Johannes Fehrle (Mannheim) and Mark Schmitt (Dortmund)

Introduction
"Adaptation as Translation: Transferring Cultural Narratives"

The discipline of adaptation studies has come a long way from its academic inception in novel-to-film studies. Since George Bluestone's seminal 1957 study *Novels into Film*, often regarded as the starting point of modern day Anglo-American adaptation studies,[1] the discipline has seen a continual widening of its methodology as well as of the material scholars are willing to regard as adaptations. Particularly since the turn of the 21st century and the increasing institutionalization of the discipline as distinct from literary or film studies, adaptation scholars have widened the scope to include a broad range of media, encompassing not only the traditional adaptations from novels and drama into film, but also novelizations of various other media, video game and comic adaptations, TV series, opera, theme parks and tie in vacations, and many more.[2] Others have included the study of media franchises as dependent on adaptation.[3] As part of this redefinition of the discipline, scholars have also widened their discussion to bring to the centre aspects that were not originally the main focus of adaptation researchers' comparative textual analyses, including industrial structures, legal frameworks, and, most frequently and emphatically, questions of intertextuality and the cultural and ideological embeddedness of adapted texts.[4] Since the late 1990s, cultural and societal questions have

---

[1] George Bluestone. *Novels into Film*. Berkeley 1957. Bluestone is most often cited (and misrepresented) as a starting point in a discipline that, as Kamilla Elliott has convincingly shown, suffers from (strategic) amnesia in its attempts to claim novelty for already established concepts (Kamilla Elliott. "Theorizing Adaptation/Adapting Theories." In: Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (eds.). *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*. London et al. 2013, pp. 19-45; esp. pp. 19-31). As Elliott shows, this stands in contrast to older (and significant) contributions to film and adaptation studies, including Vachel Lindsay's *The Art of the Moving Picture*, Lester Asheim's *From Book to Film*, or some of Andre Bazin's essays such as "In Defense of Mixed Cinema". Vachel Lindsay. *The Art of the Moving Picture.* New York 1915. Lester Asheim. *From Book to Film*: *A Comparative Analysis of the Content of Selected Novels and the Motion Pictures Based upon Them.* Chicago 1949. André Bazin. "In Defense of Mixed Cinema." In: John Harrington (ed.) *Film and/as Literature.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1977, pp. 13-26. Harrington's *Film and/as Literature* also collects other significant early texts of adaptation theory, particularly on the relation between literature, film, and theater.

[2] E.g. Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O'Flynn. *A Theory of Adaptation*. 2nd ed. New York / London 2013.

[3] Clare Parody. "Adaptation Essay Prize Winner: Franchising/Adaptation." *Adaptation* 4, no. 2 (2011): 210–218.

[4] It should, once again, be noted that early critics like Bluestone or Bazin were not as oblivious to such issues as they are often portrayed.

occupied particularly those adaptation scholars eager to introduce larger theoretical or cultural studies questions and move away from purely formal analyses.[5] Such questions include what Linda Hutcheon, building on Jill L. Levenson's work, calls processes of "indigenization", i.e. an examination of the ways in which "[c]ultures that adapt stories […] reshape narratives […] according to their own tastes and preoccupation, according to the politics, ethics, and aesthetics of their day".[6]

While cultural transfer is thus not foreign to adaptation scholars' work (e.g. Lucia Krämer's work on Bollywood adaptations),[7] their questions are still largely organized around the transfer of texts or narratives from one medium to another in a process that Irina Rajewski calls "medial transposition",[8] although some scholars also allow for intramedial adaptation.[9] In this special issue, we want to follow this trend of rethinking and broadening the scope of adaptation studies. We therefore propose to expand the notion of adaptation even further to include transpositions not only (and not even necessarily) from one medium to another, but also from one cultural field into another. This focus can include what would traditionally be regarded by most scholars as classic cases of adaptation/ translation that focus on notions of cultural embeddedness (as in Caroline Lusin's contribution), but they may also go beyond the direct transfer of concrete texts, as in Kai Fischer's discussion of the 'adaptation' of rave culture into a novel, Solvejg Nitzke's use of adaption to explain how ideas travel between scientific and popular literature, or Dorothee Birke and Johannes Fehrle's examination of the adaptation to the internet of book culture as a discursive regime tied to both material objects and cultural practices. Regarded in this broader context, the concepts of adaptation and translation can be productive categories to make sense of otherwise seemingly unrelated phenomena that would usually be treated under widely different categories.

Expanding and bringing into contact the fields of adaptation and translation studies offers new insights for a comparative study of different and seemingly unrelated kinds of cultural transfer. Rather than further decentering a discipline which has already been described by so many scholars as a field without a centre (a trait seen as either a strength or weakness depending on the particular critic's perspective), we want to suggest using adaptation and translation as both lenses and metaphors to explore the traveling of cultures, discourses, and concepts across a wide array of fields.

