Introduction

JENNIFER HAM, ULRICH KINZEL,
AND DAVID TSE-CHIEN PAN

Our contemporary notion of the humanities and of the very structure of the academic curriculum and the university itself have their origins in the development of the ideal of *Bildung* (education), a concept guiding academic pursuits since its origin in eighteenth and nineteenth century German culture. While recent divestitures in the humanities call the idea of *Bildung* into question, they also invite reconsiderations of this idea from a contemporary perspective. Some recent appraisals have attempted to move toward a general concept of *Bildung*, either by surveying past conceptualizations,[1] or by linking the discourse of *Bildung* to other traditions of thinking on education.[2] An alternative approach focuses on the German tradition as a specific historical development, for instance, by studying individual depictions of *Bildung* in theoretical and literary texts to illuminate the development from the lofty ideals of the early nineteenth century to the realities of late nineteenth and twentieth century German history,[3] or by analyzing the general trajectory of how the concept of *Bildung* has shaped interpretation and action in the past.[4] Orienting themselves within the context of these historical approaches, the essays in this volume interpret specific depictions of *Bildung* in the German tradition as a way of establishing their meaning for current discussions of the humanities.

These interpretations reveal an abiding contradiction between (1) the idea that *Bildung* represents a universal education grounded in a freedom of individual development, and (2) the consideration of *Bildung* as a particular form of culture that began to replace religious instruction as the mode of moral and cultural education. If the first perspective dominated the discourse in the nineteenth century, merging the march of universal humanity with both a process of secularization and the progress of European colonialist expansion, its universalist optimism began by the turn of the twentieth century to give way to doubts about the universal character of *Bildung*. The language crisis documented by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the Expressionist search for a new lan-

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guage, and the growing antisemitism highlighted by the Dreyfus Affair were all directed ultimately against the perceived intellectual hollowness of the *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated middle class) and the liberal, internationalist values that it represented. The general crisis of *Bildung*, this modern intellectual malaise, expressed itself on both sides of the contradiction of *Bildung* both as ideal practice and as particular culture. That is, the practice of the free development of the individual spirit led especially European youth not necessarily toward cosmopolitan values, but also toward a nationalist understanding of the *Bildung* tradition. So if the war fever that overcame a generation of intellectuals—including writers such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Robert Musil, Ernst Toller, and Thomas Mann—was on the one hand a rejection of a pre-war internationalist spirit of universal progress, it was on the other hand an outgrowth of the free development of the European intellectual spirit.

The continuing crisis of *Bildung* stems from this all-encompassing aspect of the idea, which includes both a general respect for knowledge and a specific secular Europeanist metaphysical-theological attitude. Both of these aspects continue to influence the organizing structure of education, even though they push in opposing directions. If respect for scientific knowledge allied itself in the nineteenth century with the culture of Schiller and Goethe, in the twentieth century this respect led to a universalization of a technological focus on utility, in which, for Ernst Jünger, "free inquiry is impossible in a situation in which its essential purpose must be understood as the preparation for war."[5] From Jünger's instrumental view of *Bildung*, the older conception of a universal culture of *Bildung* has the characteristics of a "fetish."[6]

But if Jünger's unmasking of a universal conception of *Bildung* serves for him to move it away from a liberal, individualist conception, it also opens up *Bildung* to a critique of its cultural particularity along post-colonial lines, which include liberal premises of *Bildung* as part of its European pedigree. Although the multiculturalism debates in the United States sought to open up the canon of *Bildung* to a broader cross-section of world culture, they ultimately side-stepped the question of the relationship between *Bildung* and political identity. Today, the problem of *Bildung* much more clearly coincides with the challenges to European identity as well as the tensions between globalization and nationalism. The current global relevance of these issues leads us disquietingly back to nineteenth and twentieth century intellectual debates on *Bildung* and the political implications of those debates as inextricably linked to questions of national and international identity. This volume's contributions provide us with the material for a sober look at the historical precedents for our current situation as well as cultural resources useful for contemplating the future.

