

**Stéphanie VANASTEN, Hubert ROLAND, Maud
GONNE & Elies SMEYERS**

Introduction.

**On paradoxes, failures and misunderstandings in cultural
transfers**

Résumé

Conçue comme introduction globale à ce dossier thématique consacré aux paradoxes et malentendus des transferts culturels, la présente contribution aspire à fournir un cadre épistémologique adéquat à celui-ci sur base d'un état des lieux critique de la littérature théorique, mettant en évidence des réflexions plus ou moins abouties, voire laissées encore ouvertes sur la question des malentendus. L'énonciation d'un malentendu renvoie nécessairement à l'idée de la supposée « réussite » ou du possible « échec » dans la circulation du transfert culturel, une grille de lecture et d'interprétation que nous souhaitons remettre en cause. Plusieurs foyers d'interrogation sont ainsi esquissés autour de la prise en compte des notions d'imprédictibilité, de la généalogie et de l'historicité des transferts, afin d'interroger la logique sous-jacente des binarités et hiérarchies implicites qui, souvent, conditionnent l'interprétation du transfert culturel. Nous voulons ici suggérer que la prise en considération des paradoxes pourrait, au contraire, mener à une logique d'élargissement et de complexification permettant de stimuler de nouveaux questionnements de recherche.

Abstract

The present contribution is conceived as a global introduction to this thematic dossier devoted to paradoxes and misunderstandings in cultural transfers. It mainly aspires to provide an adequate epistemological framework on the basis of a critical review of theoretical literature on the subject, highlighting reflections on the issue of misunderstandings that are more or less accomplished, or even left open. The statement of a misunderstanding necessarily refers to the idea of the supposed "success" or possible "failure" in the circulation of a cultural transfer, a scheme of reading and interpretation that we want to question. Several lines of reflections are thus outlined around the notions of unpredictability, genealogy and historicity of transfers, in order to question the underlying logic of the implicit binarities and hierarchies that often condition the interpretation of cultural transfers. We want to suggest here that the consideration of paradoxes could, on the contrary, lead to a logic of enlargement and complexification allowing to stimulate new research questions.

To refer to this article:

Stéphanie VANASTEN, Hubert ROLAND, Maud GONNE, Elies SMEYERS, « Introduction. On paradoxes, failures and misunderstandings in cultural transfers », *Interférences littéraires / Littéraire interférenties*, n ° 26, « Paradoxes and Misunderstandings in Cultural Transfer/Paradoxes malentendus dans les transferts culturels », ed. by Gonne Maud, Roland Hubert, Vanasten Stéphanie, Crombois Julie, Smeyers Elies, May 2022, 24-45.



Interférences littéraires Literaire interferenties

Multilingual e-Journal for Literary Studies

CHIEF EDITORS

Liesbeth FRANÇOIS (University of Cambridge – KU Leuven)

Anke GILLEIR (KU Leuven)

Beatrijs VANACKER (KU Leuven)

EDITORIAL BOARD

Ben de BRUYN (UCL)

Christophe COLLARD (VUB)

Lieven D'HULST (KU Leuven – Kortrijk)

Raphaël INGELBIEN (KU Leuven)

Valérie LEYH (Université de Namur)

Katrien LIEVOIS (Universiteit Antwerpen)

David MARTENS (KU Leuven)

Chiara NANNICINI (Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis)

Hubert ROLAND (FNRS - UCL)

Mathieu SERGIER (Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis)

Lieke VAN DEINSEN (KU Leuven)

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Amélie JAKUES (KU Leuven - FWO)

Carolin LOYENS (KU Leuven - FWO)

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Sascha BRU (KU Leuven)

Geneviève FABRY (UCL)

Agnès GUIDERDONI (FNRS - UCL)

Nadia LIE (KU Leuven)

Michel LISSE (FNRS - UCL)

Christophe MEURÉE (Archives et Musée de la littérature)

Reine MEYLAERTS (KU Leuven)

Stéphanie VANASTEN (FNRS – UCL)

Ingo BERENSMEYER (LMU München)

Lars BERNAERTS (Universiteit Gent & Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Faith BINCKES (Worcester College, Oxford)

Franca BRUERA (Università di Torino)

Christian CHELEBOURG (Université de Nancy II)

Edoardo COSTADURA (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität - Jena)

Nicola CREIGHTON (Queen's University Belfast)

César DOMINGUEZ (Universidad de Santiago de Compostela & King's College)

Isabelle KRZYWKOWSKI (Université de Grenoble)

François LECERCLE (Paris IV - Sorbonne)

Isabelle MEURET (Université Libre de Bruxelles)

Christina MORIN (University of Limerick)

Andréa OBERHUBER (Université de Montréal)

INTRODUCTION. ON PARADOXES, FAILURES AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS IN CULTURAL TRANSFERS

Since its establishment in the course of the 1980s, positioning itself critically against contemporary Comparative Studies¹, the Cultural Transfer Approach applies to a whole set of phenomena ranging from encounters to circulation, reception and, above all, mediation, transformation and “resemantisation”² that involve texts, discourses, knowledge, images, media, objects and people as well as cultural practices between different periods and geocultural spaces. As an approach or research method of “intermediary scope”³ that wants to surpass national frameworks, the study of these cultural transfers has inspired a growing number of interdisciplinary works at the crossroads of (comparative) literary studies, translations studies, cultural and political history, sociology and anthropology (not to mention other fields of interest beyond the core focus of our present purpose). Besides the now central idea of displacement between (at least) one source and one target culture – analytical entities that have proven difficult to depart from⁴ –, Cultural Transfer Studies seek to account for instances of *métissage*⁵ and for the heterogeneity of the cultural spheres that are involved in the exchanges, as well as for the logics of intersection, rupture and hybridity, by identifying enclaves, networks, scales, actors, vectors and supports of material and linguistic circulation.⁶

Besides their conceptual relevance, their broad scope of investigation and their abundant number of instructive case studies or research projects (namely on mediation, transmission and particular cross-border exchanges or phenomena), the study of Cultural Transfers seems to have reached, after forty years, a turning point. In their time, Werner and Zimmerman⁷ have already shown that crossed objects, entities and practices do not escape the pitfalls of pre-established (national, regional, cultural) categorization. On the other hand, the methodological reassessment of notions of border(s) – sometimes at the expense of historicity –, the recurring observation of the instability or even unpredictability of transfers that undermine a macro-systemic approach, and the broadening of the concept to an increasingly large

¹ Michel ESPAGNE & Michael WERNER, *Transferts. Les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles)*, Paris, Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988.

² See Michel ESPAGNE, “La notion de transfert culturel”, in : *Revue Sciences/ Lettres* 2013, [online], <<https://doi.org/10.4000/rsl.219>>: “Tout passage d'un objet culturel d'un contexte dans un autre a pour conséquence une transformation de son sens, une dynamique de resémantisation.”

³ „[A] theory of intermediary scope“, Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, “Introduction. Reframing the Cultural Transfer Approach”, in: Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, *Cultural Transfer Reconsidered. Transnational Perspectives, Translation Processes, Scandinavian and Postcolonial Challenges*. Amsterdam, Brill (Approaches to Translation Studies, vol. 47), 2021, 2. See also Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation. Interaktion – Kulturtransfer – Fremdwahrnehmung*, Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 2008, 143.

⁴ Lieven D'HULST, “(Re)locating Translation History: From Assumed Translation to Assumed transfer”, in: *Translation Studies*, 2012, 5, 2, 140.

⁵ Michel ESPAGNE, “Introduction”, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands*, Paris, PUF, 1999, 1-15.

⁶ See, for the literary field, the six basic and specific features of ‘transfer’ as distinguished by D'hulst: Lieven D'HULST, “(Re)locating Translation History”, 2012, 140.