To do so we propose the concept of cultural 'translation'. Translation as a trope to redefine adaptation studies was already suggested by Robert Stam in one of adaptation studies' most foundational and most cited essays, but it is usually forgotten when Stam's work is referenced, taking the back seat behind the more

---

[5] Cf. Elliott. "Theorizing Adaptation/Adapting Theories."

[6] Linda Hutcheon. "Moving Forward: The Next Step in Adaptation Studies." In: Nassim Winnie Balestrini (ed.). *Adaptation and American Studies: Perspectives on Research and Teaching, With an Afterword by Linda Hutcheon*. Heidelberg 2011, pp. 213-17; p. 217.

[7] Lucia Krämer. *Bollywood in Britain: Cinema, Brand, Discursive Complex*. New York, et. al. 2016, pp. 187-225.

[8] Irina O. Rajewsky. "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality." *Intermédialités* 6 (2005): pp. 43–64; p. 51.

[9] E.g. Hutcheon with O'Flynn. *Theory*, p. 7-8.

popular "intertextual dialogism" suggested later in the same essay.[10] As Stam argues, "art renews itself through creative mistranslation",[11] and so does culture, as we will suggest below. By taking Stam's textual and artistic translation and reframing it as cultural translation, we hark back to the term's linguistic origin, which – as the late Laurence Raw explains – came into use in the Middle Ages "to describe a process of carrying across cultures (originally used to refer to the physical transfer of relics), linked to the Latin words *translatio* or *transferre*".[12] As Raw and other scholars including Katja Krebs and Márta Minier have pointed out, such an approach that brings into contact the disciplines of adaptation and translation studies reveals not only that the boundaries between translation and adaptation are highly diffuse and dependent on historical and cultural contexts. It also means that many of the questions and methods developed in the respective fields are, in fact, compatible and can be fruitfully brought into contact.

Questions of cultural specificity, difference, and belonging connect adaptations and translations insofar as both processes have to come to terms with questions of origin and destination. Rather than merely finding ways to employ most effectively the respective media involved in adaptation processes, media which according to some scholars "can" and "can't" do certain things,[13] adapters, like translators, are confronted with the challenge of adequately transferring a text and its meaning from one semiotic system into another. Where their challenges converge is precisely in the embeddedness of such processes of adaptation/ translation in cultures, their conventions and codes between which they adapt/ translate. These can be the contexts of a certain political climate as in case of the Turkish translations/adaptations aiming to Westernize Turkey under Atatürk that Raw discusses;[14] or they can be attempts to transform e.g. adaptations of cult comic books to meet the taste and expectations of a Hollywood audience while retaining enough of a (sub)cultural appeal to build a bridge between different audiences and different media regimes. Likewise, the work of the translator is by no means restricted to finding semiotic equivalents. In order to convey the meaning of a text in another language and to a culturally different audience, the translator will have to build a bridge between cultures that is not exclusively restricted to the linguistic sphere. The translator as transposer between different languages frequently encounters cases in which the target language does not have the proper semiotic equivalents necessary to convey the meaning of the source text. Thus, just like adapters, translators are challenged by questions of cultural context and their task in these in-

---

[10] Robert Stam. "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation." In: Timothey Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj (eds.). *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classics and Contemporary Readings*. Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin's 2011, pp. 541-557; here pp. 549-550.
[11] Ibid. p. 549.
[12] Laurence Raw. "Introduction: Identifying Common Ground." In: Laurence Raw (ed.). *Translation, Adaptation and Transformation*. London and Oxford 2012, pp. 1-20; p. 4 (italics in orig.).
[13] Seymour Chatman. "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)." *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 121-140; Anne Gjelsvik."What Novels Can Tell That Movies Can't Show." In: Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (eds.). *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*. London et al. 2013, pp. 245-264.
[14] Raw. "Introduction", pp. 6-8.

stances flows into that of adaptation: will the signs in the target language be intelligible without the specific context of the source language and if not how much change is necessary, permissible or desirable to make it comprehensible? In this respect, as Katja Krebs has argued, translation and adaptation are, once again, comparable processes in that both are concerned with questions of "faithfulness" and "equivalence".[15] Both practices are ultimately "phenomena of constructing cultures through acts of rewriting".[16]

