Wasting Words

Are we interculturalists still relevant in a world of instant sound bites and fake news?
Editorial

“Alternative facts” as official discourse

When Donald Trump claimed his inauguration had attracted the largest audience in history, photographic evidence immediately proved this false. Senior advisor Kellyanne Conway, however, didn’t see a problem; she said the president was simply offering “alternative facts”.

With double-speak becoming official discourse, it’s no surprise that George Orwell’s classic dystopian novel “1984” has enjoyed a 9,500% increase in sales and tops Amazon’s list of current best-sellers. The novel, published in 1949, features a totalitarian society where independent thinking is “thoughtcrime” and “Newspeak” is the official language. The Ministry of Truth oversees propaganda while rewriting history according to party lines.

Our correspondent in Montreal, Dan MacLeod, looks at how public communication has been reduced to omnipresent noise. “Why waste words?” opens with an examination of journalism and media in 1988, already a fairly futile means of conveying information in the pre-Internet era. Things have gotten exponentially worse since then, as Mr. Trump shows us daily via Twitter. But the problem goes deeper, is one of language itself — our relationship, as societies, with words. Starts on page 8.

This issue’s interviewee is Anna Zelno, the absolute epitome of a SIETARIAN. What makes her exceptional is her constant widening of horizons, from Poland to Germany to Spain. She both absorbs the culture and adds to it at the local level no matter where she lives. Read more about her beginning on page 3.

Also of note, a contribution from John Magee about how Germans and Americans view communication and the art of persuasion. He dissects their perspectives systematically and provides advice on how both can overcome potential misunderstandings. From page 14.

Finally, David McRae reviews the migration crisis and its effect on Greece, where he lives, as well as the rest of Europe. He passionately argues for a realistic European policy on refugees without further delay, warning that nationalism and racism are replacing multiculturalism with each passing day. From page 11.

Patrick Schmidt, Editor-in-chief
How do you say “dynamo” in Polish, Russian, German and Spanish? It turns out that, while spelling varies, the word is the same as in English. Of course, Anna Zelno could have told you that — she speaks all five! Not what you might expect from someone who grew up in Poland before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Then again, when you’re closed off from the rest of the world in childhood, it seems the perfect response to go out and embrace that world once the walls come down.

From Poland to Germany to Spain, she’s adopted both language and culture in a constant widening of personal horizons, a process which includes “giving back” to the local community. Member of Young SIETAR, SIETAR Spain, SIETAR Europa and SIETAR Poland (which she co-founded) can all tell you this, as Anna Zelno has been active in all four...a “SIETAR record” for multinational participation.

Tell us about your early life and what led to you becoming an interculturalist.

I was born in Dzierzoniow, a small town in lower Silesia, 60 kilometers south of Wroclaw, the regional capital. Before World War II, it was part of Germany. My grandparents came from another part of Poland and settled there after the war, like many families not originally from the region.

I joined the Scouts when I was young and stayed in the organization until my late twenties, which influenced my life tremendously. I learned a lot about entrepreneurship, leadership and autonomy. And my first intercultural experience was through the Scout magazine, “Youth World”, I found a pen-friend from Nigeria.

I didn’t know English but, with the help of a dictionary, I wrote my first letter. That gave me the incentive to look for a language school. I was so proud when I found it, especially since I was only 11 years old! At the time, the only foreign language we could learn at school was Russian.

I was living with my grandmother and already autonomous. Many Poles went to Germany to work; my mother was taking care of children in Berlin and my father was a musician in a small Polish orchestra. Living apart led to their divorce when I was 13. My father married a German woman and our family became bi-cultural.

When I was 17, I went to Germany on a Scouts’ exchange. This experience, and the fact that my father was now married to a German, led me to study German at Jagiellonian University in Krakow. Later, I fell in love at a Scout conference in Germany and moved there when I finished my studies. You could say that my father and I made a great contribution to Polish-German relations.
I registered at the University of Mainz in applied language and culture studies. The campus is actually located in Germersheim, about 110 km south of Mainz. It was an amazing place, a microcosm of people from around the world who came there to study translation and interpreting. I was in a dormitory with students from all over the world, many from African nations and I discovered how varied it is. A friend from Cameroon showed me how the country is a mirror of the continent, with so many different ethnic groups.

At the University of Mainz, I was introduced to intercultural communications by my Professor, Andrea Cnyrim, a member of SIETAR. She invited me to be a co-trainer for her training for teachers and allowed me to run my own workshops with exchange students. I later became her assistant and to Professor Leonhoff, head of the Intercultural Communications department.

I did my Erasmus semester at the Autonomous University in Barcelona, Spain. It was a fun time as an exchange student and I enjoyed the city so much that it’s where I now live and work.

During my studies at Germersheim, I realized I didn’t want to be a translator and work with texts. I graduated as a translator for Polish, German and Spanish but I’ve done very few translations. You’re not paid by the hour but by the word. My problem is I’m a perfectionist, I wanted a perfect text and this takes a lot of time. My dream was to become an intercultural trainer and work with people.

**What did you do after finishing your studies in Germany?**

I decided to go to Valencia because my ex-partner lived there and we had to choose a place to live. At first I wanted to do my PhD, but I couldn’t find anyone to be my advisor, as the intercultural field was a relatively new academic subject. I found a foundation that worked with immigrants and had a school for mediation. Their program had nothing in terms of interculturalism and I convinced them to introduce intercultural competence and started to work with them. Then, more and more, I began collaborating with public administrations, social workers and NGOs.

