



119: *KURZSTRECKE*  
SARA DANIUS

Sara Danius is Assistant Professor in the Literature Department at Uppsala University, Sweden. She received her B.A. in the Humanities from Stockholm University in 1986, her M.A. in Critical Theory from the University of Nottingham in 1989, her first Ph.D. from the Literature Program at Duke University in 1997, and her second Ph.D. from Uppsala University in 1998. In 1999–2000 she was a research scholar in the Department of Comparative Literature at UCLA and carried out archival research at the Getty Center. Professor Danius is the author of *Proust's Motor* (Stockholm, 2000) and *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY, 2002). She contributes literary criticism to *Dagens Nyheter*, the major morning paper in Sweden, and has published essays on a variety of topics, from fashion to Marcel Proust. She currently lives in Stockholm with her husband, Stefan Jonsson, a literary scholar and writer, and a son. – Address: Department of Literature, Uppsala University, ingång AO, 75237 Uppsala, Sweden.

I was an ideal Fellow. At least if you follow Wolf Lepenies' definition: an ideal Fellow is someone who fails to do what he or she set out to do. After a few months at the Wissenschaftskolleg, I thus decided to put aside my original research plans and to start a completely new project – on the nineteenth-century novel and the advent of visibility. And because I conceived this project at the Wissenschaftskolleg, the bibliography stretches over many more fields than it otherwise would have done, from the role of photography in the history of visual anthropology to the advent of democracy in the West. At the end of the year, I presented my new project to an audience ranging from neurologists and legal scholars to composers. After my colloquium, Ansgar Büschges, a neurobiologist who studies

locomotion in animals such as sticky insects, told me that not only had he understood my talk, but he also found the project positively interesting. This was one of the high points of my year at the Wissenschaftskolleg.

My family and I arrived in Berlin in early September in order to attend the intensive German course. We had great plans for our year in Germany. I was going to make headway with my projects, brush up on my German, and get to know Berlin. My husband Stefan had taken the year off to look after our twelve-month-old son. His plan was to explore the city and its history together with our little one. Leo, for his part, had decided to learn how to walk. At the colloquia and various lunch tables, the locomotion group made me understand that this is one of the most complicated tasks a human being can undertake. Five months into our stay in Berlin, and having practiced at numerous splendid art museums, Leo finally mastered the art of walking. He had been cheered on by forty keen-eyed Fellows who, especially on Thursday evenings, had noted his gradual progress. I think it is safe to say that Leo was by far the most successful of the three of us. Seriously, how many of the Fellows managed to achieve as much as our children did?

Six days after our arrival, a friend of ours called me from Alexanderplatz. Before a word had been spoken, I could tell he had bad news. The World Trade Center had been exploded, he said, and the Pentagon was on fire. I realized he was not joking and turned on the radio. The curious mix of excitement, disbelief, and fear that marked the reports during those confused hours immediately after the terrorist attacks would mark our stay in Berlin for months. For some Fellows, most of the year was lost, at least in terms of work.

The research project I brought to Berlin was an inquiry into modern theories of photography, in particular as articulated in the early part of the twentieth century. It is an intervention in current debates on visual culture, with an emphasis on their historicity. In Berlin I explored important German sources, especially works by Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. I spent a lot of time reading closely their texts, penetrating the architecture of their arguments. In December I gave a lecture in Copenhagen on Kracauer's notion of the unique "affinity" between the photographic image and the real.

In the spring I decided to do what I had longed to do for years: to read literary works without any particular intellectual goal in mind. I wanted to approach a series of classical nineteenth-century texts with "evenly suspended attention", to borrow a phrase from Freud. Such unstructured reading is a luxury that few literary scholars can afford, but thanks to the extraordinary working conditions at the Wissenschaftskolleg, I was able to do exactly that. I began with Goethe and Kleist, and then turned to the French nineteenth-

century novel. The extraordinary librarian Gesine Bottomley and her brilliant staff saw to it that my bookcases in my office in the Neubau never collected dust; soon books, journals, and notes started spilling over into my Japanese futon sofa. One day, I discovered that yet another research project was about to take shape.

I had spent years working on the modernist period in European culture stretching from, say, 1880 through 1930, and I now decided to venture into a new field: the realist novel. I wanted to explore a little-understood aspect of the realist period: the intense interest in the visual appearance of the phenomenal world that makes itself felt in the early part of the nineteenth century, beginning with Stendhal and culminating with Flaubert. How can it be, I asked myself, that so many writers at this time suddenly exhibit such a passionate interest in representing how persons and things look? Conversely, why did writers before the nineteenth century consider visual description less important, to the extent that they even thought about the alternatives? The German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno once suggested apropos of Balzac's obsession with precise details and specialized lingo that the realist pursuit of concreteness and exactness has nothing to do with a familiarity with the real world; on the contrary, what enables the realist project is a generalized loss of reality, a *Wirklichkeitsverlust*. If Adorno was right, then what did that lost reality consist in? And what modes of representation did it encourage, and why?

