

Summer School Report

I will begin this report hypothetically by imagining if I were asked (let's say in 20 years) what I remember as a defining moment during my time in the university: I will without a doubt mention the summer school for reasons that I shall try to explain in what follows.

- Recruitment of *participants* was successful. That is, the international mixture of students from diverse disciplines added a crucial and vital ingredient to our many fruitful discussions in classrooms as well as 'after hours', in which local and national aspects were incorporated into many lively debates. I was truly impressed by how many strenuous hours of traveling people have endured just to attend the summer school. There were people, for instance, from Canada, India, South Africa, Europe, Mexico, to name but a few countries.
- With regard to *practicalities*, I will emphasize how much work and effort the team of students have put into creating a brilliant week. They really did everything possible to make us feel welcomed and arranged everything, which cannot be stressed enough. However, there was a minor flaw in terms of the reading material, which has nothing to do with the team's abilities. Unfortunately, some of us could not access the literature on the otherwise excellent digital platform iversity.com. In addition, it would have been less stressful to have had the reading material at least a month before, so that all of us could have been more prepared for the seminars and workshops. This is something you can take into account for next time: the technical problems that may occur and asking the teachers to announce their chosen literature in at least a month advance. I will use the adjective beautiful to describe the place where we were housed, and it was a good idea to have everyone make breakfast together.
- Most of the morning *lectures* were eye opening. The lecturers were competent and eloquently presented their arguments to the audience. Although some of them very broad in perspectives, it really tied nicely in with the rest of the program that was to come afterwards. If I were to highlight something that could have been made differently, it will be the duration of the lectures, which was 1 hour and 30 min. including time for questions. I will either suggest 1 hour for lecture and time for questions or place a 5-minute break after the first 45 minutes and keep the current format. It simply becomes hard to focus for such a long time, and it is a shame that the inspirational ideas and perspectives should go lost.
- There were many interesting *seminars* from which we could choose. I attended the seminar entitled "The Animal in World-literary Encounters", and I must admit that being from a literature department I have never really specialized or paid much attention to what is called Animal Studies, so I thought that it was time to challenge myself and experience a different field of studies. First of all, our instructor was extremely good at communicating some of the complex ideas and made space for all to share ideas and thoughts on animals but also the role of literature. We were asked to read two very different yet powerful novels, one by J.M. Coetzee and one by Julia Leigh, that

were used to open up a discussion on how the animal is represented and what function it plays in literature; that is, if animals can at all be represented. Furthermore, we spent some time on generating ideas on what literature is and how it works in order to shed light on our problems in incorporating the animal into the literary framework of thoughts. All in all, what I learned during the seminar I will definitely use in my future work at my home university.

- As a supplement to the lectures and seminars there were several **workshops** we could choose from, where students were mixed. These workshops, from my understanding, used specific cases or examples to explicate some of the theoretical perspectives such as the postcolonial museum, science fiction as a genre, and didactics. However, once again I will mention that in some cases we were given the reading material in class, which was unfortunate seeing as that time could have been used to discuss and work more 'hands-on'. The workshops helped make some of the abstract ideas more concrete, and introduced us to other relevant areas.
- Similarly, there was an **excursion to Berlin** whose aim was to juxtapose some of the theory with NGO work and debates with key figures who have implemented these ecocritical ideas into their daily lives. For example, at the debate panel there was an entrepreneur and a politician who debated de-growth among many other pivotal things. This day was stimulating seeing as we could get closer to the 'real world' and speak to these figures who are working in the interest of a better and just society.
- The **closing session** connected everything together. That the students from each seminar presented some of the key topics was perfect. However, the setting was not right for closing remarks since we were seated in an auditorium, so maybe in the future, if possible, it will be more effective to gather all of the participants in one large room that is not used for lectures where there could have been an opportunity to bring the entire week's ideas into play in less informal surroundings.
- **The 'social' events** such as film screenings, readings with authors, and the farewell party were all examples of how impressively planned the week was; these events helped all of us to get to know each other better and inspired one-on-one discussions and exchange of ideas and, most importantly, e-mails for keeping in touch.

I will end by saying nothing but **thank you for an extraordinary summer school** to the team who have worked hard to make the week possible, to the participants and teachers who have inspired me and the others to investigate further, and to the University of Potsdam for giving us majestic surroundings where only creative ideas can flourish. As a personal footnote to this report, I must add how enlightening it was to see so many humanities students and teachers in one place who all worked hard in a time that has been called both by pundits and media as the 'crisis in the humanities'; a hyperbole, clearly.

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