An example for this kind of challenge in which a translator must struggle to adapt the text within a different cultural semiotic context is Irvine Welsh's novel Trainspotting (1993). Trainspotting confronts the reader (and the translator) with a number of transcribed dialects and sociolects rooted in Scotland's capital Edinburgh. This type of prose not only proves to be challenging for non-native readers, but also for those whose native tongue is English, but who may not be familiar with the linguistic details of Scottish dialects and sociolects. In an interview conducted by Nadine Schwandt, literary translator Peter Torberg recalls his own problems while translating Trainspotting into German in the 1990s. As readers familiar with both the German and the English version of the novel know, one particular chapter is entirely missing in the German edition. Only two pages long, "The Elusive Mr Hunt", is building towards a pun which is so unique to the phonetic and semiotic particularities of the Scottish dialect that it proves to be virtually untranslatable. In the chapter, Kelly, one of the novel's main protagonists, falls victim to a prank phone call by one of her male friends while working at a pub. Sick Boy asks for a pub dweller named Mark Hunt, which prompts Kelly to yell across the bar: "ANYBODY SEEN MARK HUNT? [...] This guy on the phone wis after Mark Hunt". It is only after the male guests collapse into "lynch mob laughter" that Kelly realises the cruel joke she has fallen prey to: "Mark Hunt", if pronounced with a Scottish inflection, is homophonous with "ma [my] cunt."

Several things are thus necessary for an adequate translation of this chapter: one has to be aware of the specific cultural semiotic context within which the term "cunt" assumes its significance. While it might be possible to find a lexical equivalent in the target language that has the same drastic and vulgar meaning as "cunt", a proper translation would also have to find an equivalent for the phonetic intricacies on display in Welsh's source text. As Katherine Ashley has argued, with a text like *Trainspotting*, translations into other languages are very likely to gloss over aspects and thereby to neutralise issues of social class, regional difference, ethnicity and gender. In *Trainspotting*, and one could extend this to all texts, no linguistic feature is "culturally neutral". Careful attention to adapting the novel's cultural details is therefore a crucial task which goes beyond translation on the lexical level and enters the realm of 'cultural translation' that we have identified as the terrain of adaptation.

In our special issue we thus aim to scrutinize the notion of translation as a process of bringing different cultures into contact through the comparative lens of

---

[15] Katja Krebs. "Translation and Adaptation – Two Sides of an Ideological Coin?" In: Laurence Raw (ed.). *Translation, Adaptation and Transformation*. London / Oxford 2012, pp. 42-53; p. 43.
[16] Ibid., p. 42.

adaptation studies. We work with a broad definition of what cultures are, ranging from the hegemonic definition of "national cultures" via different subcultures to the separate discursive and ideological fields of science and the humanities and the possible exchange between the two.

In this context, the notion of "rewriting" is of central importance for this definition of translation and adaptation. Following Homi Bhabha, such "rewriting" could be described as the very essence of cultural encounters. Drawing on Walter Benjamin, Bhabha regards cultural translation as always marked by a fundamental "foreignness".[17] Translation is thus a performative process which embodies the "staging of cultural difference".[18] According to Bhabha's reading of Benjamin, culture will always remain fundamentally "untranslatable" – and yet, this very untranslatability is that which lets "newness" enter the world.[19] It is the "constant state of contestation and flux caused by the differential systems of social and cultural signification" which is paradoxically that from which the possibility of cultural communication arises.[20] While Bhabha explicitly develops his argument about cultural translation and the emergence of "newness" from in-between spaces that emerge in encounters of migrant cultures, his argument can also be considered in the context of what we regard in this special issue as the transferral of cultural narratives through adaptation or cultural translation.

What is central to our understanding of adaptation and cultural translation is the question of inter- and intrasemiotic transposition.[21] Thus, the analyses in our issue touch upon questions that are central to both adaptation and translation studies. They are concerned with the process of translation and adaptation as the work of a "*transcultural actor* who can adapt the source text to respond to the demands/values of the audience, taking into account cultural and behavioural differences".[22] The uses of the concepts of adaptation and translation are therefore not restricted to textual levels or to transferring a narrative from one medium to the other or from one language into a different one. Rather, adaptation and translation entail a much more complex understanding of what cultures are. As Edwin Gentzler states with regard to the intersection of translation studies and cultural studies: "In a world with increasing forms of communication and migration of people, translation will become increasingly more important at those multiple sites where different cultures come into contact".[23] This is also true for the kinds of interdiscursive adaptation and translation considered in the articles of this special issue.

---

[17] Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. New York 2010, p. 325.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Cf. Márta Minier. "Definitions, Dyads, Triads and Other Points of Connection in Translation and Adaptation Discourse." In: Katja Krebs (ed.). *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film*. New York 2014, pp. 13-35; p. 18.
[22] Edwin Gentzler. "Translation and Cultural Studies." In: Harald Kittel et al. (eds.). *Übersetzung. Ein internationals Handbuch zur Übersetzungsforschung*. Berlin / New York 2004, pp. 166-170; p. 167 (emphasis in orig.).
[23] Ibid., p.169.