As I was more interested in the business world, I got a masters in “talent management”, which is nothing more than a nice word for HR management — essentially, it’s about developing talent within an organization. I got a chance to meet every week with HR directors and managers from Spanish and international companies. Getting an inside view of different HR strategies and policies was a very good experience and allowed me to understand deeply the dynamics of multinationals organisations and work with them better.

I noticed that you do train-the-trainer sessions. Many
people who’ve spent a semester abroad think they have the qualifications to teach this. Do you believe it’s possible to teach intercultural skills to someone who’s only lived four or five months abroad?

I know the problem. I’ve run several programs for intercultural trainers and participants often ask, “Can you be a trainer if you don’t have this long-term experience abroad?” It’s a real tricky question. I think it’s better if you have the experience of an ex-pat or immigrant. You have more credibility because you understand a lot processes that occur in intercultural interactions.

Still, I know a few trainers who don’t have any experience abroad, social workers who’ve worked with immigrants for many years. So you can have intercultural experience without ever leaving your home country.

You not only work as a trainer for international companies, you also teach at the Autonomous University in Barcelona. What sort of students do you have?

I’m in the “study abroad” program, geared for foreign students in Spain. I have 22 from China this semester. For me, it’s a real immersion in Chinese culture. My subject is cross-cultural management. It’s a double load for the students; they’re learning Spanish and learning about themselves. The main part is intercultural competence. Last semester one student wrote in his exam that, when he arrived in Spain, he thought he was a modern, open Chinese person. But by the end of the course, he realized he was really traditionally Chinese. The students didn’t expect to learn so much about themselves, their values, motivations.

This reminds me of an interesting article you wrote a few years ago, as a contribution for the book “Interkulturelle Kompetenz im Wandel”, a SIETAR Deutschland publication. It was about how using a different language can influence one’s self-perception. Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

The article was about the lingua franca in intercultural training. You’re touching very deep, sensitive issues, such as identity and values. When you’re not using your mother tongue, it has an effect on the learning process as well as on your participation. Because you’re not thinking in your own language, you’re not able to express yourself well. Consequently, your self-esteem is lower, you don’t feel comfortable, are a little bit stressed. It’s not easy to process all the emotions going through your head.

Together with SIETAR Deutschland, you also edited a book on Spain: “Spanien von innen und außen”

Yes, that’s right. It was indeed a very exciting project. Together with Anne Rupp, Melinda Dalipi and Alexander Scheitzer, we invited interculturalists based in and outside of Spain to present their perspectives on Spanish culture from
different disciplines. I recommend this book to all German-language readers.

You’re very engaged in SIETAR Polska, SIETAR Espana and SIETAR Europa. You were heavily involved in organizing the very successful SIETAR Polska congress in Wroclaw last November. Where do you find all the energy?

I receive this energy from other enthusiastic, engaged and committed people, such as Barbara Covarubias. In my Twitter profile I write that I’m addicted to SIETAR. I started as a “Helfer” at one of SIETAR Germany conferences in Bonn, than I joined Young SIETAR, co-organised the congress in Ravensbrueck, where the initiative of creating SIETAR Polska was born.

Thanks to Alexander Scheitzer, we founded SIETAR Polska eight years ago. His support was very helpful for creating a strong organization from the very beginning. Our goal, as it is today, was to promote interculturality, encourage intercultural dialogue and give back by organizing events, which are not only an opportunity to network but also to make an impact on society. We wanted to show how important it is to build up intercultural competence within all sectors. We design our congresses around this theme.

During the organization of the last Congress, not only the outcome was important, but also the process of organizing it. This means getting as many people from SIETAR involved as we can, which integrates them more, and also attracting people from outside. We managed to invite the City of Wroclaw and some companies.

When I was putting together the team for the last congress, I invited people who weren’t members of SIETAR. For example Aneta Dlugopolska, president of “WrOpenUp”, an organization that promotes intercultural education and diversity in Wroclaw. I called her and said I’d love to have her on the steering committee but she’d have to join SIETAR and pay her fee first and she did. I did this with many non-Sietar people and they all joined!

Some of them just wanted to support us because they saw our commitment and enthusiasm and they also believe that the intercultural competence is really the key to the globalized world (which was the title of the conference). For me personally, it was a great test on leading a virtual, intercultural and intergenerational team of volunteers, which is an added challenge. There were no major mishaps and the Congress exceeded my expectations. So I think, I managed it well. Excellent coaching talent of Eileen Gricuk, vice president of SIETAR Polska helped me a lot. I even decided to organize a small similar conference this spring in Barcelona.

What struck me when I attended was the overwhelming...
enthusiasm of SIETAR Polska. It seems Poles want to be human contact bridge-builders. Do you think there's something in Polish culture that makes you unique compared with other SIETAR organizations?

I don't know if we're unique, or if there's something in Polish culture that makes us stand out. You must remember that people in SIETAR aren't representative of Polish society. And like all organizations, we have our problems and internal differences, except you can't see them. At the congress, you see a unified, spirited team. There's a lot of hard work by Board members and the people around them. You may think SIETAR Polska is very dynamic but, behind any effective association, you need a passionate driver.

Let's go on to Polish society. The government has stated openly that it refuses to take in third-world refugees. Can you explain that?