I found a brilliant article by Italo Calvino on the visual nature of Flaubert's style; it confirmed my hypothesis that the early nineteenth century sees something like a paradigmatic shift in the history of literary visibility. I then decided to explore my initial hunch that the rise of the realist novel coincides with the advent of literary visibility proper. I also decided that such a project could usefully be seen as a prehistory of modernism. In the process, I gained tremendously from exchanges with Heinrich Detering, Sheila Jasanoff, David MacDougall, Allan Young, Gottfried Boehm, Caroline Jones, Ioana Pârvulescu, Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, Ann Kaplan, Fritz Ringer, Tom Levine, Jakob Tanner, and many others. And when I say that I gained from these conversations, I have more in mind than my research bibliography; I can already see that the very framework of my project has been influenced by our exchanges.

In June, I was able to test the waters with my new project before a distinguished audience at New Europe College in Bucharest, Romania. We were three literary scholars – Heinrich Detering, my husband Stefan, and I – and we had been invited to lecture on Literature and Modernity. The event was organized by Ioana Pârvulescu, a literary scholar and writer who had spent the fall at the Wissenschaftskolleg, and the Director of the New

Europe College, Andrei Pleșu. Thanks to them, our professional network now extends to Romania, and I can picture conferences and workshops emerging out of our interactions.

The Tuesday colloquia proved to be a great learning experience, from both an intellectual and a sociological point of view. As one might expect of any multidisciplinary setting, different epistemological cultures do not coexist easily. In addition, the colloquium format never really worked as a forum for discussion. After a few months, I detected a growing sense of frustration among many of the Fellows. John Breuilly and I thought we had better address the situation. In our capacities as *Sprecher*, we decided to organize an informal meeting called “Ways of Knowing”. Wolf Lepenies told us that a similar attempt had been made the previous year. It had ended in disaster, he added with a grin. John and I settled for a minimalist approach. We decided that if our meeting did not end in disaster, it would have to be considered a roaring success.

We were clear about what we wanted to avoid. We did not want to “build bridges” between the “two cultures”; there were more cultures than two, and C. P. Snow’s analysis was obsolete anyhow, including the terms in which his discussion was framed. Nor did we intend to establish a shared understanding of what should count as “scientific” and what not. We also wanted to avoid discussions of “interdisciplinarity”. As I saw it, the problem was not that the Fellows had little in common theoretically and methodologically, nor that we had different notions of what counts as “evidence”, “proof”, and “truth”. The problem was rather that we had no conceptual languages in common with which these crucial differences could be brought to light and discussed. What John and I sought to do, then, was to create an informal context for discussing these differences, however tentatively. We knew we could count on support from the expertise in our own group: Sheila Jasanoff, a science and technology studies scholar, and Martin Kusch, a philosopher and sociologist of science.

It turned out to be an intense and productive Thursday afternoon, with some twenty Fellows attending. The topics ranged from Roland Barthes’ statement that the latest Citroën model is like a cathedral – a valid proposition or nonsense? – to Ludwik Fleck’s notion of thought collectives, or *Denkkollektive*. The perhaps most instructive exchange emerged out of our discussion of the epistemological and methodological status of analogy in various kinds of scientific inquiry. Afterwards, John and I agreed that our Ways of Knowing meeting would have to be considered a success. In fact, the response encouraged us to organize a second one.

There was also a life outside of the Wissenschaftskolleg: it consisted of bus 119, art museums, playgrounds, blackbirds, opera, public readings, hospital visits, outings to the Pfaueninsel and Prenzlauer Berg, trips to Weimar and northern Italy, and much more. It also consisted of new friendships. During the year I became acquainted with a series of extraordinary intellectuals in Berlin, notably Reinhard Baumgart and Hanns Zischler. For me, our conversations were an education in itself. Without the generosity of these free spirits, my year in Berlin would have been much less inspiring.

I am writing this report at the end of October, three somewhat melancholic months after our departure. Many memory images insist on being entered into the *Jahrbuch*: that late Thursday evening in December when Adonis invited a small group of Fellows, including myself, to take a look at the collages he was working on in his studio. Or Walter Levine's *Gesprächskonzert*, which restored my faith in the importance of intellectual work. Or those daily encounters with Frau Klöhn and Frau Speder, the two fairies in the *Speisesaal* who worked wonders for us all – you have to see it to believe it. Or the walk John Breuilly and I took to the café at Hagenplatz, while discussing Stendhal's humorous representation of Waterloo in *La Chartreuse de Parme*. Or that dinner on Valentine's Day when Alex Kacelnik and I, surrounded by chocolate hearts folded in red metal foil, debated the science wars and postmodern cultural theory. Or those German sessions in the basement of Villa Jaffé when the brilliant Eva von Kügelgen had Peter Galison and me analyze Max Weber's turn of phrase in *Wissenschaft als Beruf*. Or evenings at the Berlin Philharmonic in the company of Gérard Mortier and other Fellows. Or those delicious Japanese meals with our neighbors Helmut Lachenmann and Yukiko Sugawara. Or the many times when Leo assisted the ever-gracious Frau Sanders with the switchboard...

I could go on, but the long and the short of it is: it was an ideal year. I thank you.