

Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture

Concepts for the Study of Culture

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De Gruyter

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De Gruyter

ISBN 978-3-11-022761-1
e-ISBN 978-3-11-022762-8
ISSN 2190-3433

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

© 2012 Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin/Boston

Printing: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen

∞ Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Germany

www.degruyter.com

Table of Contents

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: MODELS FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE

BIRGIT NEUMANN and ANSGAR NÜNNING Travelling Concepts as a Model for the Study of Culture.....	1
DORIS BACHMANN-MEDICK Translation – A Concept and Model for the Study of Culture.....	23
ANNA VERONIKA WENDLAND Cultural Transfer.....	45
ANITA TRANINGER Emergence as a Model for the Study of Culture.....	67

II. KEY CONCEPTS FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE

UWE WIRTH The Underlying Logic of the Study of Culture.....	85
DORIS BACHMANN-MEDICK Culture as Text: Reading and Interpreting Cultures.....	99
ALEXANDER FRIEDRICH Metaphorical Anastomoses: The Concept of ‘Network’ and its Origins in the Nineteenth Century.....	119
ANSGAR NÜNNING Narrativist Approaches and Narratological Concepts for the Study of Culture.....	145
WOLFGANG MÜLLER-FUNK Identity, Alterity and the Work of the Narrative: A Transdisciplinary Discourse Report.....	185

GRETA OLSON Gender as a Travelling Concept: A Feminist Perspective.....	205
BIRGIT NEUMANN and MARTIN ZIEROLD Cultural Memory and Memory Cultures.....	225
HANS RUDOLF VELTEN Performativity and Performance.....	249
CAROLINE WELSH ‘Stimmung’: The Emergence of a Concept and Its Modifications in Psychology and Physiology.....	267
SILKE HORSTKOTTE Visuality and Visual Culture.....	291
STEPHAN GÜNZEL Space and Cultural Geography.....	307
INGO BERENSMEYER From Media Anthropology to Media Ecology.....	321
MARTIN ZIEROLD Mass Media, Media Culture and Mediatisation.....	337
LEORA AUSLANDER Material Culture and Materiality.....	353
FRANK BÖSCH and HUBERTUS BÜSCHEL Transnational and Global Perspectives as Travelling Concepts in the Study of Culture.....	371
WOLFGANG HALLET Conceptual Transfer: A Cognitive Approach to the Construction, Re-Interpretation and Re-Contextualisation of Academic Concepts.....	389
Notes on Contributors.....	411

Translation – A Concept and Model for the Study of Culture¹

DORIS BACHMANN-MEDICK

1. Introduction

It is no longer possible to ignore how crucial processes of cultural translation and their analysis have become, whether for cultural contact or inter-religious relations and conflicts, for integration strategies in multicultural societies or for the exploration of productive interfaces between the humanities and the natural sciences. The globalisation of world society, in particular, demands increased attention to mediation processes and problems of transfer, in terms of both the circulation of global representations and ‘travelling concepts’ and of the interactions that make up cultural encounters. Here, translation becomes, on the one hand, a condition for global relations of exchange (‘global translatability’) and, on the other, a medium especially liable to reveal cultural differences, power imbalances and the scope for action. An explicit focus on translation processes—something increasingly prevalent across the humanities—may thus enable us to scrutinise more closely current and historical situations of cultural encounter as complex processes of cultural translation. Translation is opened up to a transnational cultural practice that in no way remains restricted to binary relationships between national languages, national literatures or national cultures.

This broadening of the horizon of translation currently poses challenges to most of the disciplines in the humanities and specifically to the study of culture, by referring to translation as a category of practice in the social field and by developing translation as an analytical category and even as a model for conducting cultural research. Admittedly, this complex process risks diluting the concept of translation, and it seems important to delineate the concept more precisely. We might begin this

1 I am grateful to Kate Sturge for the translation of an earlier version of this essay, which appeared as the introduction to “The Translational Turn,” a special issue of the journal *Translation Studies*. Ed. Doris Bachmann-Medick 2–16.

specification by dissecting what has become a rather vague term into its most important facets (transfer, mediation, transmission, metaphor, the linguistic dimension, transformation, and so on) and the most significant areas of enquiry to which it can contribute.

One of these areas would be the reinterpretation of situations of global cultural encounter. Another would be a reworked view of the academic landscape and research practices—it might, for example, be constructive to consider interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity as a translation problem, potentially enhancing our understanding of the contact zones arising in the transitions between disciplines. In all these cases, it would be a mistake to pass hastily over the tensions inherent in translation's relationships to appropriation, transformation and conflict. These can usefully be explored and developed: frictions arising from translational relations (whether they be metaphor transfers, conceptual bridges or mutual repudiations) between the humanities and neurobiology offer a taste of what this might involve. It is beginning to emerge in the challenges that a 'translational turn' poses for the studies of culture and for the humanities, including translation studies itself.