What we are experiencing in Poland today is a lot of xenophobia, which is due to lack of understanding and knowledge. People and the government really don't distinguish between simple concepts like Muslim and Islamist, they mix the words.

Let me talk about Spain. Before the economic crisis of 2008, the country received many immigrants and invested an enormous amount of money to integrate people. In my opinion, we see the results of those programs today, which were well done. There's less aggression against immigrants or people who are different. Barcelona, where I live, proclaims itself as the “city of refugees”. There are still a lot of integration programs and the local society is dealing quite well with differences. It should also be pointed out that people in Spain have been used to cultural diversity much more than in Poland.

How do you see the role of SIETAR in years to come?

I think the most important thing is to understand and accept that migration is a fact that can't be ignored. Europe is an increasingly aging society and needs young people. We need to invest in these people — the return on investment will be high. As a Chinese axiom says, “Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach a man how to fish and you feed him for the rest of his life.” This is the strategy we should be following. Of course we can not think only in terms of investment, but also in term of our social responsibility.

SIETAR can contribute both to refugees and in the receiving communities by helping each understand their cross-cultural differences. It's our social responsibility as an organization. Handled well, it can have a hugely positive effect on an individual and a collective level. And we should make a balance between making a business out of the migration crisis and giving back to society our talent. This is where I see the future of SIETAR.

Interviewed by Patrick Schmidt
Why waste words?

by Dan MacLeod

“Why waste words?”

That phrase turned itself around in my mind; it was something I felt I should think about. In my life, did it mean conversations and letters? Journalism as well? Literature? Maybe it meant everything, the futility of attempting to communicate at all.

I hoped to write words for a living. I considered their virtual worthlessness—or perhaps uselessness—in everyday use. Everybody talked all the time. A lot of what they said meant nothing but it didn’t much matter because most people hardly listened. And, when they did, the whole jumble of message went through filters of confused interpretation. Sartre, for whom words were also a matter of life and death, wrote a book on the subject but nobody agreed on what he was trying to say.

People use words as if they’re free but, unless we don’t mean what we say, they’re not. And writing things down leaves traces, footprints saying “Here I am, this is me, this was me…” But, when I thought about it, the worst liars were the ones who wrote things down for a living.

Ad-writers who work at blurring borders, then send their prose down to the legal department. Speech-writers who rely on alliteration and nonsensical metaphors to skate around issues—the best among them laughing at the parroting politicians even as the latter laugh at the constituents. And my journalistic colleagues who, I was coming to realize, would always be content to blame the rules of the profession when rationalizing their avoidance of professionally-uncomfortable stands concerning things they know to be wrong. Okay then, what about the short stories I wrote? But I had the answer half-way through the question. They were like pieces of music, Satie compositions, two-minute glimpses. Glimmers. Real writing.

(from the novel “Noise”)

I had that conversation with myself on a train from Paris to Munich when I was 31. At the time, I was reporting for Radio-Canada’s main Current Affairs show and writing features for Montreal’s “La Presse”. Relatively few people listened to public radio, national or not, but the weekly newsmagazine cahier had an estimated half-million readers.

Magazine pieces last a week, not a day, and mine were usually an attempt to explain things like sectarian violence in Northern Ireland or Belgium’s Flemish-Walloon conflict: part-overview, part-adventure-story. Still, I had the impression that even the best of what was called “the media” just added to the noise.

I hadn’t feel that way ten years earlier when I published for the first time. This was in the “Boston Globe”, in my hometown, an op-ed piece on the separation of French and English schools in New Brunswick, Canada, where I was now liv-
Why waste words?
— continued

People called my mother, one even sent a card, and she called me long-distance to say I was “almost famous” at 21.

Now that I’d seen a bit of the world, I realized every town had its daily papers (Paris had thirteen in 1988; Montreal had four), as well national and international magazines. Most wasn’t highbrow stuff, meant to educate, but tabloid fodder, meant to titillate. And even highbrow stuff had limitations — readers of “Le Monde” typically despised those who read “Le Figaro” and the feeling was mutual.

As far as radio, a Belgian colleague in Montreal called it “de la masturbation éthérique”, meaning we tried to impress people with our wit and intelligence while our words floated off into space. He said television was the same except that certain images burned themselves into our collective retina.

Ironically enough, I was on my way to Northern Italy—which the Austrians call the Sudtirol—to report on a linguistic conflict. Ethnic to be sure, tribal, but what it came down to was language, as usual. Words.

Italy took over Austria south of the Brenner Pass in 1918 and quickly banned the German language. A bombing campaign in the ’50s led to linguistic rights (schools, newspapers, theatre) but Rome continued to be heavy-handed and, by 1988, there were bombs again.

I interviewed a photographer who’d been arrested on suspicion of being a terrorist because he owned a short-wave radio. Newspapers and magazines would no longer hire him; his wife had taken a job at a grocery store but they were about to lose the house. Their children were taunted at school; he’d received anonymous death threats. “The carabinieri patrol at night to protect us,” he told me, shaking his head. “They’re probably the ones who made the threats.

I talked to the editor of the local German paper, who’d been hauled into court for “insulting the flag”. I talked to the editor of the local Italian paper, who told me there were “Nazis in the hills.” I talked with a group of teenagers hanging out in Bolzano’s main square — three germanophones and two italophones, all bilingual—who weren’t interested in politics. A girl said, “Somebody’s going to get killed because of this stupidity!”

