Larisa Schippel / Kate Sturge (transl.)

Between Consensus and the Dissolution of Boundaries: On the Transculturality of Communicative Action.

This contribution is Larisa Schippel's inaugural lecture for the professorship of Transcultural Communication, given at the St Jerome's Day events at the Centre for Translation Studies at the University of Vienna on October 4, 2011. The translation was drafted shortly thereafter. The text has not been published yet, but is reproduced here in its original form, because the editors think it includes noteworthy considerations for a transcultural perspective of translation phenomena.

Larisa Schippel

Between Consensus and the Dissolution of Boundaries: On the Transculturality of Communicative Action

Translated by Kate Sturge

> *"… In all beginnings dwells a magic force*
> *For guarding us and helping us to live.*
> *Serenely let us move from space to space.*
> *And let no sentiments of home detain us."*
> (Hermann HESSE)[1]

My beginning here in Vienna is a relative one in several ways. For one thing, it's already one year old. And then, of course, there is a **before** that has enabled and shaped my new beginning. I have already moved "from space to space" several times. In the first of those spaces, labelled linguistics, a doctoral thesis on syntax was written that, like the discipline as a whole, just about reached up to the text level. In the same period, in a smaller space next door, something began to take shape that did not yet have a nameplate and was often met with condescension or irony, but which seemed to have much to do with my interpreting and translating activity outside the university. "Translation scholars" was what we called ourselves, sometimes defiantly, and we were full of belief in what we were doing. For us, the text was the definitional minimum. Later, the **functional** perspective opened up common ground with linguistics again. And in the spaces of **culture**, fresh alliances arose. A focus on media – or rather, taking seriously the **mediality** of communication and exploring media *mises en scène* in word and image – left its written trace as publications, and everything together ultimately led here to Vienna.

And now it seems that the next space for me to "serenely move to" is called transculturality. After multi- and intra-, is *trans*culturality the next stop? The buzzwords usually associated with it are globalisation, transfer, hybridity, and so on. Certainly, the concept of culture that underlies "transculturality" is in need of repair and disputed, and leads us into an etymological dilemma.

As a rule, references are made to its classy Latin extraction. But noble birth is not enough, for "culture" has a conceptual life of its own, famously inducing Herder to describe cultures as bullets skittering away from each other, even if he considered each equally valuable. It is not Herder's fault that he was co-opted for nationalist and bellicose ends, yet that co-option meanders through the eras and disciplines, leading even to Thomas Mann, whose essay "Thoughts in War" – the war of 1914, that is – proposes a polarity between civilisation and culture, to which he then assigns France and Germany, Voltaire and Frederick the Great, corrupt pre-war morals and the war. Culture is, writes Thomas Mann, "unity, style, form, dignity and taste; is

---

[1] Hermann HESSE (1943/1969): Stages. In: *The Glass Bead Game*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, p. 370; translation slightly amended.

some certain intellectual organisation of the world".[2] This duality serves a militant demarcation of boundaries and anti-French bellicosity that I will not trouble you with here.[3] Published in the journal *Neue Rundschau* in November 1914, the essay caused the well-known, deep rift between the Mann brothers, and it was not re-printed during Thomas Mann's lifetime.

Culture is not, then, an "innocent" concept – the observation seems to have prompt-ed Niklas Luhmann's bon mot that culture is "one of the worst notions ever invent-ed". After the wars in ex-Yugoslavia, Clifford Geertz asked: "What is a culture if it is not a consensus?"[4] There are clearly many reasons for culture's "discontents". Browsing the internet for "transculturality" – the concept that, it seems, is intended to heal these misgivings – one comes across the most varied alliances: transcultural medicine, transcultural care, transcultural psychology; in French, *transculturalité* mainly appears in the setting of migration and new identities in the *banlieues*.

If we agree with Gilles Deleuze that "philosophy is the art of forming, in- venting, and fabricating concepts"[5], then the Jena philosopher Wolfgang Welsch has done his work well: all over the German-speaking world, the concept of transculturality or transcultural communication is attributed to him. The "Transcultural Online Portal" of the Lucerne Institute of Communication & Leadership, for example, cites Welsch:

> *"Cultures do not form homogeneous and coherent units, but are interwoven, min-gled and networked, and internally they are characterised by a pluralisation of possible identities. They have there- fore, as Welsch puts it, "assumed a new form" that routinely "passes through classical cultural boundaries".[6]*

This applies in equal measure to the macro-level of cultures and the micro- level of individuals. Defining human beings as cultural hybrids, Welsch stresses our different reference cultures. He works with Ludwig Wittgenstein's assertion that "culture is at hand wherever practices in life are shared"[7]. This means that every individual is shaped by different cultural components (family, school, work, nation, leisure, etc.) and has to find ways to combine these in the framework of identity formation. This transcultural capacity for transition, argues Welsch, is the precondition for our iden-tity, autonomy and sovereignty.

---

[2] Thomas MANN (1914/1990): Gedanken im Kriege. In *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bän-den*, vol. 13, 527-45. Frankfurt/Main: Fischer. Here and throughout, translations from Ger-man are my own unless otherwise attributed.

[3] Mann had deployed it as early as 1909, referring to Nietzsche and Lamprecht. Rejecting the French propaganda slogan "civilisation against militarism" (1914/1990: 537), Mann here gives a political charge to the terms and uses them as ordering principles to draw boundaries between the neighbours Germany and France. All the ideas and institutions of civilisation, understood as French, are condemned as corrosive; to the same degree, he ar-gues, German culture corresponds to the ideal condition of human existence, which can be only indistinctly described with concepts like "profundity", "the daemonic", "heroism" and "morality".