⁷ Michael WERNER & Bénédicte ZIMMERMANN, “Penser l'histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité”, in : *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 2003, 58, 7-36.

set of cultural phenomena could result in all kinds of unproductive relativism: if everything is transfer, nothing is transfer anymore.⁸ Besides, in the present globalized era of multiculturalism, objects, theories and methods can reveal a certain indeterminacy due to the fear to return both to constituent entities and monocultural or monolingual viewpoints. These uncertainties, combined with a lack of consensus and codification when it comes to theoretical, methodological and even metaphorical foundations⁹ have been an invitation to restore the value of cultural transfers vis-à-vis other concepts or related critical paradigms, stemming from Postcolonial Studies, Translation Studies, Transnational Historiography or Transcultural Studies.¹⁰ According to Matthias Middell and Antje Dietze, the “intercultural transfer approach has not developed into a general theory applicable everywhere. On the contrary, it is rather a key for the discovery of new research constellations, open for investigation and appropriation.”¹¹

With these critical considerations in mind, which specificities can the approach of cultural transfer still claim to possess? How can this approach, while the research field has already become significantly more international¹², be thought outside of the West-European context in which it originated? Can the notion of cultural transfer, as it was initially conceived, still help to overcome disciplinary, linguistic, cultural, regional and national borders? Or on the contrary, does it inevitably reactivate or even reinforce these borders to varying degrees?¹³ How can

⁸ “[...] one could object that if every cultural process is a transfer process, nothing is transfer anymore.”, Maud GONNE & Reine MEYLAERTS, “Introduction”, in: Maud GONNE, Klaartje MERRIGAN, Reine MEYLAERTS & Heleen VAN GERWEN (eds), *Transfer thinking in Translation Studies. Playing with the Black Box of Cultural Transfer*. Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2020, 11. See also this earlier reference: “[...] il est parfois délicat de s’entendre sur ce que signifie réellement un transfert. [...] La définition du « transfert culturel » n’est pas très précise, au risque de tenir tout transfert pour transfert culturel”, Béatrice JOYEUX-PRUNELLE, “Les transferts culturels. Un discours de la méthode”, in: *Hypothèses, Publications de la Sorbonne*, 2003, 6, 1, [online], <<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01478971/document>>, 15.

⁹ Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, “Introduction. Reframing the Cultural Transfer Approach”, in: Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, *Cultural Transfer Reconsidered. Transnational Perspectives, Translation Processes, Scandinavian and Postcolonial Challenges*, Amsterdam, Brill (Approaches to Translation Studies, vol. 47), 2021, 1. See also, concerning the “geringe Kodifizierung” of Transfer Studies research, Matthias MIDDELL, “Kulturtransfer, Transfers culturels. Version: 1.0”, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 28.01.2016, [online], <<https://docupedia.de/zg/Kulturtransfer>>. With regard to the poor metaphorical potential of transfer, see Andrew CHESTERMAN, “Transfer Troubles”, in: Maud GONNE, Klaartje MERRIGAN, Reine MEYLAERTS & Heleen VAN GERWEN (eds), *Transfer thinking in Translation Studies*, 207-223.

¹⁰ In this respect, the collective publication *Zwischen Transfer und Vergleich. Theorien und Methoden der Literatur- und Kulturbeziehungen aus deutsch-französischer Perspektive* (Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, 2013), edited by Christiane SOLTE-GRESSER, Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK and Manfred SCHMELING, gives, through its twenty-seven articles, an instructive inventory of the interactions within the large range of methods and research areas that have to do with the whole set of phenomena of comparison and transfer (See the review by Hubert ROLAND about this publication in *Komparatistik. Jahrbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*, Bielefeld, Aisthesis Verlag, 2014/2015, 337-340).

¹¹ Matthias MIDDELL & Antje DIETZE, “Methods in Transregional Studies. Intercultural Transfers”, in: Matthias MIDDELL (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies*, London, Routledge, 2018, 64 (quoted by Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, “Introduction. Reframing the Cultural Transfer Approach”, 9). Marjet Brolsma a.o. had already pointed out in an article that dates from 2008 and applies the concept of cultural transfer to the study of periodicals, that the study of Cultural Transfers is a possible approach rather than a well-defined method (Marjet BROLSMA, “Cultuurtransfer en het tijdschriftenonderzoek”, in: CONTEXTES 2008, 4, [online], <<http://journals.openedition.org/contextes/3823>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/contextes.3823>>).

¹² Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, “Introduction. Reframing the Cultural Transfer Approach”, 5.

¹³ Maud GONNE & Reine MEYLAERTS, “Introduction”, 26.

we deal with the non-linearity, the entanglement, and the asymmetry of processes of cultural transfer through time and space, and through particular cultural and political systems, in the light of the power relations at work? Is it possible to measure the impact of a cultural transfer and its relative “success” or “failure”, and if so, how? It was precisely to think about these questions that the international conference *Cultural Transfers: paradoxes and misunderstandings* was organized at the UCLouvain, between 22 and 24 May 2019. The objective of this scientific event was to rethink the viability of cultural transfers as a critical approach and paradigm and to question their instruments, concepts, goals, theoretical and epistemological frameworks from an interdisciplinary perspective, with a particular attention for the dimensions of the “failures” and “misunderstandings”, which are rather clearly labelled and circulating as such, but which stayed, until now, relatively undertheorized and understudied on a terminological level. The eleven contributions to this special issue resulted from the fruitful exchanges that took place during the conference and want to, from different disciplinary viewpoints (literary and artistic, linguistic, historical, philosophical, and mainly related to the study of translation), bring new insights by taking into account cases and practices where cultural transfers meet with resistance, cause misunderstandings, define hierarchies and asymmetries, generate contradictory interpretations and reinterpretations, or where they do not work very well as a heuristic framework.

Rethinking cultural transfers in the light of their constraints

Nowadays, one could think that as a result of a globalized world – which implies an increased connectivity, an intensification of bi- and multi-lateral communicational exchanges beyond geographical and territorial distances, as well as a growing cultural heterogeneity of our societies – the question of cultural transfers has become inevitable. To such an extent that it seems a priori difficult to think these days about the ideas of mobility and displacement, and of processes of linguistic, cultural and social exchange without being confronted with the problem of cultural transfers, no matter their form or shape.

Simultaneously – as the worldwide health crisis has made indisputably clear since March 2020 – the question of the mobility of people and goods stays inextricably linked with the political willingness for border control, and with decisions related to the physical facilitation or restriction of exchanges, journeys, and migrations. But beyond this political dependence, connections do arise and exist: the reinforcement of national borders does not prevent the occurrence of (varying degrees and intensities of) cultural transfers. On the contrary, other channels of communication (mainly digital in nature) arise in order to allow for the transition of information, objects, discourses and media between national, regional or other groups, languages and communities. Constraints emerge from these new connections, new modes of transfer produce “something new which changes

tradition, the constellation, the consequences and side-effects of the meeting between cultures, the dynamics of development and the feedback effects”.¹⁴

Between enthusiastic reactions, truisms and a certain resistance to think in dynamic terms of interculturality and mobility, one of the most frequently invoked arguments to question the operability of the notion of cultural transfer today is related to the numerous paradoxes, misunderstandings and disagreements that circulation, transmission and the perception of intercultural practices generate inevitably. The latter do indeed come across multiple positionings, mutual or non-reciprocal interests, functional changes, and particular narratives. One should not forget the numerous possible situations in which transfers stay unformed, unaccomplished, neglected, insufficient or too informal or anecdotic to be visible for posterity. Moreover, from a more radical perspective, it could be risky to think about cultural transfers as having a fortiori a happy, positive outcome or a harmonious outline that results in political appeasement and reconciliation – as was the case in the seminal French-German studies on cultural transfer that refer to the institutional and geopolitical context that has accompanied and supported them. It would indeed make us forget that the question of trans- and pluriculturality has rarely been as virulently present in politics as it has been during the last few decades. Recurring discourses about “the migration crisis” on the one hand – as well as the rise of nationalist movements as a response to phenomena of exile in Europe, the polarization between ethnic and social groups, and an overt hostility toward multiculturalism – and, on the other hand, the repeated call for the decolonization of mentalities and ways of thinking, or the visibilization of mechanisms of (racial, linguistic, ethnic, sexual, gender-related, etc.) oppression in society remind us that inclusiveness and the awareness of diversity in international and intercultural interactions are still far from acquired. Numerous blind spots continue to exist. Which role do cultural transfers really play in the questioning of (geopolitical, ideological, social) borders, their emergence, rehabilitation, or fixation? How should one think conceptually and epistemologically, when it comes to the shifting insertion of new cultural elements, about their constraints, difficulties, paradoxical developments, discontinuities and misunderstandings, about their inertia or even unproductivity?