Our consideration of this history begins with the idea of *Bildung* developed in Germany in the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt. As conceived in German philosophy around 1800, *Bildung* was understood to be the formation of the

self through the acquisition of knowledge across biographical time, which implies the ability "to connect our ego to the world by the most general, vivid, and free reciprocal action."[7] This definition with its emphasis on individuation as *Wechselwirkung* (a reciprocal process), one both dependent on and constitutive of understanding of the world, underscores the close affiliation of Humboldt's idea with the humanities and academic culture in general. For Hegel, for example, the emphasis of academic work lies not on a systematic representation of knowledge, but on its acquisition by a subject, and it is the process of this acquisition that Hegel defines as *Bildung*.[8] Humboldt's starting point is the individual's desire to define and enhance the value of their existence.[9] To be able to do so the self needs the outside world as its counterpart, as a material on which it can imprint the character of its spirit. All of these reflections focused on the spirituality of *Bildung* establish a close connection with an emphatic concept of culture and have inspired the long and far-reaching German tradition of *Geisteswissenschaften* (the humanities or human sciences).[10] What has attracted less attention, as Ulrich Kinzel points out in chapter 1 of this collection, is the political context from which Humboldt's idea of *Bildung* emerged. The aim of Kinzel's chapter is thus to show how Humboldt in his early, fragmentary essay *Ideen zu einem Versuch die Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen* (1792) confronts and contradicts the eighteenth century model of the welfare state as defined and outlined by contemporary *Policeywissenschaft* (political science). Moving from the Humboldtian origins to the neoliberal present, Kinzel shows how the nineteenth century ideal of *Bildung*, founded on an ethics of the self, has been absorbed by the idea of human capital.

Another key figure in the development of the German idea of *Bildung*, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, has been in turn praised and criticized for his linking of *Bildung* with a defense of German nationalism. As David Tse-chien Pan lays out in chapter 2, Fichte's project was, in the first place, an attempt to merge individual freedom of development with moral constraints on this development. He claimed to have achieved this reconciliation of opposites with the idea of reason, which would place natural constraints on the search for knowledge and would lead it inevitably toward a set of natural scientific and moral laws. At the same time, he sought to provide support for this development by linking it to the establishment of a German national identity that would be the basis for political action against Napoleon and the French occupation of the German territories. By imagining the development of *Bildung* as a progress toward a German national identity understood as the manifestation of a world-historical emergence of reason, his *Addresses to the German Nation* end up with an ambiguous linking of the affirmation of the superiority of the German nation with support for a cosmopolitan perspective. The subsequent interpretations of Fichte's work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reflect this ambiguity to the extent that different interpreters emphasize one or the other aspect

of Fichte's ideas depending on their particular interests and values. The final conclusion for the question of *Bildung* is that it remains intimately connected with the establishment and continuing relevance of nationalism as a definer of collective identity and that its meaning today depends on the importance of interpreting the past in order to inform the nation-state's understanding of its obligations and responsibilities.

Some of the ethical practices that constituted *Bildung* at the time of German classicism appear to be rather static; others, like traveling, imply movement and transgression. But, as Sean Franzel argues in chapter 3, if *Bildung* is also presumed to be the effect of traveling, this effect only materializes through media-based practices. Franzel compares Goethe's *Italienische Reise* with Moritz's *Reisen eines Deutschen in Italien* in order to examine the repository practices that these authors engage in as travelers, antiquarians, spectators, and writers. A principal process among the different processes of archivization they reveal affects the building of the subject, itself an archive of experience. Working out this connection between *Bildung* and archive at this early stage in the history of *Bildung*, and exploring the ways in which the legitimate contents of a cultural tradition are internalized and stored, introduces a new perspective and deepens our understanding of the defining consequences archivization has for the construction of the subject in late nineteenth century historicism.

If the political and repository context of *Bildung* has hitherto been undervalued, so too has the role of architecture, as evidenced in particular in Schinkel's concept of the museum as a vehicle of *Bildung*. In chapter 4 Andrea Meyertholen investigates how Berlin's Altes Museum contributed to the *Bildung* of a national German citizenry through the public display of classical aesthetics as designed by the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Such references to Greek art were intended to establish a continuity between the German present and an imagined classical past in order to teach the public how to be ideal German citizens within a unified cultural whole. The chapter's narrative tour of the Altes Museum displays how specific exhibitionary modes and explanatory frameworks structured public consumption of the ideals informing Greek art and effectively created a site where cultivating the German self facilitated the cultivation of a German nation, where visitors entered this *Bildungsmuseum* (educational museum) as individuals, but left as citizens of a greater, albeit imagined, German national community.