2. The Turn to 'Translation' – A 'Translational Turn'?

If the horizon of translation is expanding and differentiating, does this alone imply a 'translational turn' in studies of culture? Certainly it is not enough to disengage the category of translation from a linguistic and textual paradigm and locate it, as a cultural practice, in the sphere of social action where it plays an ever more vital role for a world of mutual dependences and networks. In this respect, important studies within translation studies have long been moving the category far beyond its traditional contexts (see, among many others, Cronin, *Translation and Globalization*; Hermans; Tymoczko and Gentzler; Venuti; on the 'turns' within translation studies see Snell-Hornby, *Turns of Translation Studies*). But the turn to translation goes further, since it is born specifically out of the category's migration from translation studies into other discursive disciplinary fields in the humanities: translation has not only become a precondition for 'travelling concepts' in the humanities and the social sciences, but is a 'travelling concept' itself. In a very wide range of disciplines we find the attempt to develop the translation category into a more general translational model for investigation and to apply it concretely in more comprehensive cultural analyses. However, the success of a broader translational approach depends on the category of translation undergoing methodological specification as it moves through the disciplines. Only then will trans-

lation fully develop the potential for the study of culture that Lawrence Venuti already noted in the late 1990s (see Venuti 9), and only then will we be justified in calling translation a new key term for the humanities, including the social sciences and the study of culture (see Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns*).

In recent years, numerous ambitious investigations have been made by scholars concerned with cultural analysis and the social sciences to foreground the translation perspective and give it practical and analytical application. Jürgen Habermas, for example, calls on religious communities in post-secular societies to ‘translate’ their religious language into a publicly accessible secular language (see Habermas), while Joachim Renn grounds a whole sociology on “relations of translation” (*Übersetzungsverhältnisse*; see Renn). Nikos Papastergiadis reinterprets migration in terms of translational action (see Papastergiadis) and Veena Das discusses “violence and translation” (see Das); in more explicitly textual terms, Susan Bassnett examines “translating terror” (see Bassnett, “Translating Terror”) and Mona Baker foregrounds “translation and conflict” (see Baker). Countless other examples demonstrate the huge range of areas of enquiry within the humanities that are currently making use of the category of translation both as a new analytical category and as a category of action in itself. Perhaps, then, the ‘translational turn’ has already arrived?

It is certainly clear that, compared to just a decade ago, today’s situation is much more complex, since the boundaries between disciplines have become blurred to a far greater extent. Back then, some voices within translation studies, interested in a ‘cultural turn’ in translation studies, were already naming a “translation turn in cultural studies” (see Bassnett, “Translation Turn”; more recently see Snell-Hornby, *Turns in Translation Studies* 164–69; Snell-Hornby, “What’s in a Turn?”), then a “translative turn” (see West 162). But these early hints have not yet been systematically pursued by translation studies, despite increasingly ‘translational’ approaches in research across the humanities and social sciences. Only now, as voices from outside the discipline join the debate, does there seem to be a drive to sharpen the translational perspective theoretically and systematically in order to justify describing it as a ‘turn’ in its own right (see Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns* 238–83; “Übersetzung in der Weltgesellschaft”). Yet, we still need contributions to the project of furthering, while also critically rethinking, this heightened theoretical attention to translation processes in various fields. We need responses to a fork in the road: will the translation category, as it moves as a ‘travelling concept’ beyond the textual and linguistic level, stubbornly stick to the path of purely metaphorical uses of the translation concept? Or will new research ap-

proaches begin to elaborate a more sophisticated and detailed translation perspective in methodological and analytical terms?

At this decisive moment, the underexplored interfaces between translation studies and other disciplines within the humanities may become newly productive—as translation processes of their own, so to speak. Hereby, translation studies' special disciplinary competences would open up even further to expansion and, inevitably, transformation—especially in the disciplinary border and transition zones where the translation perspective contributes to a translational thinking intended more than just metaphorically—translation stances that are more fundamental and more capable of wider application, 'border thinking' and 'in-between thinking,' and an increase in the value attached to mediation processes. And the humanities could make new 're-turns' to translation studies as they try to sharpen the contours of this broad understanding of translation.

However, mutual incursions, conceptual migrations or hybrid overlaps between the disciplines do not alone effect a 'translational turn.' We must ask a more general question: how do 'turns' in the humanities come about? In disciplines concerned with culture, theory does not advance via the massive ruptures of 'paradigms.' Theoretical attention shifts less comprehensively, in a delicate feedback loop with the problems and processes of the surrounding society, via 'turns.' Different 'turns' can coexist, in a kind of eclectic theoretical constellation (see Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns*; on the problem of the figurative language of 'turns,' see Snell-Hornby, "What's in a Turn?"). Given this academic landscape, an expanded translation concept (whether metaphorical or analytical) will not necessarily result in a 'translational turn'—unless it moves through three stages that characterise 'turns' in general: (1) expansion of the object or thematic field; (2) metaphorisation; (3) methodological refinement, provoking a conceptual leap and transdisciplinary applicability (for more details on the question of when a turn becomes a 'turn,' see Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns* 25–27).