Paradoxes, misunderstandings, failures

The notion of cultural transfer is in scientific literature generally based on ideas of displacement, transposition, some sort of arrival or evenemential dimension, however gradual it might be, within another culture or language, within an unpredictable “elsewhere”. According to Walter Moser, cultural transfers are characterized by a “transitivity” and “vectoriality”, which entail three operations:

¹⁴ Christiane EISENBERG, “Cultural Transfer as a Historical Process: Research Questions, Steps of Analysis, Methods”, in: Jürgen SCHLAEGER, *Metamorphosis. Structures of Cultural Transformations*, Tübingen, Günter Narr, 2005, 99-100. Quoted from Maud GONNE & Reine MEYLAERTS, “Introduction”, 28.

first of all, “extraction from the giver system”, which involves an act of selection, secondly, “displacement (the act of transferring proper)”, and finally “insertion into the receiver system”, marked by more or less important transformations of the transferred artefacts.¹⁵ In other words, cultural transfers result from a perspective, a trajectory, an “underlying motivation” or generator, as it has previously been described by Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink¹⁶, as well as from success, innovation, attempts to reach mutual comprehension or accommodation, from opposition and resistance, whether it is on a political or ideological, economic, cultural, or even emotional or affective level.¹⁷ Nevertheless, cultural transfers are just as much the outcome of coincidence and unpredictable circumstances. As far as their objects are concerned, they are often defined, from an epistemological perspective, in terms of hybridity, “métissage”, and heterogeneity with regard to the linguistic and cultural spaces involved. Their analysis is often carried out according to the logics of intersection and imbrication; in short: in relations and dynamics of plural exchanges, thus prolonging the initial developments of the field of study (*Kultur-/Beziehungsgeschichte*), between and across different cultures (regions, nations, etc.)¹⁸, but with a focus on the receiving culture.¹⁹

In order to conceptualize or model these trajectories, it was inevitable that a certain kind of metaphoricity has been implemented on various levels: relational (dealing with reciprocity), temporal (dealing with periodization, generations, “back and forth transfer”), spatial (dealing with non-linearity and multidirectionality), transformative (dealing with translation, adaptation, resemantization, de- and recontextualization), or process-related (state, movement, dynamics). According to Andrew Chesterman however, it is the metaphor of transfer in itself that is problematic.²⁰ First of all, because in its metaphorical dimension, transfer implies the movement of texts or objects from a point A towards a point B (see also the notions of transitivity or vectoriality as used by Walter Moser) – or even towards a point C, in the case of triangular transfers – even though “a text in culture A that is translated into culture B is not, after this process, by definition absent from culture A”. Chesterman considers the notion of movement therefore as misleading, because the source text or object generally does not disappear as a result of the transfer.²¹ A cultural transfer rarely occurs all of a sudden, *deus ex machina*, in another cultural

¹⁵ Walter MOSER, “Cultural Transfer and its Complexities: A Study on Transnational and Transhistorical Mobilities of the Baroque”, in: Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, *Cultural Transfer Reconsidered. Transnational Perspectives, Translation Processes, Scandinavian and Postcolonial Challenges*, Amsterdam, Brill (Approaches to Translation Studies, vol. 47), 2021, 172-173.

¹⁶ “the underlying motivations (or ‘generators’) of cultural transfers/ Antriebskräfte oder Generatoren von Kulturtransferprozessen”, Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation*, 2008: 140-141.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*. See also: Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, *Cultural Transfer Reconsidered*, 5.

¹⁸ Anna Veronika WENDLAND, “Cultural Transfer”, in: Birgit NEUMANN & Ansgar NÜNNING (Eds.), *Travelling Concepts for the Study of culture*. Berlin, De Gruyter, 2012, 1st edition, 49 and 5. See also the sequence of subjects of study as formulated by Matthias Middell, for the study of Cultural Transfer, starting from the context of appropriation of foreign elements within a culture B and going back to culture A, Matthias MIDDELL, “Kulturtransfer, Transferts culturels. Version: 1.0”, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 28.01.2016, [online], <<https://docupedia.de/zg/Kulturtransfer>>.

¹⁹ See already Itamar EVEN-ZOHAR, “The Making of Cultural Repertoire and the Role of Transfer”, in: *Target*, 9, 2, 1997, 373-381.

²⁰ Andrew CHESTERMAN, “Transfer Troubles”, 210.

²¹ *Ibid.* 212.

space of reception : it not only embeds itself in the receiving culture B, but is also already related to its exporting source culture A, where it (or its effects) can come back (taking other forms and contents) afterwards. This way, we can broaden the understanding of cultural transfers towards the intercultural, as it was already formulated by Walter Moser.²² According to Jørgensen and Lüsebrink as well, the process of cultural transfer demonstrates a productive “reciprocity” and the reinterpretations, patterns of perception and readings that characterize it, in return, also affect the “producing cultures”.²³

Furthermore, the transfer metaphor is also problematic because the ‘transferred’ text, discourse, medium or artefact implies, according to Chesterman, a certain invariance, which does not correspond to the transformative and interweaving nature of transfers: “if you ‘carry something across’, you normally assume that it is the same something that arrives on the other side”.²⁴ Probably it is, within the framework of cultural transfer, this older sense given to the notion of transfer as an exchange of cultural goods (in a commercial context)²⁵ that is essentially intended by Chesterman. In any case, to compensate for these shortcomings, whether they are presupposed or implicit, an increasing number of terminological complements related to various types of intercultural processes circulate, causing all kinds of translation problems of their own (*intercultural entanglement*, *Verflechtung*, *shared history*, etc.²⁶). In light of these observations, we think that approaching the question of cultural transfers from the perspective of paradoxes, misunderstandings and failures might invite new insights as well as new questions. Thus, we identified five focal points of investigation:

1. First of all, the notions of **paradoxes**, **misunderstandings** and **failures**: What happens when a transfer, against all odds, does not take place or takes place differently than expected? Is it possible to measure transfers (on a quantitative level), to evaluate their working and processes, their power relations and asymmetries, their impact, relative success or failure, the obstacles, resistance, and setbacks with which they are confronted through time? How can one define whether a transfer is successful, (partially) failed, thwarted, doomed to disappear, or neglected? And what about those mixed but frequent cases where, within a space, a temporality, a given state of mind, failure goes hand in hand with success and vice versa? And what do these rejected, aborted, or deflected transfers teach us, or even the absence, undervaluing or invisibilization (for example in contexts of political oppression and opposition) of transfers, about the understanding and study

²² Walter MOSER, “Pour une grammaire du concept de ‘transfert’ appliqué au culturel”, in : Pascal GIN, Nicolas GOYER & Walter MOSER, *Transfert. Explorations d'un champ conceptuel*, Ottawa, Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2014, 62.

²³ Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, “Introduction. Reframing the Cultural Transfer Approach”, 4-5.

²⁴ Andrew CHESTERMAN, “Transfer Troubles”, 210.

²⁵ Anna Veronika WENDLAND, “Cultural Transfer”, 59.

²⁶ See also Michael WERNER, “Konzeptionen und theoretische Ansätze zur Untersuchung von Kulturbeziehungen”, in: Nicole COLIN, Corine DEFRANCE, Ulrich PFEIL, Joachim UMLAUF (eds.), *Lexikon der deutsch-französischen Kulturbeziehungen nach 1945*, Tübingen, G. Narr, 2013, 125-133; in particular the section “III. Vom Transfer zur Verflechtung», 131-133.

of cultural transfers per se, but also about our scientific practices at large? How can we, in our field of study, include what has left few traces, has been forgotten or has been the object of mechanisms of censorship?

Starting from the 1990s, Cultural Transfer Studies did no longer show exclusive interest in “positive” transfers, but also in phenomena of refusal or rejection, sometimes indicating the downside of fascination or attraction²⁷. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink has, in several of his works, detected “forms of productive reception” (also called “appropriation”) inherent in cultural transfers: such processes assign new contents, orientations and functions to the nature of the transfer. They can be diametrically opposed to “source” texts, discourses or practices or can concern forms of paradoxical transfers.²⁸ Among these “forms of productive reception”, Lüsebrink describes “a diversified scale, going from phenomena of imitation or transposition of texts or practices coming from another culture to forms of productive adaptation and appropriation, as well as forms of refusal, resistance and rejection”²⁹. Especially in his work *Interkulturelle Kommunikation*, he distinguishes among others the “cultural appropriation” (“kulturelle Umdeutung”) and, borrowed from Steffen Bruendel, the “negative cultural transfer” (“negativer Kulturtransfer”).³⁰ Showing that cultural transfers can be subject to strict delimitation (*Abgrenzung*) and even hostility, Steffen Bruendel did propose at the end of the 1990s, the term “negativer Kulturtransfer”. This term, which is based on an appropriation of (French) ideas from 1789 as a reference point to reject the culture of the other (as was also the case during the intense German nationalist mobilization in the first weeks of the First World War, for instance, in the context of what has been called “the ideas of 1914”) aims to pay a joint attention to phenomena of competition, conflict and exchange.³¹

In his investigation of the cultural material from the baroque that was transferred from Spain and Italy towards Latin America and France, Walter Moser, has also shown interest in the transformation or “recontextualisation” processes in terms of their “results”. Among the cultural transfers with (great) success on the long term, he distinguishes a

²⁷ Matthias MIDDELL, “Kulturtransfer, Transferts culturels. Version: 1.0”, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 28.01.2016, [online], <<https://docupedia.de/zg/Kulturtransfer>>

²⁸ Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation*, 2008, 137.

