Scottish, Irish culture. But, she said, we don’t necessarily need to communicate in different languages. Also there are different cultures in different parts of society: academia, engineering, the language of mathematics, and graphical languages, and within these, there are also lots of national languages. There is scope for looking at what other sorts of languages define culture.



Øyvind noted that in the Humanities there are new methods and tools for simple cheap conference translations, for example whispering, online whispering, on-the-fly amateur translations, but this competes with commercial translation settings. There are ways of making multi-lingual conferences less ghettoized.

## SPECIFIC READINGS OF ARTEFACTS PRESENTED AT THE WORKSHOP

### Amnesty International Film

Of several short films screened at the workshop, perhaps the most controversial was the Amnesty International film *Look beyond Borders—4 mns Experiment*<sup>16</sup>, presented by Draginja. Based on a technique developed by American Psychologist Arthur Aron's research on intimacy, the filmmakers invited refugees and non-refugees to spend 4 mns looking into each other's eyes. Draginja made the telling observation that in Poland they couldn't find new migrants to participate: most prefer to go to other countries and this film was made in Berlin, Germany. The refugees in the film mostly came from Syria and had not been living in Europe for longer than a year.

In response to the film, some argued that estrangement isn't about empathy, it's more about an intellectual element, accepting that we are all different, and in this respect more of an intellectual development. Teodor voiced reservations with the methodology followed, stressing that the people featured in the video constituted a self-selecting sample and expressed scepticism about the artificially positive image it projected.

In defence of the concept, Draginja felt that this was an authentic film, and the real questions is how to avoid oversimplification that people 'just need help': "We are in the trap of discussing whether to open the border or not, when the reality is people will come in regardless; all these fears and badmouthing from the Polish people, after an initial honeymoon period, were also used toward Serbian refugees." Small differences were used to emphasize differences between Serbs in Serbia and Serbs outside Serbia.

For Mary the Amnesty International film recalled the French Jewish philosopher of Lithuanian origin Emmanuel Levinas: "in the face to face there's no knowledge, no labelling, no taking of the other, no meaning to be extracted, a moment of utter respect, responsibility for the other."

The film also prompted discussion about the current situation in Poland and the UK: "Many immigrants in Poland, here for over 10-20 years, are starting to fear more and more that they are 'other', in the last year. Opportunities for integration and contact are changing," said one of the participants. Naomi flagged that the same is happening in the UK, for example Jews who have been there for a long time are starting to feel on edge.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7XhrXUoD6U>

## Other artefacts discussed

Heather felt that the Weiwei picture is powerful because it shows a well fed adult with a voice but it also says we are all vulnerable.

Robert felt that the choice of the Waddington movie showed where art wins over literal representation, that is, in what it chooses not to say, relating the viewer's experience to Fredric Jameson's political consciousness: "it is left to viewer to reconstruct, an active hermeneutic act of interpretation."

Waddington's images were literally literal, too much there in contrast, denial of the very act of reflexivity it was trying to represent. Paweł observed that the material is highly edited, the sound cuts, the breaks — this creating this effect of excess without appeal to directness.

Dorota commented that she had proposed these two artists, not as representation, but as matter to reflect on because they are very popular, to ask: "What is the use of these images? What is the visibility? Who is responsible for immigrants to be visible?" These two artists used very traditional, almost conservative, yet powerful and convincing means. Paweł's film is much better, it uses the language of art, avant-garde, but we don't see the migrants, we are in there, maybe it's more powerful.

It also depends, Dorota continued, on the place the artist speaks from. For example Isaac Julien's work, and art created by black people, he is part of them, not representing them, but himself – we cannot question his right to represent himself. Weiwei, he is them and us, he is abolishing this difference while creating these images.

## CALL FOR PAPERS FOR THE 2017 CONFERENCE

As a result of the Workshop and further discussion within the 2017 Conference Program Committee, the following Call for Papers was prepared and released.