Thus, only when the conceptual leap has been made and 'translation' is no longer restricted to a particular object of investigation, but moves across disciplines as a new form of knowledge—a kind of 'travelling concept' and a methodologically reflected analytical category—can we really speak of a 'translational turn.' At that point, translation also turns into a model for the study of culture as it transforms cultural concepts by making them translatable and translating them consciously into different fields. Beyond this, scholarly thinking and perceptions themselves become translational as a movement in research gathers pace, moving towards border thinking, taking greater interest in interstices, and focusing increasingly on mediation. In this framework, translation becomes an analytical

concept for social theory, action theory, cultural theory, microsociology, migration studies, history, the theory of interculturality, and so on. As analytical concept, translation no longer remains on the merely metaphorical level but is worked out on the basis of empirical social processes (see Fuchs, “Reaching Out”).

A further interdisciplinary translation step could enable these incursions of the translation category to benefit, in turn, from the disciplinary skills of translation studies. Translation studies’ “fine-tuning of meanings” (see Fuchs, “Reaching Out” 27) and its work on translation in a strict sense, on “translation proper” (see Dizdar), offer a way to steer the translation concept, currently somewhat distracted, back into more specific channels. The aim should be to encourage the pursuit of a ‘translational turn’ on three levels, each of which should be critically examined in the light of the expertise of translation studies: (1) on the level of an expanded horizon from textual to cultural translation, or from the translation of language to the translation of action—including pragmatic, existential transfer situations; (2) on the level of epistemological impulses—without cordoning off the power relations and asymmetries of global relations; (3) on the level of the appropriation and transformative development of translation-oriented approaches in what is now almost all the humanities and social sciences—including the critical notion of the study of culture as translation studies.

3. Expanding the Horizons of the Translation Category

3.1 Translation as Contextualisation

A ‘translational turn’ in those disciplines concerned with the study of culture presupposes the cultural turn in translation studies since the 1980s, a move that extended translation’s purview beyond the transfer of languages or texts, opening it to questions of cultural translation and of the frictions and complexities of cultural lifeworlds themselves (see Snell-Hornby, *Turns of Translation Studies* 164–69). In the process, the familiar categories of text-related translation, such as ‘original,’ ‘equivalence’ or ‘faithfulness,’ were increasingly supplemented by new key categories of cultural translation such as ‘cultural representation and transformation,’ ‘alterity,’ ‘displacement,’ ‘discontinuity,’ ‘cultural difference’ and ‘power.’

For a long time, reflection on cultural translation in translation studies drew its impulses chiefly from ethnographic research and its critique of representation (see Carbonell i Cortés; Simon and St. Pierre; Sturge; Wolf, “Culture as Translation”; Yamanaka and Nishio). These offered methods

of cultural contextualisation which helped a ‘translational turn’ take root within translation studies itself. Cultural contextualisation fostered the linking of smaller units in texts (symbols, forms of address, narrative patterns, communicative situations, etc.) to larger, culturally specific and historical patterns of thinking and signification. But, conversely, these efforts of cultural contextualisation still need the procedures and positions of textual translation in order to gain important correctives to a critique of representation that risks sweeping generalisations: it is never whole ‘cultures’—and never general and holistic cultural concepts—that are translated. In contrast, a more concrete than metaphorical translation perspective makes the wider spheres of culture and practice accessible in smaller units of communication and interaction. It allows larger complexes of communication like cultural transfer, the transmission of concepts, cultural dialogue or cultural comparison to be almost microscopically dissected—not least in terms of concrete translational activities by agents acting as cultural brokers. There is still untapped potential in ideas such as Susan Bassnett’s early call for translation theory as a general theory of transactions, dependent on the specific translational actions and negotiations of cultural brokers:

Today the movement of peoples around the globe can be seen to mirror the very process of translation itself, for translation is not just the transfer of texts from one language into another, it is now rightly seen as a process of negotiation between texts and between cultures, a process during which all kinds of transactions take place mediated by the figure of the translator. (Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 5–6)

The expansion of the translation category as a model for the study of culture reaches far beyond a mere ‘travelling concept.’ This expansion is perhaps all the more groundbreaking in that the translator and, especially, the translation scholar always set the micro and macro levels in a necessary interrelation: the smaller formats, textual and interactional analyses, are related to wider translational frameworks and vice versa. Translations are thus inserted into broad views of the relations of power and dependency and into a discursive environment such as Orientalism or colonialism (see Asad and Dixon 177; Venuti 158). Translation history is made part of the history of colonialism, part of a “global regime of translation” (see Sakai, “How Do we Count a Language?” 75) or of a “biopolitics of translation” (see Sakai and Solomon; Solomon 53).