²⁹ Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, “Les transferts culturels: théorie, méthodes d’approche, questionnements”, in: Pascal GIN, Nicolas GOYER & Walter MOSER, *Transfert. Explorations d’un champ conceptuel*, Ottawa, Presses de l’Université d’Ottawa, 2014, [online], <https://books.openedition.org/uop/438>. Translated by Elies Smeyers.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 136-137; 139. Lüsebrink means with ‘transfert négatif’, by extension, a “processus où des artefacts – ou des éléments d’artefacts – d’une autre culture sont transférés, mais changement totalement, à travers des formes d’appropriation et de réception, de contenu et de signification”. (Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, “Interculturalités en temps de guerre – approches d’une problématique paradoxale”, in: Valérie Deshoulières, Hans Jürgen Lüsebrink, Christoph Vatter, (eds.), *Europa zwischen Text und Ort. L’Europe entre Texte et Lieu. Interkulturalität in Kriegzeiten. (1914-1954). Interculturalités en temps de guerre (1914-1954)*, Bielefeld, Transcript, 2013, 109. About the concept of ‘negativer Kulturtransfer’ referred to as “radical change of the sense and the use of the transferred artifacts”, see also Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, “Introduction. Reframing the Cultural Transfer Approach”, 8-9.

³¹ Cf. Steffen BRUENDEL: “Negativer Kulturtransfer: Die ‘Ideen von 1914’ als Aufhebung der ‘Ideen von 1789’”, in: Marc SCHALENBERG (Hg.): *Kulturtransfer im 19. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, Travaux du Centre Marc Bloch, 1998, 153-172.

form of “active forgetting”, by which the foreign cultural material is inserted in the new context to such a degree of assimilation that it is attributed a new functionality³², which involves its active, and at least partial, denial or forgetting within the source system.³³ On the other hand, Moser talks about “failed cultural transfer” in case of failure in the process of recontextualization, “if the object remains ill-inserted and eventually rejected by the receiver system”; in this specific case “the transferred object will consequently either be ejected from, or else encysted into the system as a foreign body”.³⁴ Subsequently, Moser distinguishes three different modalities of negative results, of distancing, of resistance or even refusal or rejection: “progressive suppression” (“resistance to the transfer was stronger than the initial royal motivation”³⁵); “repression of the ‘Foreign’ element”, when the transfer is subject to a “systemic repression”, which Moser associates with the Freudian *Verdrängung*³⁶, and finally “encysting of the ‘Foreign’ Element”, which consists in a refusal to integrate or assimilate, “ostentatiously making it appear foreign”: “It operates as the opposite of a repression that would make it unrecognizable and instead represents an exhibition of the object’s otherness. In a written text, for instance, this modality may adopt the discursive procedure of a quotation, thus pointing the finger at the otherness of the transferred element while containing the danger of being ‘infected’ by it.”³⁷ Applied to interlinguistic transfers, the two latter modalities of Moser remind us of the dichotomous opposition of Lawrence Venuti, among others in *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*, between “domesticating” and “foreignizing”³⁸. This restrictive treatment, or even the repression of the foreign and its encysting, which Moser describes as Unsuccessful Transfer, appears in Venuti’s (and before him Berman’s) work as a successful transfer because it is guided by an ethics of difference and capable of subverting hegemonic discourses and asymmetries.

If, to come back to the central question of “paradoxes, misunderstandings and failures”, Lüsebrink and Moser do in fact situate “negative cultural transfer”, “active forgetting”, “progressive suppression”, “resistance”, “encysting”, “repression”, “refusal”, “rejection”, as so many modalities on a continuum of reception, recontextualization or productive appropriation of cultural transfers, other researchers, on the other hand, have recently identified in these shortcomings or “failures” a central and constitutive dimension of cultural transfers from the perspective of appropriation and transformation. As a matter of fact, for Anna Veronika Wendland “models of cultural transfer function with a structural integration of ‘mistake-making’”, since the insertion of a foreign, imported, and new

³² Walter MOSER, “Cultural Transfer and its Complexities”, 182, 187, 196.

³³ *Ibid.* 173.

³⁴ *Ibidem.*

³⁵ *Ibid.* 192.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 193.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 194.

³⁸ Lawrence VENUTI, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*, London & New York, Routledge, 1998.

element is in a position to disturb and disrupt the system, as it demands repositioning:

Cultural ‘misunderstanding’, ‘false reading’, ‘mistaken reception’ are not relevant to theories of cultural transfer, since adaptation processes and transformations of the concept itself, or inhibited transfers are legitimate elements of the very transfer process itself, giving us valuable information about the societies entangled with each other. Though difference between cultural systems is crucial to cultural transfer – otherwise there would be neither the need for transfers nor the instruments to discern them – there is no such thing as a ‘failed’ cultural transfer. This would imply a hierarchy of cultures, where the inferior part is not sufficiently developed to ‘successfully’ adapt foreign cultural elements, as was the explanation for ‘failed’ transfers in earlier times.³⁹

The notion of misunderstanding or failure in itself supposes, in a problematic way, a certain norm, convention, appreciation, hierarchy, supremacy, in relation to which a divergence, miscomprehension or lack of recognition could establish itself. Matthias Middell does also consider cultural transfer by definition as a process of active appropriation, oriented by the needs and “deficient experiences” (*Defiziterfahrungen*) of the receiving culture. Consequently, the notion of miscomprehension or misunderstanding is put aside for the benefit of a process of “necessarily selective observation” based primarily on the receiving context, as was mentioned above:

Kulturtransfer wird verstanden als ein aktiv durch verschiedene Mittlerrgruppen betriebener Aneignungsprozess, der von den Bedürfnissen der Aufnahmekultur gesteuert wird. In diesem Sinne kann es auch nicht zu einem Missverstehen einer fremden Kultur kommen, sondern zu deren notwendigerweise selektiven Wahrnehmung entlang einer Idee von der eigenen Kultur oder Gesellschaft, für die nach Anregungen zur Reform diagnostizierter Mängel gesucht wird.⁴⁰

From this target-culture perspective – as it is not hard to believe that the perspective of the sender would theorize the question of failed transfer differently, presumably through “intentionalist” considerations, which are widely discredited in present-day scientific discourse –, “failures” and “misunderstandings” are actually always present in cultural transfers, given the fact that they form their foundations and exemplify their process. In other words, if the question of their distinction in the guise of a possible typology thus arises and stresses other points of interest, the reasons and motives behind these presumed “misunderstandings” and “failures” deserve to be fully investigated, as Anna Veronika Wendland indicates, because they

³⁹ Anna Veronika WENDLAND, “Cultural Transfer”, 55.