In all cases, processes of rewriting are a fundamental part of constructing cultures.[24]

The power of narrative (be it in strictly fictional discourse or in other not primarily fictional texts) frequently functions as a vehicle for such processes of translation from one specifically coded semiotic field into a different cultural and discursive context aiming, among other things, to adapt certain notions and values associated with these fields and contexts into different ones. The process of adaptation / translation thereby appropriates and complicates the supposed aura of the 'original' artefact or discourse, sometimes paradoxically while aiming to re-inscribe it. By focusing on these processes of adaptation and their implications for 'original' and 'adaptation,' the issue highlights the contradictory forces at the heart of transferring and reworking culturally coded narratives and practices. A decidedly comparative approach to these processes illuminates the strategies with which discursive patterns are being translated and re-employed within the adapted text or discourse. By looking at these strategies as a *tertium comparationis*, the contributors aim at studying the commonalities and differences between individual discursive fields. The articles deal with processes of adaptation/ translation employing a variety of approaches, including ones from the fields of literary, media, adaptation, cultural, and translation studies.

Dorothee Birke and Johannes Fehrle's article "#booklove: How Reading Culture is Adapted on the Internet" examines the cultural practice of reading and its changes in past decades. Starting from widespread conceptions of a split between "old media" book culture and new media "digital culture" the authors employ concepts from media studies such as Henry Jenkin's concept of "convergence culture" to question such clear either/or conceptions of worthwhile cultural practices like reading and a presumably post-literate, wholly commercialized, and empty internet age. Examining new media variations of older institutions like the book club, Birke and Fehrle examine how the cultural capital associated with the practice of reading and "bookishness" has been appropriated and transformed in today's digital economy, bringing to the fore forms of "performative reading" (Birke and Fehrle) that are at once new in form and old in function.

In his contribution "'Prole Politics' – Adaptation as Appropriation of Techno in the Works of Rainald Goetz", Kai Fischer considers German writer Rainald Goetz's literary and journalistic writings on techno as a case in which the text is not only about a certain style of music and its subculture, but in which the structural patterns and the (emotional) effect of the music are being appropriated and thus adapted by and into literary language. Fischer shows how Goetz ultimately arrives at an aesthetic and political programme through his writing about and with techno by adapting from the music scene of the 1990s.

Caroline Lusin focuses on the considerable impact of Russian literature on British writers in the 20th and 21st centuries by exploring the cultural transfer of Venedikt Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki*. In her article "A One-Way Ticket to Paradise? Adapting the Bible in Venedikt Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki* (1973), Stephen Mulrine's *Moscow Stations* (1993), and A.L. Kennedy's *Paradise* (2004)", she utilises Yuri Lotman's notion of culture as a "semiosphere" to assess the relationship of

---

[24] Katja Krebs. "Translation and Adaptation", p. 42.

"original" and "adaptation". Building on Lotman's concepts, Lusin considers adaptation and translation on two levels: first, the adaptation and translation of Russian motifs and themes in British literature, and, on a second level, the adaptation of Biblical motifs in these texts. Lusin is thus concerned with multiple processes of adaptation and translation in which the use of more or less transversal motifs serves as a bridge between cultures which otherwise are challenged, among other factors, by language barriers.

In "The Adaptation of Failure: Representations of Environmental Crises in Climate Change Fiction", Solvejg Nitzke takes her cue from the "Two Cultures" debate initiated by C. P. Snow in his 1959 Rede lecture. As is well known, Snow diagnosed a growing gap between literary intellectuals, the humanities and scientists who in his view form distinct groups and even speak different academic languages. Nitzke reconsiders this hypothesis by looking at current examples of popular "climate change fiction", i.e. narratives (literary texts, films, and documentaries) which translate scientific knowledge and language into the realm of the fictional in order to give their narratives a "scientific feel". By analysing Roland Emmerich's film *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and the novels *Freedom* (2010) by Jonathan Franzen and *Solar* (2010) by Ian McEwan, Nitzke shows how scientific knowledge (or what is assumed to be scientific knowledge) is appropriated by the filmic and literary narratives as well as by the characters on the diegetic level. Adaptation, Nitzke argues, is thus a negotiating process both in scientific knowledge production and fictional representation. Seeing adaptation as a link can thus bridge the gap between the "two cultures."

Together the articles in this special issue extend the potentials of adaptation studies by shedding light on a variety of textual phenomena regarded under a wider angle of adaptation and translation of cultural phenomena. The analyses exemplify the translational aspects of narrative as a cultural practice across discourses and media, extending beyond literature and film and opening up new areas of discussion for the thriving new field of adaptation studies and its intersection with translation studies when approached from a cultural studies perspective.