In these moves outward to wider horizons, clearly the role of language, and with it “translation proper,” cannot be ignored. However, in the disciplinary framework of translation studies, “translation proper” itself suggests a concept of translation that undermines representation-alism: a multilayered, complex concept that is constantly generating differ-

ence and hybridity and confounding tendencies towards homogenisation through what translation studies scholar Dilek Dizdar refers to as its “third-party position” (Dizdar 96). Dizdar shows how “translation proper,” as a language-oriented procedure, can offer valuable insights for the investigation of in-between positions and ethical implications as opposed to mere transcodings, thus making more visible the translation process and the actions of translators themselves.

3.2 Translation as Self-Translation and Transformation

The tension between “translation proper” and an expanded understanding of translation in the humanities and social sciences absolutely needs to be retained and constructively explored—not least in order to demonstrate how strongly even individual translation practices are conditioned by more comprehensive hegemonic relationships, the asymmetries of the global “regime of translation.” Connections like this are especially significant at the level of language policy. The struggle of regional, indigenous languages like Gĩkũyũ or Yoruba against the overbearing power of world languages makes the translation issue a particularly explosive one. This becomes clear in an impressive autobiographical essay by Kenyan writer and scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (see Wa Thiong’o). He describes from his own experience how the asymmetries of languages are also relations of violence. These asymmetrical relations subject speakers, including authors, to demands for a specific kind of translation—and political enforcements of translation—that affect their very existence. The power relations between European and African languages in these situations are experienced bodily, as linguistic repression or terror. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s encounters with translation from the Kenyan Gĩkũyũ into the global lingua franca of English result in self-translation in a double sense: the translations of his own books by himself, but also translations of his own self—a life lived in and as translation. At stake here are translation challenges which, as Jon Solomon argues, always already imply the “myth of global English” (Solomon 66). But even this now mythologised global language leaves gaps for intervention, oscillating as it does between the conflicted poles of “complete translatability”—attended by translation as a medium for the configuration of the “flexible personality”—and a contrary national linguistic self-assertion and articulation of difference (see *ibid.* 67).

At this stage a translational perspective within cultural research opens the door for further study of the politics of translation. This will involve discussing, on the one hand, global linguistic asymmetries in the framework of what Solomon calls a “biopolitics of translation” (*ibid.* 53) and, on the other, the levels of the experiences, actions and constraints that

impose translation and self-translation on subjects and agents in the framework of “translation as a social action.” The latter aspect is examined in particular depth by Martin Fuchs in his sociological perspective on translation as a social practice (see Fuchs). Fuchs shows how the Indian ‘Untouchables’ or Dalits try to translate their existential and political concerns into a universalist Buddhist frame of reference, so as to find a point of contact with other social contexts and thus gain recognition. Translation appears here as an intentional, active “reaching out to others.” We see how far-reaching a translational perspective can be, not least for the analysis of practices by social groups which, through their pragmatic negotiations, use translation “as a mode of agency” (Fuchs 32). Analysing social action in this way indicates how little, in translation circumstances like these, the bipolarity so often—and problematically—associated with the translation process really holds. When translational actions need to capture universalist ‘third terms’ (such as Buddhism) as reference points, the situation is evidently multipolar. Translation here is more than just a bridge between two unrelated poles, more than a one-way transfer process; instead, the concept is a complex sociological, relational one that opens up translation to reciprocity and mutual transformation.

The ground for this far-reaching notion of translation as transformation was prepared by the postcolonial debate. Certainly, postcolonial studies have largely focused on transforming Europe’s understanding of itself as an ‘original,’ critically re-mapping and reorienting previously dominant notions of centre and periphery, breaking open fixed identities and attacking the principle of binarism in favour of hybrid mixing. Yet postcolonialism’s attention to the patterns of power in all kinds of translation relations (see Niranjana; Spivak; Tymoczko and Gentzler) has importantly set out the terms for considering mutual translation and transformation as a conflictual process. It is a viewpoint that oversteps traditional understandings of translation relations as relations of equivalence, breaking apart the assumption of firmly drawn positions or spheres, let alone of faithfulness to the ‘originals’ of tradition, ‘roots’ or identity. Instead, it is the transgressive and transformative aspects of translation that, as Zygmunt Bauman argues, are the precondition for “reciprocal change”:

Cross-cultural translation is a continuous process which *serves* as much as *constitutes* the cohabitation of people who can afford neither occupying the same space nor mapping that common space in their own, separate ways. No act of translation leaves either of the partners intact. Both emerge from their encounter changed, different at the end of the act from what they were at its beginning. (Bauman xlviiii)