The next day I almost got killed because of all the stupidity. There had been a bombing the night before, at a building site in a nearby town. Arriving there, I asked (in German, in an Italian-speaking café) where the bomb had gone off. A few minutes later I was arrested on the street by a pan-
icked squad of carabinieri, half a dozen of them pointing automatic weapons at my head, safeties off, ready to fire. ... 

Idiocy about language, about words and the right to say them, has been around forever — without its eternal French-English conflict, Canada would be a very boring country. But something about other people’s words seems to cause some people’s brains to shut down altogether.

Also in 1988: in Belgium, preparing to interview the head of the Vlaams Blok, I’d been told “Speak English or, if his English isn’t good, speak German but don’t speak French.” We began the interview in English and he wasn’t bad but, after the second question, he said “You’re from Canada, do you speak French? English is my third language, I’m not very comfortable.”

Perhaps, as the eyes are a window to the soul, words are the heart of us — our feelings, thoughts and beliefs, our very capacity for perception and expression. Words are, in fact, reality.

An example? The Sandy Hook shooting, where 20 six- and seven-year-olds and six teachers were killed by an insane man with an automatic weapon. The lunatic fringe of the American gun lobby not only claims it was staged by the government (part of the plot to take away their weapons) but posts anonymous insults and threats on the Facebook memorial pages of bereaved parents (accused of being professional actors). ... 

Although I was on national radio and published features in a major paper, I felt the futility of trying to get through the noise of both media and mindsets but consoled myself with the thought that short stories and novels were different, art was different. Of course, I was writing short stories, planned to write a novel someday. I was blinded within my own language, my own culture, that of a liberal-arts professional.

I saw the world according to my world. I was like the unilingual anglo from Moncton who made an official complaint when check-out girls at a department store spoke French together in front of him (“Which button do I push when a customer pays by check?”), part of a story I did in ‘89.

Few people read short stories. And those who read novels mostly read Harlequin romances, airport-shop thrillers or best-sellers like “The Da Vinci Code”. Yes, there are the “Harry Potter” exceptions but they’re usually children’s books: the reading audience is truly universal. Then politics, race, class and gender kick in and make us deaf.

In the Age of Twitter, why waste words?
In my two previous articles [June/August] and [September/November] last year, I concentrated on the migration crisis as it has affected Greece, my country of residence. Wider economic and political events have, of course, concurrently involved a much broader panorama than this country alone — in fact, pitting the disparate needs of non-European migrants against the resources and willingness of Europe to respond — in a way that has no parallel until one reflects back to the massive intra-Europe refugee crisis post World War Two.

At that time, the developed nations of the West pulled together under the auspices of the newly formed United Nations — and, subsequently, the Marshall Plan emanating from the United States — to credibly handle the massive flow of humanity. This time, in a scenario fast becoming of similar — or maybe, higher proportions, the response is weak [with some notable exceptions — Germany and Sweden come to mind], disconnected and, in some cases, repellent.

It is very difficult to successfully address the migration issue without strong political resolve and economic action on the part of the powers that be — particularly at the heart of Europe i.e. The European Union. The disparate approach to the subject from individual national governments is, frankly, bordering on pathetic. If left to grow unaddressed, Europe will be swamped by a heaving humanity driven to escape poverty and famine by war and economic dislocation.

It has the capacity to equal the morass which is the response to climate change — although here there is a much greater reaction in the sense of global awareness and plans for dealing with the subject — not perfect, of course, as we know. A global reaction and action is what is required on the problem of migration — not just for Europe [witness the massive refugee camps in North Eastern Kenya on the Somalian border]. The United Nations is obviously heavily involved through UNHCR — very evident also in countries like Jordan and Lebanon as the massive outflow of humanity from the Syrian conflict swamps the economies of those countries. Turkey too is under heavy pressure for the same reasons.

But let’s come back to Europe — the subject of this article. The apparent inability of the European Union to galvanize its members to collectively address the fast growing inward migrant issue is, frankly, mindboggling. Ask front line states such as Italy and Greece what they think! A ‘union’ should be acting together. Yes, we live in difficult political and economic times — dis-satisfaction with liberal democracies post the 2008 financial crisis, job losses — and the subsequent rise of populism — potentially leading to au-
Migration to Europe — continued

In the 10th century, Saxon England attempted to ward off the Vikings invasions with ‘Danegeld’

tocracy. But where are the unifying leaders today? Given that this article is for a SIETAR readership, I will not stray too far into the political field — but, surely, the focus should be on professional screening of migrants at the outer borders of the Union — and then, for those migrants accepted, professional assimilation programmes such as Germany and Sweden in particular are attempting to perfect. Much as I admire the intent of the Schengen Agreement, I do believe that its’ suspension whilst assimilation takes place is, unfortunately, necessary.

Aside from internal EU issues, there needs to be a forward plan to tackle economic poverty in countries bordering Europe — most notably in North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Some attempt is being made to address this — but it is insignificant in the larger scheme of things. True, in many cases, efforts are frustrated by civil conflict in a majority of these areas — and, of course, when one comes to the Middle East, outright war/civil war is the enemy of any progress at all.

We should not forget Central and Southern Asia either in regard to growing problems in that part of the world — and the attraction of the European magnet. Turkey remains a major problem and, in spite of its’ political mess, needs to be genuinely helped by the European Union.