### **(e)motion**

#### **Cultural Literacy in Europe: Second Biennial Conference**

**Warsaw 10-12 May 2017**

#### CALL FOR PAPERS

This international conference aims to bring together new and innovative work in the field of literary and cultural studies. After the success of the 2015 conference, organised at Birkbeck College London, Cultural Literacy in Europe has developed into a thriving international organisation, with active membership and Special Interest Groups. For more information on the CLE initiative, visit <http://cleurope.eu/>

Cultural literacy is an ability to view the social and cultural phenomena that shape our lives – bodies of knowledge, fields of social action, individuals or groups, and of course cultural artefacts – as being essentially *readable*. Cultural literacy engages with interdisciplinarity, multilingualism and collaboration. It is a way of looking at social and cultural issues through the lens of literary thinking, employing communication, comparison and critique on a scale beyond that of one language or one nation-state, and avoiding abstraction. Furthermore, it is as much about innovation and creative practice – whether scholarly, artistic or social – as it is about analysis, and it very often brings these two methods together.

CLE 2017 is dedicated to the issue of motion, which is crucial for the contemporary human condition. The concept of motion captures the state of affairs in Europe today, where seemingly rock-solid arrangements, like the shapes of borders, are being nullified and apparently irreversible processes, like European integration, are turned around and dismantled. It marks our spatial relations, as is clearly visible in the challenges of migration, experiences of social and professional mobility, social movements or tourism. Mobility also has a temporal aspect, which is visible in the processual and performative character of identity, memory or history. The other key term we would like to address is emotion, which aims to contextualize this movement and localize it in human affectivity – feelings, motives and perceptions. Texts and other kinds of representations, the body in movement, forging personal links, living with memories – all these bring motion and emotion together. We believe that the notion of cultural literacy will help us read and comprehend these diverse, changeable phenomena.

In your proposal, you may wish refer to one or more of the following areas:

- How are ways of remembering and forgetting linked to mobility? Is cultural memory changing in the light of new forms of mobility?
- How does affect theory help us understand contemporary migration and its cultural representations?
- Migration and translation – how do either or both of these activities divide or unite national and linguistic groups?
- How are creative representations refreshed in a newly mobile world? What limits or empowers the representation of mobile lives?
- Is the contemporary body changing beyond recognition, into new forms of enhanced mobility – or depleted reality?
- How do mobile, ever-changing and fluid digital texts of news feeds, blogs, social media sites or artistic creations reshape our engagement with culture and identity-building processes?
- Do theoretical notions rooted in the experience of movement (e.g. travelling concepts, hospitality, centre and periphery) help us understand non-theoretical issues?

### **Submission Types**

1. Individual academic papers. These must be 20 minutes long and will be grouped into parallel sessions: 3 papers followed by questions.
2. Poster presentations. These are presentations of projects which are successful examples of Literary-and-Cultural Studies research, relevant to the conference topic. They will be presented in a plenary panel as lightning talks (3 minutes per project), followed by a poster session.

### **Submission Procedure**

Proposals must be submitted by **15 October** on-line (check: <http://cleurope.eu/CLE2017> for details). Your abstract must include a title & must not exceed 500 words (including bibliography if relevant). Please also supply a short bio (100 words).

### **Fees and bursaries**

Detailed information about fees will be available at a later date on the conference website. A number of Early-Career Bursaries will be available for participants presenting a paper or a poster. Applicants will have to provide a statement of up to 500 words, explaining their interest in the Cultural Literacy in Europe project and their particular need for the bursary.

### **Organizers**

[Cultural Literacy in Europe Forum](#). [Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences](#). [Committee on Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences](#)

**Program Committee:** Madeleine Campbell, Robert Crawshaw, Mary Gallagher, Daniela Koleva, Maciej Maryl, Naomi Segal

**Local Organizers:** Anna Barcz, Łukasz Bukowiecki, Dorota Jarecka, Nina Kancewicz-Hoffman, Krzysztof Kłosiński, Paweł Mościcki, Justyna Tabaszewska, Marek Zaleski

**Venue:** [Staszic Palace, Nowy Swiat 70, Warsaw](#)

Full information is available on the conference website: <http://cleurope.eu/CLE2017>

All queries should be addressed to: [CLE2017@ibl.waw.pl](mailto:CLE2017@ibl.waw.pl)