3.3 Culture as Translation – Cross-Cultural Translation

The far-reaching approaches to translation as transformation incorporate a dynamic that will ultimately trigger a translational reconceptualisation of the notion of culture itself: “culture as translation” (see Bhabha). Cultures are not unified givens that, like objects, could be transferred and translated; they are constituted only through multifarious overlaps and transferences, by histories of entanglement under the unequal power conditions of world society. Countering tendencies to standardise, to affirm identities and to essentialise, a translation perspective can bring to light specific structures of difference: heterogeneous discursive spaces within a society, internal counter-discourses, right up to the discursive forms of acts of resistance. Drawing on this concept of a ‘translational’ culture, Judith Butler makes the category of translation a transnational key category of cosmopolitanism, in which the constitution of a world culture is an unending process of cross-cultural translation (see Butler 49–50).

However, perhaps the formula of a “translational transnationalism” (Apter, “On Translation” 5) should not be too hastily adopted as a way of making global language and translation policy and practices the gateway to enlightened cosmopolitanism. A ‘translational turn’ might, rather, start from the confrontation with concrete issues and work towards a consideration of the historical, social and political conditions that could allow cross-cultural translation even to take place. Several pointers in this direction should be mentioned. Firstly, Bhabha’s links between the transnational and the translational can be taken quite literally in this case. They go beyond mere wordplay to indicate a task for transnational cultural studies awaiting further elaboration: “Any transnational cultural study must ‘translate,’ each time locally and specifically, what decentres and subverts this transnational globality, so that it does not become enthralled by the new global technologies of ideological transmission and cultural consumption” (Bhabha 241).

Secondly, the translation category can encourage us to spell out not only ‘culture’ and ‘cultural studies,’ but also ‘globalisation,’ in a translational sense. Thus, Michael Cronin’s “globalization as translation” (Cronin, *Translation and Globalization* 34) refers to the decentring of global processes as well as an agent-oriented view of globalisation (see also Papastergiadis, “Cultural Translation”). Translation allows the citizens of a global civil society to achieve a “bottom-up localization” (Cronin, *Translation and Identity* 28) and thus advance the active formation of relationships and networks. But thirdly, the study of global translation processes also requires careful reflection on the historical dimension. Such work calls for a reinterpretation of the transition of non-European nations (such as India) to

capitalism and distinctive forms of multiple modernities: no longer as the result of linear processes of universalisation, but as the result of historical differences and translational ruptures.

4. Epistemological Dimensions of a ‘Translational Turn’ and Their Global Implications

4.1 Displacement

“Translation is the agency of difference” (Haverkamp 7)—but a statement like this requires specification. Nor can that specification remain only epistemological, countering holistic approaches and the supposed purity of the concepts of culture, identity, tradition, religion and so on. It is imperative to provide historical detail when analysing processes of cultural translation; Walter Mignolo and Freya Schiwy call this the necessity of “theorizing translation across the colonial difference” (Mignolo and Schiwy 4). Crucial in a historical approach is the attempt to rethink the new epistemological and methodological orientation with a fresh emphasis on global relations and the global regime of translation.

Global relations, with their displacements and multiple cultural affiliations, insist on a new view of the translation concept that is political and sensitive to power—and thus enhances the study of culture with a political dimension. In place of the popular notion of translating as bridge-building, it might therefore be more stimulating and realistic to focus on the fractures and disparities in the translation dynamic. After all, the in-between situations within translation relations are closely linked to the interstitial existences arising from global migration, exile and diaspora. As early as 1923, Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Task of the Translator” displaced the original by relocating its historical survival to the transformative work of the translation. Benjamin’s emphasis on the productive force of translational discontinuity—as opposed to translation as the reproduction of meaning and the representation of the original—finds special relevance today in its encouragement to retranslate in the wake of post-colonial rewritings of history. Recently, initial attempts have been made to consider the process of migration, too, in the light of translation (see Pastergiadis, *Turbulence of Migration*; Wolf and Vorderobermeier).

A translational view of migration is still at a very early stage, but it promises to benefit from the analytical capacities attributed to translation. They shed new light on the translational character of cultural phenomena in general: their non-holistic structure, their hybridity and multiplicity. In this regard, our understanding of translation has now developed to include

important processes of displacement and alienation, of distinction and mediation. The path has, at least, been cleared for new methodological approaches to the ‘interstitial spaces’ so celebrated by the humanities, by examining them as translational spaces: as spaces where relationships, situations, identities and interactions are shaped through concrete processes of cultural translation. Geographically relevant relationships between translation studies and urban studies emerge from this, as can be seen in, for example, translation scholar Sherry Simon’s investigation of the contact zones, language communities and many-language migrants of the divided city of Montreal (see Simon).

