Word and Text A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics	Vol. IV, Issue 2 December / 2014	5 – 9

Cultural Transfer: An Introduction

> We need to understand colonization, exile, emigration, wandering, contamination, and unintended consequences, along with the fierce compulsions of greed, longing, and restlessness, for it is these disruptive forces that principally shape the history and diffusion of identity and language, and not a rooted sense of cultural legitimacy.[1]

The editors of this special issue of *Word and Text* conceptualize 'Cultural Transfer' as the global mobility of words, concepts, images, persons, animals, commodities, money, weapons, and other things (understood in a broad sense). Such a pragmatic understanding, indebted to Stephen Greenblatt's notion of 'cultural mobility',[2] is offered as a starting point for interdisciplinary debate on transfer processes that focus on their textual and largely cultural mediation in a general and traditional sense. However, we would like to supplement this broad definition with four specifications:

First, acknowledging the fluidity of words, texts and images, etc. not only stresses the flow of objects of all kinds but also the fluidity of the persons involved as well as the instability of the environments in which these processes take place. Borders and places, even if imaginary, are constantly 'on the move' so that it has become increasingly difficult to identify origins and ends or even signposts and directions of cultural processes, especially with regard to their textual traces. Thus, culture itself may be read *as* transfer, as suggested by Lutz Musner,[3] and, more specifically, as an on-going negotiation and differentiation.

Second, despite the transferring nature of objects and environments, demarcations of borders are not only very real, but there are also strict limits and often unsurpassable obstacles and barriers to the mobility of things. Discourses of 'culture' and 'text' prove highly effective in terms of inclusion or exclusion, and 'imaginary communities'[4] are potent political agents. The analysis of Cultural Transfer and Culture *as* Transfer has to take into account the dramatic situations of contact zones and border regimes a well as the conditions and dynamics of selection, translation, adaption or mutation within highly asymmetrical power relations. Thus, the necessary acknowledgement of an oscillation between fluidity and stasis with regard to 'culture' does neither stop short at an abstract diagnosis of rhizomatic lines of flight[5] or the endless play of *différance*[6] nor

[1] Stephen Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.
[2] See Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility*.
[3] Lutz Musner, 'Kultur als Transfer. Ein regulationstheoretischer Zugang am Beispiel der Architektur', in *Ent-grenzte Räume. Kulturelle Transfers um 1900 und in der Gegenwart*, ed. Helga Mitterbauer (Wien: Passagen-Verlag, 2005), 175f.
[4] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Revised ed. (London: Verso, 2006).
[5] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 3-28.

does it in any sense privilege a return to an understanding of culture as something coherent, substantial, or even metaphysical. This is why the editors prefer to use the adjectival form 'cultural' (as suggested by Arjun Appadurai) in order to allow for the analysis of differences, contrasts, hybridity as well as similarities, shared features and interstices between all sorts of categories – languages, classes, genders, roles, social fields, groups, nations, etc. In short, cultural transfer does not mean transfer between static and essentialized 'cultures' or the transfer of 'Culture' but, rather, a differing game and its very real yet unstable discursive effects (differences, identities) within the analytical framework of the 'cultural'.

Such an approach and conceptualization allows for Cultural Transfer to become a heuristic device for talking about difference and similarity with regard to textuality as conceptuality, but – and this is the third specification – it simultaneously undermines an analytical conception of the textual as, in Derrida's words, 'confined in a volume itself confined to the library' or of the 'cultural' as confined to language or cognition. Moreover, it allows for a broader understanding that might at least have a vague prospect of conciliating conceptuality and materiality.[7] On the one hand, such a formulation leads back to and simultaneously widens our list of objects of Cultural Transfer in the first paragraph: Cultural Transfer has to take into account entanglements between the conceptual and the material and acknowledge that the anthropocentric notion of the human as the prime mover of objects (in a broad sense) and creator of meaning is troubled by the agency of nonhuman life (animals, viruses, etc.), inorganic matter (particles, etc.), and the various idiosyncrasies of these objects themselves. On the other hand, the blurring of boundaries between the material and conceptual opens up space for a (serious) gaming with analogies, comparisons and – beyond the mere conceptual – *relations:* transplantation, infection, evolution, etc.

Last but not least, Cultural Transfer is itself an object of transfer, a 'travelling concept' in the Humanities and Social Sciences as conceived by Mieke Bal. Cultural Transfer, although precursed and paralleled of course, was formulated by historians Michel Espagne and Michael Werner in the mid-1980s as the *terminus technicus* for the analysis of historical relations between France and Germany. Espagne and Werner opposed the then widely accepted history of hegemonic influence *(Einflussgeschichte),* focussing instead on simultaneous research into neighbouring societies and peripheral zones (*métissage*)[8]. While at first, Cultural Transfer Studies were mainly preoccupied by bi- or trilateral transfers and interconnections between Central European nation states, the concept since then has been considerably developed, for example with the help of postcolonial studies allowing for the study of more complex spatio-temporal overlapping and applied to more dynamic (global, local, continental, areal, etc.) cultural formations.[9] Cultural Transfer has long become a highly integrative, polivocal and

[6] See especially Derrida's essay 'Différance', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 3-27.