Just giving money to ward off further major influxes of refugees, is not the answer — it smells too much like Saxon England trying to limit the invasions by the Vikings with ‘Danegeld’ in the 10th Century!

If Turkey is not helped, expect to see a further major influx of refugees across both the Aegean Sea to Greece – and the land borders between Turkey/Greece and Turkey/Bulgaria. Remember, there are up to 3 million Syrian refugees currently sitting in South East Turkey!

None of this, of course, accounts for the steadily increasing migrant numbers hitting Italy from Libya in particular – nor pressure from Morocco through Spanish enclaves on the Moroccan coast. Worst of all, in my opinion, is that, from a European point of view, these collective events aren’t something that will be put off for several years …..they are a function of 2017! Is Europe prepared?!

The nationalism — and, yes, racism — rising out of ‘modern’ politics in Europe — and elsewhere — is not a good sign for the promotion of multiculturalism — and, as we interculturalists must realize, runs counter to what we are all about.

I rest my case!
Sietar members Arvid John, Sabine Wagner and myself have joined forces for the last twelve months in establishing the Personal Leadership method in Europe. The method was first introduced in the mid-1990s by three facilitators at the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication in Portland, Oregon. It applies two powerful, critical principles: mindfulness and creativity, drawing on areas of positive psychology, whole-person-self-development, emotional intelligence and embodied culture, using messages coming from the senses as well as a grounding vision statement to align the practice with.

It is a framework that pulls together and disentangles at the same time the emotions, stressors, triggers, and passions that drive our day-to-day interactions. It directs us to the “right way” to take action in specific intercultural situations using the Critical Moment Dialogue and self-assessments based on six practices. In short, it helps people translate their theoretical knowledge into applied competence.

Arvid John began using the method with a group of students to deal with the realities of living in a confined space while doing an academic program on a ship. He has kept up his practice since that time. He conducted the first pilot program in Osterstedt/Hamburg, Germany with Rita Wuebbeler in 2012. Sabine Wagner came to that program and became heavily involved in the method. I, myself, was also at Osterstedt, and felt it made sense and matched up well with my personal work as an actor and my training based on Stanislavski’s teaching, focusing on digging into and nurturing an ever-ready well of emotion to draw on for the critical points in a performance.

One of the biggest challenges current and future leaders face is to be able to “lead themselves” before going out and attempting to lead others. Being grounded and as clear as possible on one’s own values, preferences, ways of working and communicating with others is a vital first step to becoming an effective leader.

It is an highly interactive program that offers participants a chance to assess how they respond to ambiguous (intercultural) situations, decision points and conflict. Instead of going on “auto pilot,” Personal Leadership (PL) presents a step-by-step process for taking charge of your own reactions and becoming aware of your own judgments, emotions and physical sensations resulting in greater clarity and resolve in determining the best options - especially in the changing political and social situations in Europe.

Seminars are scheduled in Germany, March 23-25 in Berlin and September 8-10 in Munich. More information can be found on Events, Workshops and Congresses on page 23 of this issue or at www.plseminars.com
Much of our daily communication aims to persuade others of our point of view. When we persuade, we want the receiver of our message to respond in an affirmative way: “Yes. I agree. I’ll go along with that. I’m with you. You’re right. I buy that.”

We attempt to persuade in many forms: when speaking on the phone, writing an email, presenting in a meeting, composing a formal report. We attempt to persuade in many interactions: with colleagues, our boss, our direct reports, as well as with customers, suppliers, and business partners.

But Germans and Americans persuade — and are persuaded — differently. These differences, if not understood, can threaten the success of their cooperation.

Decision making options, which come across persuasively in the one business culture and lead to important action, suddenly do not reach their target audience in the other. A misperception of another colleague’s logic in persuasion can lead to a misperception of her or his fundamental competence.

Misperceptions create friction and mistrust. Colleagues do not agree on issues significant to the company. The one side is seen as overly problem-oriented, critical and cautious. Opportunities are missed. The other is judged to be too optimistic, glossing over serious problems, thereby endangering the performance of the entire team.

Decisions made with broad consequences, judged by the one culture to be persuasive and therefore legitimate, are viewed by the other as suboptimal, perhaps even unjust.

The fundamental willingness to be persuaded is weakened. The situation deteriorates. The performance of the organization suffers. Yet, if understood and carefully combined, the respective strengths in approaches to persuasion can be a very valuable asset.

The goal is to minimize the problems created by the differences, while maximizing the benefits of integrating them. Americans and Germans can do that.

1. Objective

German
The Germans separate message from messenger. The presenter consciously and purposely moves into the background so that the content can take center stage. Arguments should speak for themselves.

American
Americans link message and messenger. Message-content, form and presenter should form a unity. Americans say: „Sell yourself first, then your product or service.“
Persuasion ...  
— continued

**German Perception**
Germans react ambivalently to linking speaker and content. An overly personalized presentation style is motivating and attractive, at the same time however, too personified. Germans expect more distance between speaker and subject.

**American Perception**
Americans, on the other hand, find the separation of speaker and subject as impersonal and distanced. To distance oneself from one's own content is seen as risk-averse and disinterested.

**Advice to Germans**
Identify yourself with your message. Use “I”. Draw on your personal experience with anecdotes. Put your heart into it. Show emotion. Give signals when you are a subjective participant in your story and when you are an objective observer.