But beyond this, ‘in-between spaces’ unfold their greatest potential in an epistemological and analytical respect: translation-oriented lines of approach encourage the search for concepts that cut across binary pairs and break open formulaic clusters. For example, a translational view of ‘interculturality’ makes plausible the concept’s constitution out of individual translation steps, thus giving new visibility to easily forgotten elements like understanding, mediating, misunderstanding, resistances and so on. This kind of translational approach makes complexity more transparent and easier to handle—useful not least in dissecting master narratives and synthesising terms, like modernisation, identity, society or culture, that can be disassembled when examined in terms of translation processes (even at the risk that a translational fragmentation and blurring like this might yet again be a European or Western strategy).

4.2 From Universalisation to Cross-Categorical Translation

Will the concept of translation, then, succeed in transforming universalising European theories, concepts and categories themselves? Or are these still necessary in order, as Boris Buden argues, to open up a “new universalist perspective” in the face of the “particularisms” (Buden 17) proliferating worldwide? To be sure, alongside the search for a “universal basis for communication,” the search “for the specific cultural origin of the self” (Shimada 260) remains very much present. It is this dilemma which opens up a promising if contested field for translation issues. One-sided claims to universalisation premised on Eurocentric categories are certainly being called more and more vehemently into question, especially from outside Europe. Under particular fire is the European translation privilege and its long tradition of translating other cultures and languages exclusively into the European context. In the future, current trends to reverse that line of vision are likely to become increasingly important in critical reflections on translation. This will mean that the west will be increasingly subjected to—and will increasingly subject itself to—translation processes

from other directions and with a view to other (Asian and African) localisations and translation traditions (see the articles in Hermans; Hung and Wakabayashi). This turnaround of the translation perspective will show how “translation processes genuinely play a fundamental role in the ways all non-European cultures see themselves” (Shimada 261).

It is becoming ever more dubious to assert global communication and to only ground this communication in universalisations that remain all too firmly in Western hands. The assumption of global distribution on the basis of universalising transfers is, at least, no longer uncontested. It is beginning to be filtered through a close scrutiny of global, reciprocal translation processes. This move is supported above all by studies that try to identify points of articulation for the mutuality of translation, like the shared effort to find ‘third idioms’ (with reference points like religion, as discussed by Fuchs, or human rights as in Tsing). Such approaches cannot survive without the impetus for a reconceptualisation of translation coming from outside Europe—at present, especially strongly from Asia. Non-Western conceptions of translation are being formulated with a critique of Eurocentrism informing the emphasis on reciprocal translation and theoretical exchange (see Hung and Wakabayashi; Ning; Ning and Yifeng).

In this respect, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s work aims at ‘displacing’ the question of translation. It shows just how closely epistemological and global problematics interlock with issues of cultural and translation policy, demonstrating how the translation perspective has to be developed from the divergent cultural categorisations in different life-worlds. His influential book *Provincializing Europe* proposed that we consider translation not only “cross-culturally” but also “cross-categorically” (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* 83), thereby explicitly challenging Eurocentric, universal points of comparative reference and in turn opening the door to non-European categories of investigation. For example, it must be possible to translate the Hindi term *pani* into the English term ‘water’ without having to pass through the pre-given category in the Western knowledge system, H₂O (see *ibid.*). For Chakrabarty, only a comparison that neither resorts over-hastily to general terms of mediation nor leaves the *tertium comparationis* unreflected can help create a shared plane of mutual cultural translation.

Chakrabarty shows how “cross-categorical translation” demands a historicised and contextualised approach to universalising investigative categories such as democracy, human dignity or equality. He argues that a political historiography in non-European countries like India and under postcolonial conditions is possible only through a process of translating European key categories of modernity—translating here in the sense of ‘translation-as-displacement.’ Chakrabarty presents the example of the

whole “series of displacements of the original European term ‘the proletariat’” in India—towards “subalterns,” “masses,” “peasants,” even Hardt and Negri’s concept of “multitude” (Chakrabarty, “Subaltern History” 101). J. Devika’s study of “translating feminist concepts largely produced in first-world contexts into the local language” (Devika 183) in 1980s Kerala State, India, is another innovative investigation of this kind. Her work underlines the “instability of translation” in the process of a “specific shaping of modernities in colonies and postcolonies” (ibid. 185), especially through a “state of being ‘in translation’ [...] beyond the mere logic of the text” (ibid. 193). Both examples show that translation as a differential concept must be thoroughly historicised.

The importance of this kind of approach for the development of translation as a key category or even model for the study of culture becomes clear especially when we undertake cultural comparison. In a wider context, we can use the perspective of concrete translation processes to examine issues like a global, transnational historiography that takes into account “entangled histories” (see Randeria). Its relevance is most striking, however, in terms of its re-evaluation of universal concepts in transcultural traffic. Because there are no homogeneous spaces of reference in the global sphere, it is essential to attend carefully to the culturally specific settings, conditions, deep structures and translational perspectives at work in the study of culture, including those of our own research. Which concepts are we working from? How far can we still consider research categories like modernisation, development, capitalism, labour, feminism and so on to be universally valid? What kinds of translation processes are necessary to both open up such analytical terms transculturally and find functional equivalents for them in the spheres of action and conceptual systems of non-European societies?