[7] Cp. Vicki Kirby's attempt to read Derrida's 'no outside of text' as 'no outside of Nature'. Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), x-xii.

[8] See especially Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, 'Deutsch-Französischer Kulturtransfer im 18. und 19. Jh.: Zu einem neuen interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramm des C.N.R.S.', *Francia* 13 (1985): 502-10.

[9] See for example the concept of *Histoire Croisée* (Shared History) brought forth by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann in the first decade of the Millenium: Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmerman, 'Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45.1 (2006): 30-50, or the postulation of the introduction of postcolonial studies into the concept of Cultural Transfer

elastic concept,[10] although it still contains a residual element of a slightly more essentialist and particularistic concept of culture (*cultures*), of transfer as a unilateral process, and of its origin mainly in French and German historical studies. The editors of this special issue do not try to restrain Cultural Transfer to a legacy though, nor do they intend to elaborate the *terminus technicus* of a certain approach. This is not an issue *on* Cultural Transfer as either a (changing) disciplinary approach or a clearly delimited object. Cultural Transfer is a travelling concept with a history,[11] of course, and the editors 'mean' something by using the term. Since the term has neither an origin nor a univocal meaning, we are not primarily interested in its genealogy, nor in orbiting a self-evident semantic field that gravitates towards a stable empirical ground.

For this very reason, this issue of *Word and Text* is above all a conceptual one: following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Cultural Transfer is the starting point for heuristic readings, the production of new or moulding of elder concepts,[12] models and terminology (genealogy, circulation, emergence, translation, adaptation, articulation, transfer, transit, transplantation, evolution, infection, etc.) – its disciplinary legacy serving as a possibly rewarding corrosive acid for distinctions at most, with our own positioning merely being one voice on an open discursive platform. The present issue invited contributors to critically engage and take up a position in such a more conceptually-driven discussion of Cultural Transfer – mostly grounded in specifics and singularities.

The volume is divided into three sections. The first is a programmatic 'gaze from afar' (Claude Lévi-Strauss) on issues raised by the two terms within the collocation Cultural Transfer: 'Culture' and 'Transfer'. It opens with an interview with Anil Bhatti, originally held in 2011. Bhatti suggests that a traditional, still flourishing emphasis on the principle of fixed differences, of Own/Alien in hermeneutic cultural(ist) theory is inadequate for comprehending the complexity of a world of movement and transformation. Instead, Bhatti suggests to focus on the 'as-well-as', on 'over-lapping' and 'translation', on 'the vague' and 'the preliminary'. His overarching analytical category, which embraces all of these states, and fosters the search for commonalities amidst differences is 'Similarity'. Thinking in Similarity, according to Bhatti, allows us to discover connecting lines and a peculiar spontaneity of possibility that makes us think off the beaten track. In the end, Similarity subverts attempts at separation and apartheid,

(Kulturtransfer) by Helga Mitterbauer, 'Postkoloniale Konzepte in der Erforschung kultureller Transferprozesse', in *Überbringen – Überformen – Überblenden. Theorietransfer im 20. Jahrhundert,* ed. Dietlind Hüchtker and Alfrun Kliems (Köln: Böhlau, 2011), 75-92.

[10] Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 11-14.

[11] For a genealogy of the concept of cultural transfer starting from Espagne and Werner see f.e. Mathias Middell, Mathias 'Von der Wechselseitigkeit der Kulturen im Austausch. Das Konzept des Kulturtransfers in verschiedenen Forschungskontexten', in *Metropolen und Kulturtransfer im 15./16. Jahrhundert. Prag – Krakau – Danzig – Wien*, ed. Andrea Langer (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2001), 15-51, Helga Mitterbauer, 'Mittler und Medien. Reflexionen über zentrale Kategorien der Kulturtransferforschung', in *Zwischenräume. Kulturelle Transfers in deutschsprachigen Regionalperiodika des Habsburgerreichs (1850 – 1918),* ed. Matjaz Birk (Wien: Lit-Verlag, 2009), 25-37. Jörg Feuchter, 'Cultural transfers in dispute: An Introduction', in *Cultural Transfers in Dispute: Representations in Asia, Europe and the Arab World since the Middle Ages,* ed. Jörg Feuchter (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2011) 15-40, Anna Veronika Wendland, 'Cultural Transfer', in *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture,* ed. Birgit Neumann und Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2012) 45-66.