⁴⁰ Matthias MIDDELL, “Kulturtransfer, Transferts culturels. Version: 1.0”, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 28.01.2016, [online], <<https://docupedia.de/zg/Kulturtransfer>>.

reveal the manner in which transfers work: “Serious cultural transfer research [...] asks for the specific reasons for non-adaptation of a transfer in a specific historical moment, or tries to discover hidden and discontinuous traditions which were influential in former epochs but are presently declared as ‘not ours’.”⁴¹ In the context of intercultural communication and management, the notion of “critical incident” has been suggested and mobilized, in order to refer to these situations in which a misunderstanding, problem or conflict arises as a consequence of cultural differences or difficulties of transcultural adaptation between the parties that are involved. In the field of literary studies, Jørgensen and Lüsebrink in particular, have asked themselves the question as to which norms, ideological and historical frameworks and which kind of positioning of intellectuals could be identified in the case of successful transfers but also of “counter-transfers”, especially “between geographically remote regions”.⁴² As far as the counter-transfers are concerned – in which we are particularly interested here – Jørgensen and Lüsebrink identify – “political, mental or cultural forms of resistance, for example against ‘foreign influences’ or forms of cultural hegemony [...]”. According to them,

[p]eriods and situations of military occupation [...] are striking examples of paradoxical cultural transfers driven simultaneously by resistance and refusal, but also by underlying forms of interest, even sometimes fascination [...].⁴³

One can, among the productive modalities of divergence, still add the medium, that is to say, the physical, inter- or multimedial material dimension of the transferred object, which has been identified but has rarely been studied in the context of cultural transfer. It is bound to play a role that will no doubt become more and more important (as facilitator or accelerator of transfers, or even of phenomena of *intox* and *fake news*, given the intensification of means of communication). Since the works of Latour, useful for translation studies, one looks at the network to identify the causes of success or failure.⁴⁴ Matthias Middell, for his part, reminds us that the investigation of the mobilization of the actors that are involved and of their mediation has to take the aspect of ‘medium’/ multimodal dimension (“mediale Seite”) – which is decisive for the nature and scope of the mediation – into account.⁴⁵ In fine, the majority of studies dealing with

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, “Introduction. Reframing the Cultural Transfer Approach”, 16: “Transfer processes do not only depend on more or less immediate cultural exchange between neighbors, or even of an intracultural kind, but also on intellectual and ideological norms; This becomes particularly clear when we look at transfers between geographically remote continents, countries or regions, where historical and ideological framings and the position of intellectuals become essential to the successful transfer of foreign cultural forms, but also their counter-transfer”.

⁴³ Steen Bille JØRGENSEN & Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, “Introduction. Reframing the Cultural Transfer Approach”, 8-9.

⁴⁴ Hélène BUZELIN, *Unexpected Allies*. “Unexpected Allies. How Latour’s Network Theory Could Complement Bourdieusian Analyses in Translation Studies”, in: *The Translator*, 2005, 11, 193-218; see p. 208 in particular.

⁴⁵ Matthias MIDDELL, “Kulturtransfer, Transfers culturels. Version: 1.0”, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 28.01.2016, [online], <<https://docupedia.de/zg/Kulturtransfer>>.

cultural transfers agree about the fact that the presumed “failures” and “misunderstandings” are the result of multifactorial and empirical processes and variables, which depend on historical circumstances and different social, political, esthetic and media-related contexts.⁴⁶

2. The second focal point of investigation that we identified is concerned with **unpredictability**. Cultural transfers, understood as events⁴⁷, presuppose a certain unpredictability. Because an event is “ce qui arrive, imprévisiblement, singulièrement” as Jacques Derrida reminds us: “unique donc, et imprévisible, c’est-à-dire sans horizon”.⁴⁸ For lack of a linear trajectory, as well as a final programmable outcome, cultural transfers – according to some⁴⁹, especially in their dimension of “failures” – are marked by coincidence and discontinuities, as the novelty emerges in the system in a new and unpredictable way.⁵⁰ With this in mind, how is it possible to scientifically study such an accidental, unprogrammable complexity – despite a certain number of invariants in the analysis – that has also to do with contingency, circumstances and coincidence, and that makes – as Béatrice Joyeux-Prunelle already noticed⁵¹ – every simplistic tentative to map out a system of transfers, to simulate assumed continuities, and to penetrate the “black box”, problematic and bound to fail?⁵² A first response to this question might be that we would prefer a reduced frame of observation⁵³, a median scale of empirical analysis, a perimeter that favors the inclusion of a maximum of concrete data to interrogate and explain.

Such an evenemential, contingent and unpredictable approach of cultural transfers results moreover in considering cultural transfer as something unintentional, accidental and – with Latour and his actor-network theory, as well as theoreticians of transfer after him, – as being processed incrementally by an agency that can be human (intermediaries, cultural transmitters or smugglers, translators, critics, teachers of language or foreign cultures, correspondents or reporters, tourist guides, entrepreneurs, etc.) and/or non-human (technological norms, translation policies, diplomatic systems, etc.), as has also been pointed out by Hélène Buzelin, mainly with regard to agents of translation⁵⁴. However, even if the cultural transfer approach presents itself as an “agent-centered approach” that takes different types of actors and their positionings into account, how

⁴⁶ Walter MOSER, “Cultural Transfer and its Complexities”, 195-196.

⁴⁷ Maud Gonne and Reine Meylaerts identify cultural transfer as an “emergent phenomenon”. The notion of “emergence” refers to “the process through which a system or organization emerges out of the interaction of its parts” (Maud GONNE & Reine MEYLAERTS, “Introduction”, 24).

⁴⁸ Jacques DERRIDA and Jérôme Alexandre NIELSBERG, “Jacques Derrida, penseur de l’évènement”, in : *L’humanité* 28 janvier 2004, [online], <<https://www.humanite.fr/jacques-derrida-penseur-de-levenement-299140>>

⁴⁹ Anna Veronika WENDLAND, “Cultural Transfer”, 56.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 46 ; 52.

⁵¹ Béatrice JOYEUX-PRUNELLE, “Les transferts culturels. Un discours de la méthode”, 154.

⁵² Maud GONNE & Reine MEYLAERTS, “Introduction”, 14.

⁵³ Walter MOSER, “Cultural Transfer and its Complexities”, 195.

⁵⁴ Hélène BUZELIN, “Unexpected Allies. How Latour’s Network Theory Could Complement Bourdieusian Analyses in Translation Studies”, in : *The Translator*, 2005, 11, 2, 193-218. See also Hélène BUZELIN, “Agents of translation”, *Handbook of Translation Studies*, 2011, 2, 6-12.

is it possible to think this contingency outside of an intentionalist and personalist paradigm (personal turn)? Does the network approach of Latour offer for example⁵⁵ a favorable frame of thought, in a perspective that is at the very least non-teleological, less directed by a design, a strategy, a project, even going beyond an apparent or primary causality, but rather in touch with the contingencies and conditions of production? Do Translation Studies also offer for example an interesting perspective in this respect, since they have studied, by means of a socio-historico-cultural paradigm, “translation agency” at the very interface of discourses, interactions and power relations of determination and influence, going beyond individual auctorality of the actors at work? According to Anna Veronika Wendland, such non-linear, discontinuous, unpredictable transfers, which produce specific productive or transformative forms of transfer, “are discussed in advanced models of cultural transfer, but require additional concepts to be adequately described”.⁵⁶

3. Thirdly, how to comprehend logics and presuppositions of **binarity** and **hierarchy**? The conceptual identification of features of cultural heterogeneity and hybridity presupposes, as mentioned above, a problematic return towards original pre-established categories, which are often binary, essentializing, or even unilateral between, in fine, a culture of transmission and a receiving culture, source and target contexts.⁵⁷ Does turning towards an approach of cultural transfers based on paradoxes, misunderstandings, inherent contradictions and failures invite us more easily to take into account the dynamic, open, and fluid vitality of transfers, with their ever-moving borders, as was suggested above? And this even though, in accordance with concrete empirical data, one can rarely distinguish separate entities, not even historically – as Matthias Middell asserts? He emphasizes that, for pragmatic reasons, the complexity of things has often been reduced to bilateral models, while triangular or even quadrangular transfers often occur:

die vorzugsweise bilaterale Anlage vieler Arbeiten zu kulturellen Transfers eine aus pragmatischen Gründen einsichtige, aber zugleich wichtige Mechanismen vernachlässigende Komplexitätsreduktion darstellte. Trianguläre Transfers und selbst vier „Stationen“ einbeziehende Konfigurationen wurden getestet mit dem Ergebnis, dass häufig „Dritte“ die Rezeption zwischen zwei kulturellen Räumen vermittelten.⁵⁸

The question of entities and borders cannot be eliminated with a single stroke and stays nevertheless operational according to Middell. But does the

⁵⁵ See a.o. Bruno LATOUR, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005; Bruno LATOUR, “On recalling ANT”, in: *The Sociological Review*, 1999, vol. 47, 51, 15-25.

⁵⁶ Anna Veronika WENDLAND, “Cultural Transfer”, 62.

⁵⁷ Cf. Michael WERNER, “Konzeptionen und theoretische Ansätze zur Untersuchung von Kulturbeziehungen”, 125.