**Advice to Americans**
Temper the showman in you. Be coy. Hint at almost a scepticism in your own message. Neither invite nor challenge your listeners to like or dislike you. Take yourself out of the equation, so to speak. It's all about the content not you.

2. Competent

**German**
For Germans a core competence is the ability to identify, analyze and solve complex problems. Germans focus on problems.

**American**
Americans strive to see problems as opportunities. And opportunities are to be exploited. Competent is that person able to recognize opportunities in problem situations and to maximize the gains they offer.

**German Perception**
Interpreting a problem as an opportunity and acting too quickly signalizes to Germans an inability to recognize the seriousness of the situation and its dangers. Americans can appear naive.

**American Perception**
The German focus on the weak points of a given situation is understood by Americans as precisely that: seeing problems as problems and consciously seeking them out. Instead of searching for the positive in a given situation, Germans are viewed as pessimistic, negative, under circumstances destructive.

**Advice to Germans**
Remain problem-oriented. It is a German strength. But choose different, softer, less direct, words. Americans are quite capable of discerning between serious and less serious problems. Establish more balance between your German problem-orientation and American optimism. Not all problems have to be addressed or even solved, in order to move forward.

**Advice to Americans**
Reduce your natural American optimism. Show more atten-
Persuasion...
— continued

Germans have an inherent need to be complex in their analysis of a problem.

Germans have an inherent need to be complex in their analysis of a problem. Acknowledge the potential down-side of a given situation. Address them directly and openly. Not all problems are challenges. Not every cloud has a silver lining. Do not fear being negative and pessimistic with your German colleagues.

3. Analytical

**German**
Germans are systematic in their thinking. Complexity is understood only by understanding how its component parts interrelate and interact. And a component part can only be understood via its role within the whole. Germans focus on theories and models.

**American**
Americans prefer to break down complexity into its component parts, in order to focus on the essential, so that action can be taken. Americans are sceptical of theory, focusing instead on facts and experience.

**German Perception**
Facts and experience, without a convincing description of the big picture, are not persuasive to Germans. To concentrate on the key variables often means to misunderstand or overlook other important aspects. Americans are often judged to be superficial and over-simplifying.

**American Perception**
The German inclination to paint the big picture, especially with the help of theory, can make a professorial and arrogant impression on American ears. Comprehensiveness comes across as long-winded, overly complicating and impractical. Americans react impatiently.

**Advice to Germans**
A wholistic approach is fine, but be careful not to get tangled up on theory. Warn your audience when you need to go into detail in order to get a particular message across. Leave out facts and factors which are not pertinent. Do not be comprehensive for the sake of comprehensiveness. If Americans need more supporting information, they will request it. Anticipate those questions. Have the data ready. Questions are a sign of interest, and not that you are unprepared.

**Advice to Americans**
Take the time to explain the analysis which led to your conclusions. Your German colleagues want to know the what (message), why (reasons) and how (methodology). Go into much more detail. Include facts and information about various factors. Germans rarely save information for the question & answer part of the presentation. Give them the info up front. In the German context, the fewer the questions during Q&A, the more persuasive the presentation.

4. Realistic

**German**
Germans define realistic as understanding reality. To understand the present, is to understand how it became so - the past.
Persuasion...
— continued

In the eyes of the Germans, Americans can come across as pushy used-car salesmen.

American
To be realistic is to understand what is possible. The possible is determined not only by present circumstances, but also by the ability to shape a new future. To be realistic is to envision a future. Forward movement often demands moving away from the past. Americans are future-oriented.

German Perception
American visions are often not grounded or rooted in an accurate understanding of the status quo. Americans want to move forward without first establishing their starting point and direction.

American Perception
Too much emphasis on the present as a product of the past is seen as backward-looking. A vision of the future, forward movement, demands moving away from the past.

Advice to Germans
Provide the historical context. But again, let your listeners know beforehand that you need to tell the full story. Your aim is for all to have a common understanding of the status quo before you can consider how best to move forward together.

Advice to Americans
Try to hold back your natural tendency to jump from the present into the future. Take the time to explain the context of a situation. This will lengthen the presentation. Do your homework and demonstrate it.

5. Persuasive

John Magee is founder and director of ‘culture influences’ and be reached at cultureinfluences.com
Book Review
Prisoners of Geography
Ten Maps that tell you everything you need to know about global politics

By Tim Marshall
Elliott & Thompson Limited, 320 pages
Euro 12.38

Geography was one of my favorite subjects in grade school, mostly because it was about people and what they did in their part of the world, rather than maps – and the textbooks had pictures! Little did I know at a tender age that the lines and colors drawn on maps were not a part of nature. The words "geopolitics" was not a buzzword at that point in time.

A few years ago, Ward Kaiser’s book, How Maps Change Things made clear to me the socially constructed power of maps. They're not just about how to get from here to there but tools, even deliberate weapons, used to claim and determine ownership as well as create bases for forming national and regional identity narratives.

Now, Tim Marshall’s new book switches on another bright light for me, examining as it does world geography and the power of topography, resources and climate to stimulate popular and political fears and ambitions. Prisoners of Geography not only delineates how the lines came about and who owns or professes to own what, but gives the geographical reasons why these lines are where they are, and why nations, not just historically, but to the present moment feel the necessity and desire to change them for reasons of access to resources, conduct of trade, as well as facilitating security and defense.

