



PRESS RELEASE

Essen, 01.02.2022

When Words Are not Enough – Anna Aslanyan presents her book *Dancing on Ropes: Translators and the Balance of History*

15 Feb. 2022, 18:00 (CET), ZOOM

Human communication, even in one language, always comes with the proviso that we understand and are understood much less than we hope. If language barriers make this challenge even greater, how do people the world over still manage to talk to each other? **Translation**, as any practitioner will attest, is as much about **cultural mediation** as it is about finding the right words and putting them in more or less the right order. That is one of the central ideas explored in Anna Aslanyan’s recent book, *Dancing on Ropes: Translators and the Balance of History*.

Stories of translators succeeding or failing thanks to their grasp of cultural issues, or lack thereof, are as old as multilingual communication itself. They go back to the days of the Ottoman empire, when the job of the translator involved – just as it does today – much more than conveying ready messages. When translating, we inevitably intervene, add or cut, change the meaning or reframe the source, gloss local aspects or contextualise political demands, rephrase the author’s wording or introduce their work. From the Great Game to the West’s recent withdrawal from Afghanistan, cultural awareness has always been as important as linguistic skills. Aslanyan’s own career as a translator and interpreter is full of examples confirming that words alone are rarely enough to establish communication. In this talk, she will share several stories, past and present, to demonstrate that we have to translate not only between languages but, crucially, between cultures.

Anna Aslanyan is a journalist and translator working from Russian. She writes for the Times Literary Supplement, the Guardian and other publications. Her popular history of translation, *Dancing on Ropes: Translators and the Balance of History*, is out with Profile Books.

Friedrich Balke is Professor of Media Studies at the Ruhr-University of Bochum, with a special emphasis on the theory, history, and aesthetics of visual representation. He is the spokesperson of the Research Training Group “Documentary Practices. Excess and Privation”, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

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SPEAKER

Anna Aslanyan, translator, and author

RESPONDENT

Friedrich Balke, Ruhr University Bochum (RUB)

COORDINATION

Danilo Scholz, Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI)

PARTICIPATION

Participation online via ZOOM. Please register via emily.beyer@kwi-nrw.de until 14 February 2022.

ORGANISATION

The lecture is organised by the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities Essen (KWI).

FURTHER INFORMATION

[Event on the KWI website](#)

We would appreciate the circulation of this press release.

ABOUT CARTE BLANCHE IV: Exchanges have always been an essential component of the KWI's activities. We are part of a regional consortium of universities in the Ruhr area and cooperate closely with our local partner institutions. At the same time, our work thrives on an international outlook that taps into debates and developments in the social sciences and humanities abroad. In the new online instalment of our Carte Blanche lecture series, the KWI will provide a platform to bring these two networks into conversation. In each session, an international guest speaker will present original research, which will then be discussed by a scholar from the University Alliance Ruhr.

About the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI): The Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI) Essen, Germany, is an interdisciplinary research centre following the tradition of international Institutes for Advanced Study. In its role as an inter-university institution connecting the Ruhr-University Bochum, the Technological University Dortmund and the University of Duisburg-Essen, the institute works together with researchers and scientists from its neighbouring universities as well as other partners from the federal state NRW and places in- and outside of Germany. Within the Ruhr area, the KWI is a place to share and discuss the questions and results of ambitious research with interested parties from the city and the greater region. Currently, work at the KWI focusses on the following areas: "cultural studies of science and science policy making", "sociology of literature and culture", "science communication", and a "teaching lab". Projects in the established research field "culture of communication", as well as individual projects, will be continued. www.kulturwissenschaften.de

Please note: If you do not wish to receive any further press releases from the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI), please send a short message to presse@kwi-nrw.de. Many thanks.

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