⁵⁸ Matthias MIDDELL, “Kulturtransfer, Transfers culturels. Version: 1.0”, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 28.01.2016, [online], <<https://docupedia.de/zg/Kulturtransfer>>.

awareness of historical and temporal perspectives, and of cultural traditions allow us to minimize their bias? Does the diversified, relational and multipolar approach of cultural transfers that involves third party-actors, various vectors and examples of passage, multiple mediation, and interwoven and variable scales (between and within territories, places and networks) allow us to “think beyond borders”?⁵⁹ To what extent are our (western) ways of thinking entangled with these pre-established, structured categorizations, which are the outcome of a human construction and hence susceptible to constant change?⁶⁰ How indeed should we as researchers who, in our case, primarily represent the West and specifically focus on cultural transfer as a concept emerging from European cultural historiography, account for our own positioning, thinking and questioning, for our own blind spots and, in the capacity of “implicated subjects”⁶¹, for our inevitable interwovenness with hegemonic ways of thinking⁶²? How can we think cultural transfers outside of the West-European context?

4. Furthermore, when it comes to **genealogy**, **historicity**, and the temporal orientation of transfers, which originally was a historical concept with a “diachronic sensibility”⁶³, the following question arises: if we deal with cultural transfers from the perspective of “success” or “failure”, are we then in a better position to reveal the perspectives of specific cultures and periods?⁶⁴ – knowing that, as Eisenberg states: “Transfers can thus be described as (historical) processes from which the final state cannot be deduced: they change in quality and direction, run continuously or discontinuously, accelerate, end abruptly, gradually die off or last forever”.⁶⁵ Moreover, if we think about cultural transfers as practices, objects or conceptual systems that surpass borders, despite the necessity to take “historical vectors of passage”⁶⁶ into account, a certain erasure of their historicity is at risk because of the distance. As soon as we discern paradoxes and discontinuities from the point of view of our present moment in time, do they really exist as such or are we dealing with a posteriori constructions? How do we have to handle inevitably retrospective projections, given the fact that our contemporary and situated categories and ways of thinking

⁵⁹ See Matthias MIDDELL & Antje DIETZE, “Methods in Transregional Studies. Intercultural Transfers”, in: Matthias MIDDELL (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies*. London, Routledge, 2018, 63 (quoted by Jørgensen & Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, “Introduction. Reframing the Cultural Transfer Approach”, 9).

⁶⁰ Anna Veronika WENDLAND, “Cultural Transfer”, 46.

⁶¹ See Michael ROTHBERG, *The implicated subject. Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, Stanford, Stanford University Press (Cultural Memory in the Present), 2019.

⁶² Achille Joseph MBEMBE, “Decolonizing the University: New directions”, in: *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 15, 1, 2016, 33, 37.

⁶³ Anna Veronika WENDLAND, “Cultural Transfer”, 62.

⁶⁴ “‘success’ or ‘failure’ of transfers are a matter of cultural and epochal perspective”, Anna Veronika WENDLAND, “Cultural Transfer”, 56, see also 60.

⁶⁵ Christiane EISENBERG, “Cultural Transfer as a Historical Process: Research Questions, Steps of Analysis, Methods”, in: Jürgen SCHLAEGER, *Metamorphosis. Structures of Cultural Transformations*, Tübingen, Günter Narr, 2005, 100. Quoted by Maud GONNE & Reine MEYLAERTS, “Introduction”, 15.

⁶⁶ Michel ESPAGNE, “La notion de transfert culturel”, in : *Revue Sciences/ Lettres* 2013, [online], <<https://doi.org/10.4000/rsl.219>>Espagne, 1.

interpret transferred cultural artefacts as well as cultural dynamics and relations *a posteriori*? Do we sufficiently recontextualize transfers within their historical perspectives, taking their “temporal asymmetries” into account – that is to say, the considerable temporal difference that sometimes exists between a cultural artefact and its transfer into another cultural space?⁶⁷ “What is then the degree of integration and the required time interval, before we can call an imported item a transfer”, asks Chesterman.⁶⁸ A nuanced conception, essential to a transnational and globalized view on cultural history, imposes itself, for which the speed and synchronicity of the processes of appropriation will probably prove to be important parameters to take into consideration. For this purpose, the historian Matthias Middell proposes a distinction between “horizontale bzw. synchrone und vertikale bzw. diachrone Transferzyklen”. The study of cultural transfers from the perspective of the paradoxes and misunderstandings they might generate, takes us irrevocably back to the historicity or rather the contemporaneity of our own position and viewpoint.

5. Finally, which **interdisciplinary dialogues** have taken place in the study of cultural transfers, related to the questions of misunderstandings and failures in particular, and which difficulties and resistances do they possibly generate themselves? Initially opposed to comparatist approaches (as they were mainly practiced in the 1980s), cultural transfer is often connected to other concepts arising from neighboring disciplines from which they borrow the conceptual toolkit (such as the notions of hybridity, *métissage*, the in-between, transculturality, pluriculturality, translation, networks, third-spaces, etc.) and it has in this respect often been considered as an umbrella concept: “Cultural transfer can be defined as an over-arching methodological concept which operationalises other guiding concepts in the study of culture under a specific perspective, regardless of which discipline is embarking upon this project”⁶⁹. Which loanconcepts in particular, if they prove to be necessary, are capable of elucidating Cultural Transfer Studies appropriately, especially when it comes to paradoxes, misunderstandings and failures, and, reversely, can Cultural Transfer Studies themselves function as a model for transdisciplinary dialogue?⁷⁰ If there exists in the field of study for example a kind of dominance of some disciplines, among which Literary and Cultural Studies, which misunderstandings and phenomena of miscomprehension will be, on a meta-level, due to a divergent vocabulary, or even a mutual lack of knowledge between fields of study? Does the mobilization of these notions within diverse disciplinary sub-fields have an impact on an interdisciplinary approach of cultural transfers on heuristic or hermeneutical levels?

⁶⁷ “[Z]eitliche Asymmetrien”, Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation*, 145.

⁶⁸ Andrew CHESTERMAN, “Transfer Troubles”, 208.

⁶⁹ Anna Veronika WENDLAND, “Cultural Transfer”, 60.

⁷⁰ Anna Veronika WENDLAND, “Cultural Transfer”, 59.

These five focal points of investigation thus make up the programmatic background and the launchpad of the different contributions to this issue. They formed the basis on which a common and interdisciplinary reflection has been built, which will hopefully allow us to reach, also on the long term, a better understanding of cultural transfers with regard to some of their more specific configurations such as paradoxes, misunderstandings or failures, and to stimulate new research questions.

*

We have divided this volume into three parts, in order to organize the contributions in relation to the principal subject and to clarify at the same time their specific input. The first part concerns the exploration of epistemological and conceptual questions related to the notion of transfer itself, when it is applied to the literary field and addressed through the interdisciplinary crossing/dialogue with comparatist approaches, digital humanities, Translation Studies, literary history, and network approaches. Secondly, a line of common thought is developed around the juxtaposed and sometimes paradoxical temporalities of “successes” and “failures”, diachronically as well as synchronically. Finally, the last section of this issue inscribes itself in the critical movement that is committed to broaden the concept of transfer, to go beyond binaries, to complexify the mechanisms of circulation and to question the phenomena of hierarchization.

Epistemological, methodological and conceptual considerations

Several articles in this issue tackle central epistemological and conceptual questions in Transfer and Literary Studies head-on, starting from a specific observation of failure, difficulty or at least from a problematization of some approaches, such as (in)commensurability, (in)dependence from relations of subordination and hierarchization, (un)predictability and the issue of thinking in terms of intercultural *métissage*, especially regarding regional or peripheral border areas. The authors strive to demonstrate these observations or to propose new ways to reveal, explain or remedy them.

In the first contribution of this issue, **Pierre-Alexis Delhaye** focusses on the structural but also difficult relationship between the study of Cultural Transfers and comparatism. In their initial publications in the 1980s, Michel Espagne and Michael Werner formulated these ideas about an antagonistic, even conflictual mode, considering transfers as a critical and alternative position with regard to several comparatist methodologies within human and social sciences that are marked by structuralism and an inclination to hierarchization. Now that Cultural Transfers Studies have reached more legitimacy, by furthering the evolution of the notion of comparatism itself (without however taking its place), Delhaye sets out to deal with this opposition that is still often represented as unsurpassable or radical, especially in the Francophone field of study. Inspired by Marcel Detienne, who pleads for a way of thinking that focusses on “comparing the incomparable”, and pointing out the non-resolved question of the relationships with an anthropological tradition in the spirit of the Humboldt brothers, he tries to show that it can be

productive to surpass the opposition between Cultural Transfers and comparatism, provided that the two approaches are no longer thought in terms of reciprocal subordination.