Most of us are aware that a lot of the messiness, wars and incapacity found on the African continent are the result of over two centuries of invasion and colonialism in which European powers ultimately divvied up the territory with no attention to the identity of tribes and peoples inhabiting it. Where geographic obstacles do not naturally determine boundaries, wars may occur to establish territorial claims to defensible positions. Even with the enormous capabilities of mobility and weaponry found in today’s military, mountain ranges, deserts, plains, forests and jungles, as well as access to transport routes on land and sea will determine security and vulnerability.

The subtitle of the book implies that maps will tell us “Everything we Need to Know about Global Politics”. While this seems to stretch it a bit, the fact is that the book tells us much more than most of us knew about the geographical substratum that provides the rationale and motivation beneath national ambitions and sentiments as well as the rhetoric of global leaders and politicians.

Reading this book from the perspective of an interculturalist gave me some important “Aha’s” as to the effect of geography on the cultural identity narratives of people around the world. If culture is, as many of us define it, the inner identity discourse created to help us survive and succeed in our environment, this book helps us to see that geography is a critical element in defining the specific environments for the management of which cultures are created.

Reviewed by George Simons
Book Review
Intercultural mediation at work

By Susanne Schuler
Bookboon.com, 79 pages
Euro 8,99

What?! Only 79 pages to both explain and educate the reader in effective mediation? Yes, that’s all that Schuler needs to school us in its best practices, using simple language and easily accessible models. As a professional who has been teaching positive negotiation skills in intercultural contexts for over 30 years, I was struck by the author’s ability to assemble and link tested ideas and functional skill sets for assisting in conflict resolution at every imaginable level. I am sure that many readers will be struck with how familiar many of the ideas and practices seem, yet surprised by how they can be made to flow seamlessly together.

In intercultural practice, there is the temptation to make cultural factors the scapegoat for failure to reach agreements, while other professional approaches may tend to ignore culture altogether. This book stands out by its natural and unforced inclusion of not just culture but of the many other factors in analyzing conflict as well as resolving it. Critical reflection on the mediator’s own cultural values and dynamics and possible biases is not overlooked.

It is obvious that the author has digested the history and theoretical underpinnings of conflict, its forms, dimensions, and means of effective resolution, and that she has put them into practice often enough to be able to tell the reader about them in everyday language. Nothing seems forced or esoteric. Occasional case studies and exercises engage the reader in the diagnosis of conflict, its resolution, and deepen one’s familiarity with tools offered.

Although reading a book about mediation does not make a mediator, the insights and advice furnished are easy enough to explore and use immediately if one wishes to start on the path to proficiency. It reminds us to use what we already know or are even familiar with, but tend to forget in the heat of exchange. This is not to dismiss the need for formal training and practice, though even there this slight volume might serve as a textbook.

The book’s transparency would not have been as effective if the author had not shared at the outset important perspectives and values, daring to even speak of charity, not in the sense of handouts, but in its classical definition as disinterested interest in the well-being of our fellows. She stresses the essential concerns for mutual respect, fairness and valuing each other’s humanity, by growing one’s identity and sense of connection with others. While conflict is inevitable, it can be productive when we have the perspicacity and the means to avoid their escalation.

The simplicity of Schuler’s book makes it obvious that while professional mediation is an important blend of personal integrity, knowledge, attitudes and skills, its essentials can and should be acquired and exercised daily in our everyday lives.

Reviewed by George Simons
This book is not an easy read, and I'm not saying that because of its style, although there is some occasionally difficult legalese, but because it reveals and challenges what I like to call the urcultural, making us uncomfortably aware of the implications of a subterranean values system that feeds into the everyday identity narrative of US Americans as well as into the rhetoric of politics. There couldn’t be a better time to read this book than the present moment when we have been flooded with the bombast of so-called patriotic and suprema- cist language in the presidential campaign. The shift toward celebrity populism in attacking migrants, Islam etc., may be happening elsewhere, but in the case of the USA, due to its extraordinary world influence, it contributes to the phenomenon that the author identifies as “American exceptionalism.”

This urcultural narrative is founded on an article of faith that European culture, particularly Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic culture constitute the one true civilization and that this guarantees both the right and the responsibility to impose this civilization on inferior humans and their societies. The USA, as heir to this mission of superiority, sees itself as the embodiment, the single sustainable model of what the rest of the world should be like, and thus attributes to itself the historical responsibility of developing the less fortunate. A realistic look at conditions and practices, both social and ecological within the USA and its footprints around the world, makes it clear that the country is, in fact, not at all a sustainable model for the rest of the world, but rather an enormous threat to sustainability at home and abroad. Believing that humanity is such because it is different from and dominant over nature is one of the urcultural premises that allows “civilized” nations to subdue, dominate, and where necessary decimate more “savage” races to say nothing of exploiting the resources on which they depend, citing the inefficient or underutilization of those resources.

Looked at from the perspective of international law, which is the author's focus, we find that the USA, being a prime player in the establishment and enforcement (“the world's policemen”) of legal frameworks for international justice end human rights – sustains a not-so-subtle extension of colonialism and the theft of sovereignty from those who define society differently. Many of the nations that we describe as failed states in
Meeting the Enemy... — continued

fact reflect the failure of the imposed, supposedly superior models of society among those whose systems have been supplanted. “Manifest Destiny” may have driven conquest “from sea to shining sea”, but it does not end there, but rather transmogrifies into ideology, “manifestly destined” to spread around the world.