[12] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994).

and leads towards an ethics of solidarity. The interview is followed by Anna Malinowska's 'Cultural Transplantation and Problems of Transferability' an essay which suggests to read Cultural Transfer in terms of 'cultural transplantation' as things become grafted from one 'cultural body' to another. As in the case of medical transplantations, such an understanding raises questions of adaptability. Borrowing from Transfer and Mobility Studies, Malinowska proposes to speak of the transferability of objects, practices, and narratives of culture in order to analyse the necessary conditions behind actual transfers, the adaptability of cultural phenomena to new environments, and the capabilities of the latter to incorporate the migrating objects of difference. Malinowska thus suggests focusing first of all on what (pre)conditions Cultural Transfer.

The second section of this special issue centres on discursive cultural formation and empowerment as effects of synchronic and diachronic Cultural Transfer. In her article 'Metaphor of Foreign Languages: "Geopolinguistics" in Romanian Culture' Ilinca Stroe presents Romania as paradigmatic for a country in which a traditional propensity of hybridity has been deliberately invested with geopolitics. Hybridization – through an assimilationist attitude towards foreign and second languages, for example – has been willingly and knowingly embraced by leading Romanian intellectuals as a *modus operandi* in the modernization of the country. In the process, especially the 'oriental-occidental' borders were considered to be fertile grounds for the production of a Romanian 'nationhood', 'identity', and 'culture'. Thus, according to Stroe, modern Romanian culture empowers itself by deliberately constructing itself as hybrid.

Pia Härter's 'Generatio(n): The Concept of Genealogy as a Form of Cultural Mobilization in Francis Meres' Honouring of Shakespeare (1598), Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* (1595), Ben Jonson's *Timber, or Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter* (1640)' presents a diachronic version of such cultural empowerment that seems to be opposed to Stroe's case at first glance. Drawing on contemporary texts by Francis Mere, Sir Philip Sydney and Ben Jonson, Härter analyses how writers in Renaissance England used the concept of genealogy in order to bridge the temporal gap to Antiquity. Genealogy, here, is employed to establish continuity, tradition and stability and, as such, leading to a strong (self-)concept of cultural heritage and identity. At the same time, the concept of genealogy not only stabilizes identity, but also carries within itself a destabilizing potential, insofar as it is a concept that has to justify cultural mobility and flexibility.

The third section turns towards specific heuristic readings of Cultural Transfer. In her contribution 'A Word: 'Palaver' and Its Transferal Residues', Mira Shah traces the rich history and journey of the word 'palaver' as it has been travelling since early-colonial times. According to Shah, the complex transfer of palaver, accumulating residual elements and transforming itself as well as its 'hosts' throughout its global spreading and infection, can be likened to the microcellular workings of a (retro)virus, thus offering a new vital model of Cultural Transfer. Ibrahim Marazka's 'Translation beyond Empire: On the Equiprimordiality of Original and Translation' draws attention to the colonial impacts of a translation theory that claims the primacy of the original over the translation. To counter imperialist politics, according to Marazka, it is necessary to regard translation under the premise of the equiprimordiality of the original and its translation. When viewed through such a framework, the author claims, translation takes the form of a *circulation* of texts, rather than that of a unidirectional movement from

origin to target normally associated with the term 'transfer'. Translation had thus better to be seen as the free movement and circulation of texts and cultural products.

The section closes with Tanja Klankert's essay 'Strange Relations: Cultural Translation of Noh theater in Ezra Pound's Dance Poems and W. B. Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well*.' Drawing on the reception of Japanese Noh Theater by Ezra Pound and William Butler Yeats, Klankert introduces a particular model of Cultural Transfer. She argues that the Irish writer's adoption of Noh is, in fact, not a transfer of a foreign object, but the staging of spatiotemporal relations marked by residual cultural difference. This method is termed 'foreignizing' in cultural translation theory, and can, as Klankert advocates, serve as a model or the study of Cultural Transfer as Cultural Translation in general.

What Laurent Milesi and Julia Jordan called in the previous issue of *Word and Text* 'an unorthodox, "transgressive" performance of sorts'[13], an article that has been exceptionally allowed its own formatting experimentation is part of the Miscellaneous Section. Brian Macaskill's critical and creative piece on Coetzee, Joyce, ethics and mathematics continues with 'Fugal Musemathematics. Track One, Point Two: J.M. Coetzee, Ethics, and Joycean Counterpoint'.

The issue ends with two review articles of recent collections of essays that are relevant for the theme of Cultural Transfer, Anca Dobrinescu's 'Translation and Culture' which engages with Doris Bachmann-Medick's *The Trans/national Study of Culture: A Translational Perspective*, and Arleen Ionescu's 'Hospitalities' which assesses Thomas Claviez's *The Conditions of Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics on the Threshold of the Possible.*

The issue as a whole demonstrates that 'Cultural Transfer' is a topic *par excellence* for the theoretical humanities as they endeavour to come to terms with accelerated mobility (enforced and voluntary) in the age of global migration that not only impacts on social and political life but also on the production, circulation, translation and reception of words and texts.

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[13] Julia Jordan and Laurent Milesi, '"Keep It New": A (Re-)Introduction', *Word and Text – A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 4.1 (2014): 8.