5. Humanities and Studies of Culture as “Translation Studies”

5.1 Translation Within Disciplines

Before the term “cross-cultural translation” can justifiably be used, then, new reflection on the problem of “cross-categorical translation” is necessary—and this seems to be one of the greatest challenges for the translational reorientation currently permeating the various disciplines. Its urgency would be increased if the humanities as a whole were to become a globally open translation studies. One example is the energetic debate within comparative literature on restructuring the entire subject. There, the model of translation expands the object of comparative literature’s

attention into political contexts and examines it from the vantage point of “translation zones” (Apter, *Translation Zone* 5), showing how “philology is linked to globalization, to Guantánamo Bay, to war and peace, to the Internet” (ibid. 11). Comparatist analyses of cross-cultural texts, language wars, linguistic creolisation and multilingual situations are already making significant contributions of this kind (see ibid.).

In the case of an emerging translational migration studies, in contrast, more detailed work is needed to identify what it might mean to redefine migration using the concept of translation and self-translation as a continuing process of transformation: “In an age of global migration we also need new social theories of flow and resistance and cultural theories of difference and translation” (Papastergiadis, *Turbulence of Migration* 20). On the level of sociological translational analysis of intracultural social problems, too, initial foundations have been laid that stake a claim to cultural theories of translation for the analysis of the integrational tasks of modern societies. Indeed, those tasks might well be characterised as relations of translation; at any rate, they could make good use of translation processes in the search for strategies to regulate conflict or further integration (see Renn; Renn, Straub, and Shimada).

Finally, the discipline of history, increasingly transnational in its orientation, has recently begun to rediscover translation. Translation is understood here as a specific historical process, associated with colonialism and decolonisation, missionary history and concept transfer (see Howland; Rafael; Richter 13). Historians are increasingly looking for creative reinterpretations of basic political concepts like liberty, democracy and human rights, for challenges to develop new historical and political terms in place of those proposed by the West (see Liu, *Translingual Practice*; Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*), and finally for practices of explicit non-equivalence. A few attempts have been made—for example in religious studies—to use the concept of cultural translation as an “analytical tool for image transmissions and religious conversions in general” (Bräunlein 29), necessitating increased attention to translations of images. Interpreting religious transfers from this translation perspective reveals that transformation, reinterpretation and active appropriation are mediated across long distances by means of a visual and performative practice of ‘image acts.’ This is a standpoint particularly suited to driving the model of translation in a direction that has so far been largely ignored, one importantly addressed by Birgit Mersmann in terms of a “cultural visual studies as translation research” (Mersmann, “Bildkulturwissenschaft” 107). As Mersmann complains, “visual cultural translation is still under-represented” in translation theory and the study of culture (Mersmann, “(Fern-)Verkehr der Bilder” 158). Visual translation has a particular explosive force arising from the

all-encompassing transcultural worlds of media and images in which we come face to face with cultural differences and opposing visual cultures, even visual taboos (an example being the scandalous photographs from Abu Ghraib).

5.2 Translation Between Disciplines

I have touched on just a few examples to indicate the large scale on which the concept of translation is currently pervading the various disciplines involved in the study of culture. A translational approach can be used to mine disciplinary links and overlaps themselves for possible transformations of subjects and their conceptual systems, since “when concepts enter different genres they do not remain intact” (Beer 186). In the emerging knowledge society, translation is more than just a medium of cultural contact or a procedure for intercultural encounter. It can also become a model for disciplinary linking where the individual disciplines make themselves as susceptible as possible to connections to other areas of knowledge and explore their ‘contact zones’ (see also Bachmann-Medick, “Übersetzung im Spannungsfeld” 286–90). In contrast to the ‘smoother’ category of interdisciplinarity, the translation category has the advantage of explicitly addressing the differences, tensions and antagonisms between disciplines or schools of thought. Increased attention to such conflicted contact zones could be particularly rewarding for a translation and thus transformation of scientific concepts through their reformulation in other contexts, conceptual systems and genres. A fascinating example of this is the current debate between neuroscience and the humanities over free will.

Another surplus of the translation category might be to harness its characteristic self-reflexivity to help consider our own research in the analysis of culture as itself a task of translation: humanities as a kind of ‘translation studies.’ On the one hand, this draws attention to the internal structure of knowledge acquisition in research on culture: pluralised relations and phenomena arise precisely through the disruption of concepts of wholeness and unity, by indicating the multiple strata—and contradictions—that each translation process inevitably accretes. It is important here that the work of cultural research should not be centralist but should begin with the investigation of margins and interstices (between disciplines or between cultural phenomena). Contact zones between the self and the other, and therefore border spaces and overlaps, must be explored as spaces of translation. In terms of the theoretical landscape, this is an appeal to translation epitomised in what we have called ‘turns’ (see Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns* 384–89).