At the same time, mouthing freedom and democracy, the USA frequently opts out of participation and compliance with the structures, organizations, and values it helped to put in place, seeing itself as superior in its insight into fundamental values. It can do no wrong. The war on terrorism is a case in point where redefinition of US military intervention and extrajudicial processes flout the law of nations in the name of “confronting evil” and legitimizing such practices as “preemptive self-defense” and torture. With well-documented historical evidence, the author points to the fact that similar themes long ago legitimated the internal genocide of Native Americans as well as prompted pseudoscientific eugenics promoting Aryan superiority at home and abroad.

Besides this book’s becoming ever more timely, I find it an excellent model for those who are concerned with intercultural affairs to connect with the kinds of narratives that construct the everyday self-understanding and behavior of people. While this book is heavily focused on international law, certainly similar explorations of economic assumptions and theories are both related and in need of exploration that identifies their abiding premises. The USA suffers from the need of being both accepted by and excepting itself from others.

It is exceedingly hard to extricate oneself from this uncultural narrative, but certainly the kind of careful examination of historical evidence and identification of the rhetorical clichés that perpetuate the story, done so well in this book, as well as the facilitation of grass-roots relationships with those who think different from ourselves, are very good starting points.

I close with three quotations from the book that I would like to keep in mind when working interculturally:

“…the human rights paradigm, like that of development, has been challenged as a ‘Trojan horse’ through which Western powers are attempting to remake all other cultures in their own image.”

“…there are truly universal values common to all peoples, but finding them by exploring the multiverse of actual worldviews and their attendant values is a very different thing from imposing them by fiat.”

“…peoples must be free to tell their own stories on their own terms – a process diametrically opposed to ‘collecting’ worldviews like anthropologically ‘discovered’ artifacts and collapsing them into a master narrative.”

Reviewed by George Simons
SIETAR Europa Congress 2017

Themes and Tracks

Dublin, Ireland
22-27 May 2017

CONFERENCE THEME:

21ST CENTURY WAVES OF CHANGE.
CULTURAL DEXTERITY FOR TURBULENT TIMES

Track 1: Business & Organizational Challenges:
What does it mean to work together?

Track 2: Sociopolitical concerns:
How can cultural sensitivity become part of the creation and application of law, media, health and educational systems?

Track 3: Shaping Intercultural Professions:
What are the current updates & fresh developments in theory, methodology and practice?

Track 4: Practicing and shifting Perspective Change:
What are the opportunities and challenges of hybrid identities?

Track 5:
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Germans and Americans define competent differently

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Events, Workshops, Congresses
Events, workshops, congresses

Berlin & Munich Germany
23-25 March 2017 in Berlin
7-9 September in Munich
Personal Leadership: Making a World of Difference Inspired by intercultural communication, positive psychology, education, leadership development, the wisdom traditions, the natural and the quantum sciences, Personal Leadership was introduced in the mid-1990s as a way to help people translate their theoretical knowledge into applied competence. 10% discount for SIETAR members. Write to arvid.john@nvce.eu for more information.

Bath, United Kingdom
19-23 June 2017 & 19-23 Sept. 2017
Developing intercultural training skills This 5-day course is for trainers who wish to learn more about the theory and practice of intercultural training, both to integrate intercultural topics into their training and also to deliver their own intercultural training courses. 26-30 June 2017 & 25-29 Sept. 2017 Designing and delivering intercultural training This 5-day course is a follow-up to the above course, also suitable for trainers who already have experience in the intercultural field. More information at www.lts-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm or contact adrian.pilbeam@lts-training.com

Milan, Italy
5 - 6 May, 2017
IX SIETAR Italia Annual Conference — Multicultural Identities: Understanding the Sense of Belonging The notion of identity — be it personal, religious, ethnic or national — is important to interculturalists. SIETAR ITALIA has chosen the subject for its 9th conference and will explore the ambivalences, fluctuations and modalities which underpin multicultural identities. Those who have worked on the subject of "identity" are welcome to propose papers or presentations. Deadline is the 10th of January, 2017. For more information on proposing a paper, please go to http://www.sietar-italia.org/en/

Dublin, Ireland
22 - 27 May 2017
SIETAR Europa Congress 2017 This five-day event will have as its theme: 21st Century Waves of Change: Cultural Dexterity for Turbulent Times. This congress welcomes all those whose life and work puts them at the interface of cultures, from the perspectives of economy, society, and education with the aim of reshaping intercultural discourse, questioning our current cultural paradigms and exploring new thinking to help us navigate complexity in our emerging global world. Thus our congress title mirrors this need. For more information, write to: dublin2017@sietareu.org or click: http://www.sietareu.org/activities/dublin-congress-2017

Winterthur, Switzerland
15 - 16 June, 2017
Tools for Intercultural Training This two-day workshop will explore topics related to intercultural training and teamwork as well as debriefing read-to-use simulations and games. The focus is on activities that enable the participants to interact with the content and help them process, recall, adapt, and apply them to improve their professional and organizational productivity. The facilitators are Dr. Sivasailam “Thiagi” Thiagarajan and Samuel van den Bergh. More information at http://diversityandinclusion.net/en/

Online Everyday
The SIETAR Europa group, discussing Transmigrant Politics in a Transnational World on Linkedin, has now over 8000 members. Plus it offers videos, articles, books, tools for the intercultural profession. To join, click here: https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2740568 For more information, contact George Simons at diversophy@gmail.com