German nationhood became political reality in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, and this development cannot be separated from the cultural mission of *Bildung*. The philosophy and literary culture supporting *Bildung* was already divided between nationalist and universalist ambitions since Fichte's time, and by the middle of the nineteenth century this conflict had intensified. In Adalbert Stifter's work, the concept already begins to rid itself of its exclusive idealistic foundation, as his protagonists in his *Bildungsroman*

(novel of education), *Der Nachsommer* (1856), couple their antique self-restraint with a scientific and economic interest in the real world. This combination of humanism with realism shapes and reflects a debate in which the aspiring middle-class molds its vision of classicism as a unifying culture and at the same time demands new forms of public education to meet the challenges of the growing industrial and commercial sphere.[11] Alongside this development we see the rise of the natural sciences and, as an ambiguous companion, the rise of the *Geisteswissenschaften* (the human sciences) which are shaped both by the humanist tradition and by a new scientific methodology. After 1871 and the foundation of the German Reich, cultural reference to antiquity, of paramount importance for the cultural orientation of *Bildung*, begins to crumble and give way to *Bildung* as a vehicle for nationalism. The change is humorously illustrated in Theodor Fontane's *Frau Jenny Treibel* (1893), a novel in which the idealism of Schiller is represented and parodied by Jenny Treibel, the wife of a patriotic manufacturer of (Prussian) blue-colored dye, while a small group of teachers and professors hold their occasional meetings under their circle's name "Die sieben Waisen" (a pun on *Waise* [orphan] and *Weise* [sage]), commemorating the loss of traditional values like authority and discipline.[12] It is within this nineteenth century context of the middle class' superficial adoration of the classics and the rise of authoritarian nationalism that Friedrich Nietzsche gives vent to his cultural despair in his revaluation of *Bildung*.

The starting-point of the second half of the volume, focused on the internal cognitive mechanisms of *Bildung*, is Nietzsche, who in the history of *Bildung* represents a watershed. A product of the culture of *Bildung* himself, he became its disillusioned critic in order to save and reformulate it on a new existential basis. He thus set an example for critiques that led to a proliferation of new possibilities for realizing the idea of *Bildung* in the twentieth century within the problematic context of nation-state structures. These reformulations—in the higher cultural segment of hermeneutics and *Geistesgeschichte* (intellectual history)—attempted to hold onto the emancipatory potential of the idea by continuing to promote individual development and creativity, while at the same time overturning a static notion of *Bildung* tied to specific cultural and social forms.

As Jennifer Ham indicates in chapter 5, Friedrich Nietzsche understood *Bildung*, first, as a merging of ancient Greek and German culture, and, second, as a process of individual self-transformation whereby what he called true great men first undertake an artistic fashioning of their own lives and then transform humanity through the establishment of new cultural forms. Within this conception, Nietzsche on the one hand criticizes the educational institutions of his day for promoting a mechanical rote learning, and on the other hand promotes a kind of education that focuses on building the individual *will*. The means of building the will are grounded in a practice of asceticism in which individu-

als impose on themselves the kind of discipline that Nietzsche rejects when it comes from the educators. Consequently, Ham distinguishes Nietzsche's "gymnastic of the will" from an exclusive focus on work by insisting that the former, while subordinating the body, does so in a way that affirms the sovereignty of the individual will rather than its subordination to communal goals. Nietzsche's ideal of *Bildung* focuses on the development of exceptional heroic minds that set themselves apart through their ability to transform themselves and establish metaphysical goals for their communities as well.

Nietzsche's ideas on *Bildung* have had a double legacy. On the one hand, he was lamenting what he saw as the degradation of the concept of *Bildung* from the neo-humanist ideal focused on life learning and active self-betterment to one invested solely in the static possession and expansion of specialized knowledge, used as a kind of cultural capital, whose ultimate exchange value was reduced to solidifying status and privilege for Germany's *Bildungsphilister* (cultural philistines). Nietzsche admonished educators for creating national educational policies that moved away from character formation and free thought toward an instrumentalized application of education, knowledge, and innovation for narrow state purposes. On the other hand, if Nietzsche could be recuperated as a defender of free inquiry, his focus on the individual aesthetic will rather than the objectivity of knowledge also brought about a new focus on interpretation as a creative act, whose significance cannot be evaluated scientifically, but only through its ability to develop an aesthetic and ideological power. This emphasis on individual will and power as the goals of *Bildung* risks affirming any expansion of power, regardless of its goals.

It is with regard to methodology, inquiry, and ways of knowing in the humanities that Wilhelm Dilthey promised a way out of the educational impasse that Nietzsche's work posed. Dilthey, one of the first to bring the word *Geisteswissenschaften* into circulation, sought to distinguish, sanction, and thereby protect the autonomy of the humanities from the predominant academic methodology of *Wissenschaft* (science), one dominated by a scientific orthodoxy aimed at amassing evidentiary data and producing fruits of objectivistic empirical research. Whereas humanistic disciplines like philology and philosophy had historically enjoyed a status as the unquestioned dominant models of *Bildung*, the natural sciences—once considered an integral part of philosophy, having developed their own empirical method—were now competing for that position. At stake was not just particular domains of knowledge, but also the very methods of its production. Focusing squarely on investigative method, Dilthey distinguished humanistic fields as taking an interpretive or hermeneutic approach, as opposed to disciplines in the natural sciences, which he viewed as proceeding by nomothetic means, intent primarily on establishing laws.