The contributions by **Raluca Tanasescu** and **Núria Codina Solà** are part of the same search for epistemological renewal as the one initiated by Pierre-Alexis Delhaye and propose different theoretical perspectives, mostly inspired by networks, in order to question the ideas of hierarchy and subordination. Both of them point out the necessity to adapt, or even to revise the Cultural Transfer approach towards a greater flexibility, according to the specific fields and objects under study. Hence, the case study by Raluca Tanasescu, which deals with poetry translation, invites a reflection that focusses on the idea of unpredictability. She tries to control this factor by means of a tool that she calls “random translation”, which mobilizes ideas of heterogeneity. To do this, she mainly uses a computational analysis of networks. Random translation, as an example of cultural transfer that is not submitted to a pre-established model and unlikely to reproduce itself, appears as a useful concept for explaining poetry translation into small decentralized and non-hegemonical countries, in this specific case Romania. The author concludes that a modelling that includes historical and bibliographical resources and that takes the involved agents into consideration, is necessary to account for the complexity of every single act of literary translation.

In her turn, **Núria Codina Solà**, observes forms of inadequacy between the presupposed movement of the transfer and the need for a historiography of forms of transcultural literature, which would benefit from fully integrating migration literature, which focuses on multiple narrative identities that are simultaneously connected to different national traditions. In order to describe in the long term the experience of authors who write what is still often referred to as “German-Turkish” (*deutsch-türkische Literatur*) literature or *littérature beur*, critics have the tendency to try to explain this field using the concept of “generations”, which would allow to a certain extent to evaluate differentiated discourses related to their members’ sentiments of belonging. But here again, the author shows that such an approach poses a certain number of problems, as it tends to homogenize the idea of generation itself as well as that of the construction of an attachment to a collective identity that is too clearly defined. Do these procedures of intercultural and intertextual crossing generally fall within the category of transfer, since they do not involve the displacement of an artefact within space or from one cultural area to another. On the basis of an analysis of immigration literature in Spain, – where this literary manifestation appears to be more recent and “young” than in countries such as Germany, France or the United Kingdom – Codina prefers the approach of the rhizome, which transcends generations and allows to cover the different temporalities and distinct constitutive contexts of this literature, thus encouraging the necessary dialogue between different human and social sciences.

‘Successful’ or ‘failed’ cultural transfers: questions of perspective and pluritemporality

One of the most significant results that emerge from the contributions and discussions that took place during the conference concerns the absence of contradiction between the genealogical and historical approaches within Cultural Transfer research and the analysis of phenomena anchored in the most immediate (political, social, etc.) present. On the contrary, the constellations of the historical present emerge very clearly from continuities that have been established on the long term and one observes an interwovenness between historicity and events or phenomena arising from the contemporary, or even the ultra-contemporary.

That is how **Beatrijs Vanacker and Tom Verschaffel** strive to highlight, in a long term perspective, an active practice of multilingualism in the intellectual context of the eighteenth-century Austrian Netherlands, a political entity centered around the Southern Low Countries that has often been considered as a manifestation of “Belgium before Belgium”. Their contribution is based on a large corpus of periodicals that is still partially under construction, and illustrates that the Southern Netherlands distinguish themselves, in contrast to the national monolingualism of their neighboring countries, by their linguistic and cultural “hybridity”, to such an extent that a specific category of mediators orchestrates the active cohabitation of French and Dutch in those regions. The institutional context, studied here is that of some “Flemish” literary journals that implement, in their literary section, models of selection, transfer and publication of some literary texts and genres in several languages. The functionality of these periodicals as experimental platforms of distribution within a multilingual and bicultural context is thus analyzed. For example, the Flemish periodical *De Vlaemschen Indicateur*, of which the literary section largely consisted of translations or adaptations from diverse (mainly French) periodicals, also published samples of literary material of Flemish origin, thus already prefiguring some sort of national Belgian space.

The field of academic disciplines is the subject of the contribution by **Laurent Béghin**, who gives an account of a “successful” history that he evaluates according to the criterium of consistency with the imported academic tradition. More precisely, it is about the spirit of inherited national philologies from the romantic era and the nineteenth century, following the model of importation of German professors or of foreign specialists educated in Germany. Béghin describes the efficiency of this model through parallel cases of chairs of Slavic Studies that were created in Italy and Belgium after the First World War, of which he describes the specific modalities. Several of the first scholars in Slavic Studies at Italian universities actually came from Slavic territories falling under Austria until 1918, but attributed to Italy in the treaties of 1918-1920. As far as the introduction of Polish Studies in Belgium is concerned, they are part of a resolute intervention of Poland’s cultural diplomacy, as the authorities in Warsaw actually financed the first chair of Slavic Studies at the Université Libre de Bruxelles in 1926. The holders of this chair, all of them Poles or some Russian exiles, taught Russian and Polish Literature at the Université Libre de Bruxelles until 1939. By scrutinizing these entanglements, ramifications and examples of mediation responsible for this importation, the author reconstructs the historical moment of the establishment of the academic discipline of Slavic Studies in two countries where it did not exist yet. In both cases, the primary beneficiaries of this knowledge transfer – the scholars in Slavic Studies

in Italy and Belgium – exported their knowledge abroad, especially to the United States, thus reinforcing the institutional efficiency of transfers by granting them a multilateral dimension.

The contrast between the presupposed “success” of an institutional transfer of Slavic Studies into new countries, and the “failure” of a project that wanted to construct a transnational literary internationalism within post-war Europe seems clear at first sight. In their contribution, **Marjet Brolsma and Francis Mus** suggest that this project that was supported by a European intellectual network, of which the active collaboration has led to publications and concrete efforts of mediation in Germany, England, Belgium, Italy and The Netherlands, eventually resulted in a “failed cultural transfer”. One of its most visible achievements, however, was the simultaneous publication of the volume *Europas Neue Kunst und Dichtung / De Nieuwe Europeesche geest in kunst en letteren* (1920) and its reception in different countries. Several individual chapters of this work have been translated and published in various periodicals across national borders, while the project initiators invited each other in the meantime to give lectures in the difficult post-war circumstances, even if the “demobilization” of the mind was not yet favorable to receiving people who embodied the former enemy. The aim of the initiators of this project, among who the German writer and art historian Friedrich Markus Huebner, the Belgian journalist Paul Colin and the Dutch literary critic Dirk Coster, was to support – as a direct continuation of the efforts of the pacifist and internationalist group *Clarté* – a thorough international dialogue that would inform the European public of the literary and esthetic developments within every foreign country. The initiators thus shared the conviction that a reconciliation of Europe, ripped apart by the war, could be possible by way of a cultural transfer between national literatures, which all reflected their version of a “new European spirit”.

Of course, the realization of the short-term failure to build European networks between the two World Wars cannot be denied as we know the history that follows, in which Europe is once more taken over by nationalisms and dictatorships. Nonetheless, such an immediate judgement as to whether we have to do with success or failure depends once more on a short-term vision and should be re-evaluated in all its paradoxical aspects. In fact, we can ask ourselves the question whether these first outlines, however imperfect they may be, to establish an intellectually unified Europe, might have laid in a certain way the foundations for the unified post-World-War-Two Europe, in the wake of the well-known efforts of mediation of Romain Rolland or Stephan Zweig. On the other hand, the idea of an academic discipline that is diffused, promoted and (financially) supported by a national cultural diplomacy was undoubtedly not very promising on the long term, insofar as a university chair that depends on diplomacy can hardly be perennial when the day comes that the latter no longer has the intention or the means to finance it – which indeed was the case for Slavic Studies. In other words, it is necessary to put things into perspective, not only from the point of view of the efficiency of the transfer, but also from the point of view of its ethics. For, to submit the viability of a scholarly domain to particular national interests raises a number of questions that have to be asked with acuteness in the present difficult circumstances, which

unfortunately prevent universities to finance the sectors they would like to encourage themselves.