5.3 Translation as a Model for the Transnational Study of Culture

From this vantage point, a further dimension of translation for the humanities and the study of culture becomes visible: the possibility or necessity of translating not only between culturally different concepts, but between different, locally specific knowledge and research cultures within the study of culture itself. Even within Europe, tunnel vision still all too often restricts the view to Anglo-American approaches alone. What other research approaches are being ‘lost in translation’? This translation task becomes even more relevant beyond Europe—an example would be Latin American cultural studies, only very recently coming to international attention after its previous marginalisation. Here, “cross-categorical translation” can help to broaden awareness in a way that will draw stronger contours for a critical globalisation of the humanities in the future.

If the study of culture is to be not only globalised but transformed, starting from what are from the European viewpoint its ‘margins,’ it will, in Stuart Hall’s view, have to make use of translation processes: “Cultural studies today is not only about globalization: it is being ‘globalized’—a very uneven and contradictory process [...]. What interests me about this is that, everywhere, cultural studies is going through this process of re-translation” (Hall and Chen 393). A full decade ago, then, Stuart Hall was already insisting on the need for European cultural studies not only to translate itself into the processes of internationalisation and modernisation, but also to make itself translatable for Asian and African cultural studies. Importantly, Hall decouples translation once and for all from a European ‘original’:

[T]ranslation [is] a continuous process of re-articulation and re-contextualization, without any notion of a primary origin. So I am not using it in the sense that cultural studies was ‘really’ a fully-formed western project and is now taken up elsewhere. I mean that whenever it enters a new cultural space, the terms change. (Ibid. 393)

For this as-yet unfulfilled project for the humanities in translation and as translation studies, we must intensify the search for methods and research concepts that do not remain restricted to Western knowledge traditions, but that arise in the course of a “global conversation” (Jacob 112). In this context, ‘translation’ could become a stimulating model for a transnational study of culture, reaching beyond ‘travelling concepts.’ Such a model of translation would postulate not only a global frame of ‘travelling’ that considers the applicability or transformation of concepts, but also a frame of ‘displacement,’ of ruptures, frictions, power asymmetries, and even untranslatabilities (see Bachmann-Medick, “Transnationale Kulturwissenschaften”). The critical points that Naoki Sakai sets up in his work go

straight to the core of this set of issues. Sakai's main object of criticism is an overly harmonious notion of global conversation, and of translation as communication between national languages, against which he sets the discontinuity of translation processes. He elaborates the epistemological and political conditions under which the humanities and the study of culture might operate as critical translation studies: namely, by trying to comprehend and overcome the global system of translation as a regime of "national monolingualism," as a modern schema of "co-figuration" of national languages (in the sense of countable units) by means of which boundaries—and with them, exclusions—are brought about (see Sakai, "How Do We Count?").

In this system, translation as a critical conceptual perspective has an absolutely strategic function. Sakai and Solomon have elsewhere shown by example what humanities as 'translation studies' can also mean: "comparative cultural theory that is attentive to global traces in the theoretical knowledge produced in specific locations" (Sakai and Solomon v). Their point is far from being that cultural studies, like 'travelling theories,' should spread hegemonically from the USA across the whole world. Rather, the study of culture needs to face up to the simultaneous production of knowledge and theory "in disparate sites"—and undertake to publish it multilingually: perhaps in Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean simultaneously, as the multilingual series *Traces* does (see Sakai and Solomon). Theory is, of course, no longer at home only in the West. A project like *Traces*, with its "dislocation of the West" (ibid. 18), could be seen as a fitting complement to Chakrabarty's historical project of "provincializing Europe." The convergence suggests that the 'translational turn' in the study of culture finds its greatest scope at those points where disciplines make themselves pluralised and translatable within an emerging global knowledge society—against the grain of a "unilateral regime of translation."

However, in individual cases we must ask very carefully what insights are really gained, what empirical research is furthered by working with the category of translation, and whether we might not merely be witnessing the start of a new metaphor's triumphal march. One thing, though, is already clear: the (transnational) study of culture can profit a lot from a concrete and critical sensitivity to cultural translation processes in their political dimensions and underlying structures: their implicit strategies, their claims to power and hegemony, their manipulations and acts of violence, as well as the opportunities for intervention that they offer. 'Translation' is emerging more and more as "a matter of war and peace" (Apter, *Translation Zone* 3). Ultimately, the move from what is still an ivory tower of theory and research to the hard ground of social and political relation-

ships in “global communication across cultures” would, in Mary Snell-Hornby’s words, be “a truly revolutionary ‘translation turn’” (Snell-Hornby, “What’s in a Turn?” 50).

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