Anna Guillemin explores Dilthey's reflections on the poetics and hermeneutics of humanistic *Bildung* as a method of scholarly inquiry. As she elucidates

in chapter 6, Dilthey rejuvenates the concept of *Bildung* in part by restoring the centrality of the concept of *Bild* (image) and *bilden* (to create) at the heart of a self-education grounded in *Erlebnis* (experience). Dilthey suggests that the distinctive method of self-fashioning that the human sciences facilitate is actually integral to the organic nature of poetics and the poetic imagination itself. As opposed to the natural sciences, whose aim is to *erklären* (explaining) phenomena, knowledge production in humanistic disciplines is an aesthetic, interpretive, and reciprocal practice of *verstehen* (understanding) or decoding poetic forms, on the one hand, and image formation on the other. Borrowing from both Johannes Müller's and Goethe's portrayals of the workings of *Einbildung* (imagination), and applying rigorous analysis and even experimentation himself, Dilthey identifies the method of literary study and the decoding of poetic forms as vehicles for cognition and self-formation. By placing the formative power of image and imagination at the core of visualization, perception, and learning, Dilthey turns *Bildung* itself, as Guillemin suggests, into a method of scholarly inquiry. For Dilthey, the humanities in general and poetry and literature in particular invite a pedagogy of productive inductive questioning that, in its ability to reveal humans making sense of the world, yields unique insights into the human condition.

The experience of National Socialism (Nazism) led to a reevaluation of the meaning of *Bildung* as a cultural program. The 1950s saw cultural movements cling to a cultural tradition which was—in those movements' perception—wrongly stained by history. Christian existentialism that unfolded around Heidegger championed a return to the European tradition of self-fashioning.[13] In the same philosophical context Emil Staiger tried to preserve *Bildung* in a timeless garden of classical literary heritage, a project that was to become the target of heavy and sustained criticism in the course of the 1960s.[14] At the same time Thomas Mann's anthology of essays *Adel des Geistes* (1945) became programmatic for a Nietzschean vision of democracy led by the aristocracy of a superior spirit of heroic minds. But by the 1960s this ethical type of direct reference to cultural tradition embraced as exemplary and of value comes under attack and *Bildung*, now relativized as a historical and social phenomenon, is exhausted, much as its twin principle history. It is in this situation that Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* appears and offers a way to reconnect with tradition—through methodical understanding and dialogue. In the context of a rising radical criticism of *Bildung* and its alleged timeless values, Gadamer—across the abyss separating the post-war subject from history and cultural tradition—reopens a path to history in which the historical dimension of texts and their cultural value are united. In this respect hermeneutics offered an alternative to Benjamin's idea of a redemptive critique of tradition, which Habermas[15] introduced into the contemporary debate about how to authorize tradition after the fall of history and *Bildung*.

As John H. Smith points out in chapter 7, Dilthey's reflections on the nature of literary interpretation influenced not only Heidegger, but also his student Gadamer, who reflects on hermeneutics as a model for learning in the humanities. Like Dilthey, Gadamer analyzed the different ways of knowing fostered by the humanities, on the one hand disavowing the newly adopted scientific approaches to the humanities aimed at objectively analyzing texts, and on the other criticizing Dilthey's approach to hermeneutics as being overly aesthetic and subjective. For Gadamer, understanding in the humanities is not a practice of unearthing an intended meaning in the text itself, but rather of garnering insights that emerge out of a dynamic between the text horizon and the horizon of the reader, both of which are changed in the process. While attempting to resuscitate notions of tradition and echoing to some extent Humboldt's portrayal of learning as *Wechselwirkung*, Gadamer views knowledge acquisition less as a reproductive endeavor and more as a productive undertaking. He famously refers to this reiterative dynamic of interpretation as the hermeneutic circle, which he contrasts with the scientific method of knowledge production, focused on observations of an *Erkenntnisobjekt* (object of cognition) with the straightforward aim of deducing objective conclusions.