It is in order to get emancipated from national frameworks that **Pieter Boulogne** proposes a broadening of the concept of transfer to a set of intersemiotic, inter- and intralingual practices, which he intends to connect with a broader comprehension of the concept of translation and of Translation Studies. The case study that he presents refers to a recent incident in the long history of cultural entanglements between Russia and France, that is, a spectacularly subversive performance by the Russian artist Pyotr Pavlensky in Paris in October 2017. On the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the October Revolution, the latter, exiled in France, set fire to the head office of the Banque de France. Even if this action has not been perceived as a transposition of the revolutionary spirit, it is possible to analyze it as a “self-transfer”, or even some kind of “self-translation”. Because one of the “source texts”, so to speak, that Pavlensky used was an earlier performance that he had realized in Moscow: the fire he had perpetrated at the headquarters of the FSB, the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation. One of the political paradoxes that this action exposes, is that one of the artistic symbols of opposition against the Kremlin, who has been received in France in name of the freedom of expression as opposed to totalitarian regimes, ended up behind French bars. But from the perspective of the history of cultural transfers on the long term,—the reception of Pavlensky’s performance fits into a long-term tradition of a romantic and national paradigm. Even though the art of Pavlensky brings the diffusion of the democratic and cultural artefact of the “ideas of 1789” to the present and continues in this respect the tradition of French-Russian exchanges, his reception in France does not acknowledge the transnational tradition of avant-gardes in which he reaffirms however, through his act, his radical and left-wing inscription. From this perspective, transfers, seen from various angles, are both failure and success, but above all instances of circulation and transformation, in the sense of the concept’s broadest mobility and hospitality.

Circulations and reconsiderations of binarities and hierarchization processes

The first part of this dossier is consecrated to a series of case studies that underpin the observation according to which the idea of a strict bilaterality of transfers appears mostly misleading, because “anomalies” and “asymmetries” are so numerous that they undermine ideas of binarization or hierarchization in the analysis. The contribution by **Thomas Franck** about the transfer of Theodor Adorno’s thinking into France emphasizes the idea of a “blind spot”, by visibilizing Thomas Mann’s oeuvre as a cultural interference between Romain Rolland and Adorno, thus following the model of a trilateral configuration. Here too, transfer must be understood in an extensive and hospitable way, because Franck does not identify a direct connection between Rolland and Adorno, but he comes manifestly close to the idea of the “rhizome” that was already mentioned above. More precisely because the interference between both oeuvres, which is fundamental to real implicit

dialogues, emerges through common interlocutors— among whom Stefan Zweig and Sigmund Freud. What results from it is essentially this fundamentally interdisciplinary intellectual material – think of the protagonists’ common interest for Wagner’s and Beethoven’s music, but also of their complex relationship with Nietzsche’s thinking – that, starting from the interwar period, would establish a solid common base for the French-German reconciliation after 1945. One could add that the misunderstandings that existed about the concepts of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, which had contributed to the hostile climate during the First World War, became themselves constituent parts of the dynamics of the transfer.

A European intellectual reconciliation between yesterday’s enemies at the time of the reconstruction also forms the outlook of **Stefania Caristia**’s contribution, in which she studies the transfer of Sartre in his capacity of theoretician and literary critic within post-war Italy (1945-1970). It is not surprising that the circulation of the translations of Sartre’s literary and theatrical works, as well as the publication of his critical-theoretical works in literary journals is intimately connected to the debate about committed literature. But if the role of Sartre’s theories in the Italian debate about commitment seems undeniable, this transfer appears nevertheless problematic, partial and “fragmentary” as a result of the norms of the receiving system and of the reduction of Sartre’s program according to the demands of the Italian Communist Party. By using notions such as “semantic transmutation” and “anomalies”, Caristia tries to understand how the success or impact of the transfer within the literary field of the target culture can be evaluated, while questioning the relevance of the term “misunderstanding” in the domain of cultural transfers. It is indeed at the end of this process, fifteen years later, that the first work that collects a selection of Sartre’s critical and theoretical articles was published, as a result of the reconfiguration of the literary and cultural field in Italy and of new international geopolitical relationships.

The two last contributions finally explore the indispensable field of North-South relationships, and the connections between Europe and Africa. **Nadjib Sadikou** dedicated his reflection to the long-term reception of the twofold German canonical tradition of *Sturm und Drang* and of the *Klassik/Romantik* in *Négritude*-literature, here also structured in the form of “anomalies” or triangulations. He proves that the reception of this German tradition is actually anchored in a French reception of German romanticism that Senghor, as founding figure of *la Négritude*, experienced directly in the French context of his time. This cascading movement manifests itself through the process of a double misunderstanding, simultaneously because of historical distance and with regard to the selection of ideas from German romanticism. The hypothesis that is formulated here is that this anomaly generates an irritation as founding moment of the cultural transfer process and that this irritation becomes the “catalyst” of intercultural communication. This dynamic, overloaded with paradoxes, is conceived here as a system of “open opacity”, referring to Edouard Glissant’s terminology. Instead of wishing for an illusory transparency that would not respect diversity, Glissant assumes this idea of opacity that necessarily implies the acceptance of paradoxes as elements of the transfer process in their own right. Beyond the movement of *Négritude*, the initial logic of confrontation induced by a moment of irritation is for Nadjib Sadikou also located

in a kind of ambiguity that is at work in many Francophone African narratives about the theme of colonization, as he finally illustrates through his analysis of the novel *L'aventure ambiguë* (1961) by the Senegalese author Cheikh Hamidou Kane.

Finally, the contribution by **Valentina Tarquini** deals also with the modalities of the circulation of knowledge and esthetics between France and Africa. In a diachronic trajectory from the 1960s till the present day, she analyzes the return movement of a scientific discourse about African knowledge as an intercultural product and an object of transfer. In a first stage, she wants to highlight the discrepancy between a “scientific” approach, as was supported in the West and since the colonial era transmitted to African elites, and an exotic discourse through which the West created an imaginary knowledge about Africa. In a second stage, the author shows how a critical discourse about the African arts and sciences has been developed aiming at an epistemological questioning, by integrating the reflexive subjectivity within the mechanism of enunciation (Mudimbe, Mbembe). Lastly, Tarquini suggests that through strategies of cross-reference between the African cultural field and the French literary field, writers of the diaspora (Mabanckou/Waberi) contribute to the circulation of a shared transcultural patrimony that institutionalizes itself progressively within the French literary canon.

On epistemological and methodological levels, we can observe that the stakes of Cultural Transfer Studies within the French-African field are considerable, as far as the study of the circulation of these products will necessarily have to analyze the French socio-institutional structure in order to be able to ask how the categories of interpretation for African knowledge could be reconfigured, by questioning in particular the concept of “canon” beyond western norms (chronological periodization, genres, etc.).

*

To conclude, there is no doubt that the research area of Cultural Transfers continues to show that they are remarkably dynamic. For example, the monthly seminars by Michel Espagne, Pascale Rabault-Feurhahn, Matthias Middell and Ninja Steinbach-Hüther – as part of a collaboration between the École nationale supérieure (ENS), le *Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography* and the University of Leipzig⁷¹ – do not only contribute to a broadening of thematic concerns, directing towards a global, transnational and transregional practice of history, but also to a permanent redefinition of the paradigms of different disciplines that are mobilized on the level of interdisciplinarity and of a fundamental epistemological reflection. Consequently, the contributions assembled in this volume can only represent a partial overview of the present-day developments, as the editors of this volume stay dependent on their own, necessarily fragmentary, research practices in Transfer Studies.

Beyond the limits of our work, we nevertheless believe that we have pointed out the fact that an approach from the perspective of possible “misunderstandings” and “failures” within cultural transfers has until now never been the subject of a systematic and critical investigation, even though everyone is conscient of their

⁷¹ These seminars “Transferts culturels/Kulturtransfers/Intercultural-transfers” were held in German, English and French: <https://histoire.ens.fr/transferts-culturels-kulturtransfers-intercultural-transfers-2022-2023.html>

importance in the movements of circulation, transmission, transformation and resemantisation. It is possible and even (very) probable that this kind of reflections have already been present in the context of existing case studies, but they are not visible as such and struggle to surpass their specific objects of study. This is all the more so because every author suggests or imposes her/his own conception of “misunderstanding” or “failure” without necessarily articulating a reflection about the presuppositions that underlie these concepts, thus undermining a collective discussion on this subject. Furthermore, we still observe that a certain ambiguity continues to exist between the terms “cultural transfer” and “intercultural exchanges”, which are mixed up or confused, even though they often designate different points of view.

Multiple connected phenomena, such as post-migration literature, are integrated in the field of cultural studies even if they are clearly no longer part of a logic in which artefacts are displaced between one cultural space and another. As for interactions between the field of study of cultural transfers and related or convergent disciplines resulting for example from Anglo-Saxon research traditions on transculturality, they still leave food for thought, thus supporting our initial observation that a methodological turning point has been reached after four decades of largely successful practice that is still destined to gain importance within the international landscape of human and social sciences.

Stéphanie VANASTEN
UCLouvain

Hubert ROLAND
F.R.S./FNRS – UCLouvain

Maud GONNE
Université de Liège

Elies SMEYERS
Université de Liège