According to Smith, Gadamer's argument cut across the grain of secularized *Bildung* in the nineteenth century. An agnostic himself, Gadamer appears less interested in the revelatory process of religious belief than he is in the exegetic mode of theological interpretation itself as a model of service underlying humanistic understanding. For him, the purpose of humanistic inquiry was not only to expose the *Wunder des Verstehens* (miracle of understanding), but also as *Bildungswissen* (cultural knowledge) to replicate the posture of care, application, and *Dienstwissenschaften* (theological service). Accordingly, the kind of understanding the humanities produce is not won by *Herrschaftswissen* (mastering knowledge), vanquishing the unknown through gestures of mastery, power, and possession, but rather by a humble attitude of *Dienst* (servitude) operant in establishing relevance, significance, and applicability to the here and now. Unlike the believer reading scripture for confirmation and empowerment, the humanities students' disposition is one of humility and openness, one that seeks through various discursive practices to recognize themselves at the present moment in another's (past) consciousness. According to Smith, this specifically humanistic and miraculous practice, at the root of the phenomenon of humanistic understanding, leads to the kind of transformation Gadamer considers true *Bildung*.

In looking at the past with this hermeneutic perspective, the chapters in this volume attempt to plot out visions for the future of *Bildung* that arise out of their interpretations of the past. The history of such interpretations constitutes a way of considering *Bildung*, not as a static set of ideals or texts, but the arena for discussing and revising collective identity in light of present concerns.

At the same time, the essays demonstrate a continuing conflict in the history of the idea of *Bildung* between a nationalist and a cosmopolitan context for interpretation. Hermeneutics implies a specific tradition, and part of the transformation of cultural life implied by *Bildung* has been the reorganization of culture along national trajectories, even as the ideal of *Bildung* has consistently appealed to universal concerns.

Jennifer Ham is professor of German and humanities at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, where she teaches courses on German literature, culture, and language and has served as division chair of humanities the past few years. In addition to this volume and her earlier book, *Elastizität: Movement, Time and Space in Frank Wedekind's Dramatic Works*, Jennifer has also published and presented on subjects such as animal studies, Nietzsche, femininity, cabaret, Frank Wedekind, and German cinema; she is also coeditor of *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*, published by Routledge.

Ulrich Kinzel is professor of German literature at the University of Kiel. His research and teaching include seventeenth to twentieth-century German literature and culture as well studies in comparative literature and culture. He has recently published articles on Thomas Kling's and Gerhard Richter's reflections on 9/11, Ferdinand Kriwet's media work and Peter Weiss's concept of *Bildung*. He is the author of *Ethische Projekte. Literatur und Selbstgestaltung im Kontext des Regierungsdenkens. Humboldt, Goethe, Stifter, Raabe* (2000) and edited *London—Urban Space and Cultural Experience* (2010). He is currently preparing a continuation of his ethical studies into literary experience covering German literature of the first and the second half of the twentieth century.

David Tse-chien Pan teaches at the University of California, Irvine, in the department of European languages and studies and serves as the editor of *Telos*. He is the author of *Primitive Renaissance: Rethinking German Expressionism* and *Sacrifice in the Modern World: On the Particularity and Generality of Nazi Myth*.

Notes

1. Horlacher, *Educated Subject*, 3.
2. Siljander, *Theories of* Bildung, 1.
3. Bruford, *German Tradition*, vii–x.
4. Bollenbeck, *Bildung und Kultur*, 18–20.
5. Jünger, *On Pain*, 20, translation modified; Jünger, *Über den Schmerz*, 163.
6. Jünger, *On Pain*, 20, translation modified; Jünger, *Über den Schmerz*, 162.
7. Humboldt, "Theorie der *Bildung*," 235.
8. Smith, *The Spirit and Its Letter*, 5.

9. Humboldt, "Theorie der *Bildung*," 234–40, 235, 237.
10. Bollenbeck, *Bildung und Kultur*, 143–48, esp. 148.
11. These positions are well described in Feuchtersleben, "Über die Frage vom Humanismus," 93–110. For a contemporary critique of both concepts from a perspective of radical self-fashioning see: Stirner, "Das unwahre Prinzip," 7–23. This debate continues well into the twentieth century where it contributes to the collapse of the *Bildungsideal* (ideal of education); see Litt, *Das Bildungsideal der deutschen Klassik*. For the rise of the *Bildungsbürgertum* and its cultural capital of *Bildung*, see Bollenbeck, *Bildung und Kultur*, 160–288.
12. "Wo ehemals die klassische Bildung als ein heiterer Selbstzweck gegolten hatte, den man mit Ruhe, Muße und fröhlichem Idealismus verfolgte, da waren nun Begriffe wie Autorität, Pflicht, Macht, Dienst, Carrière zu höchster Würde gelangt." Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, 722.
13. See Guardini, "Askese als Element menschlicher Existenz," 232–48 and 49–56.
14. See, e.g., Walser, "Imitation oder Realismus," 66–93, 78–79; and Weiss, *Hölderlin*, 159.
15. Habermas, "Bewußtmachende oder rettende Kritik," 302–43.

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