[4] Clifford GEERTZ (2001): *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 224.

[5] Gilles DELEUZE and Félix GUATTARI (1994): *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Verso, p. 2.

[6] http://www.transkulturelles-portal.com/index.php/1/12/122 (accessed 2 May 2012). (Note by the editors: this text is not available online anymore. The basic ideas can also be found in in Welsch 2010: 43) See Wolfgang WELSCH (1999): Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today. In *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash, 194-213. London: Sage, p. 197.

[7] WELSCH (1999), p. 202.

There's nothing particularly new about that, you may be thinking …

But in a more recent publication, Welsch accords greater emphasis to the distinction between the *content* of the concept of culture and its *extension*. In terms of its content, culture stands for those practices by means of which human beings produce a typically human life. This substantive meaning encompasses everyday routines, competences, convictions, ways of behaving, social regulations, worldviews, and so on. Secondly, however, when we speak of "culture" we are in most cases also thinking of a geographic or national or ethnic *extension* of these practices. In this case, "culture" refers to the extent of the group (or the society or the civilisation) that is characterised by the particular cultural contents or practices.[8]

It is, in my view, precisely here that we find one of the problems bedevilling the treatment of conventional concepts of culture. With the advent of that momentous "imagined community" (as Benedict Anderson put it), the nation, the concept of culture was constructed and utilised for national objectives, co-opted for nationalist purposes. It appears that the conceptual inclusion of "what unifies" has always also enabled and necessitated the conceptual exclusion of the other, the foreign or, of course, the enemy – as we saw in the case of Thomas Mann. This danger does not emanate only from notorious nationalists: nationalism lurks in the briefest newspaper report that two Poles have been arrested for stealing motorbikes, or in the routine evening television news presenting the financial profligacy and corruption of "the" Greeks as the root of all evil.

If, then, the concept of culture has become problematic – so problematic that Welsch even suggests abandoning the concepts of interculturality and multiculturality because they both remain inseparably entangled with the notion of "culture" – why and under what conditions would the case be different for transculturality? It should also be said that attributing the formation of this concept exclusively to Wolfgang Welsch is rather German-centred, since Latin American studies has already been using the term *transculturalidad* for a very long time.

Drawing on that tradition, I would like to mention the reading of transculturality that I found in the work of the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, in a text dating from 1940 – for as philosopher Robert Spaemann reminds us, progress depends crucially on not forgetting what we already know. I encountered Ortiz's text, with a preface by Bronislaw Malinowski, the father of participant observation, in the wonderful 1987 German translation by Maralde Meyer-Minnemann entitled *Tabak und Zucker. Ein kubanischer Disput.*[9] For Ortiz, tobacco and sugar are the two pillars upon which Cuba's economy rests, and at the same time two cultural counterpoints in the Cuban way of life:

> *"Tobacco and sugar are both products of the vegetable kingdom that are cultivated, processed, and sold for the delectation of the mouth that consumes them.*
>
> *Moreover, in the tobacco and sugar industry the same four factors are present: **land**, **machinery**, **labor**, and **money**, whose varying combinations comprise the history of these products. But from the moment of their germination in the earth*

---

[8] Wolfgang WELSCH (2009): Was ist eigentlich Transkulturalität? In *Hochschule als transkultureller Raum? Beiträge zu Kultur, Bildung und Differenz*, ed. Lucyna Darowska and Claudia Machold, 39–66. Bielefeld: transcript, p. 39.

[9] In English as Fernando ORTIZ (1940/1995): *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

> *to their final human consumption tobacco and sugar behave in ways almost always radically opposed."*[10]

Ortiz's analysis does not stop at the significance of tobacco and sugar for Cuba, but traces how the two products change their character, their value, the manner of their consumption and therefore their symbolic force as they move within and through the world, and how the encounter of American and Euro- pean culture changed each of them. These striking transcultural phenomena of the "tránsito vital de culturas" – the "vital change from one culture to another"[11] – ultimately led to an exchange of cultures, a giving and taking, from which each side emerged altered.

In studies around the Franco-German cultural channel ARTE, this perspective is described as a mass-media intercultural approach. However, Oliver Hahn intends something similar to the "vital change", something fed by the experience of this cross-border European project, when he argues that "the phenomenon of mass-media interculturality goes beyond a static coexistence of cultures *alongside each other*". Rather, he says, mass-media interculturality refers to a dynamic existence of the various "cultures *between each other*, so to speak: not only between the various national cultures, but also within a single society [...], a reciprocal permeation of the various cultures"[12]. Comparable processes have long been familiar as a feature of linguistic creolisation.

What would this mean for Wittgenstein's shared lifeworlds? How would it affect Luhmann's common symbolic economies, or Habermas's store of knowledge from which the partners in communication supply each other with interpretations?

The entire process of cultural development, and the identity formations that accompany it, always rests on constructions of the self and the other, ego and alter ego, the "us" and the "them", as Dietrich Busse has shown through the "discourse-semantic fundamental figure" of Self/Other in the discourse on migration.[13] Historian Jörn Rüsen puts it like this:

> *"Cultural identity depends on drawing boundaries in this way. It lays down membership based on shared fundamental convictions, traditions, value systems, mental dispositions, conscious agreements – in short, based on everything that we call a cultural form of life. On the other side of the boundary live "the others". The cul-*

---

[10] Ortiz continues: "*Sugar achieves its destiny through liquid, which melts it, turns it into syrup; tobacco through fire, which volatizes it, converts it into smoke. The one is white, the other dark. Sugar is sweet and odorless; tobacco bitter and aromatic. Always in contrast! Food and poison, waking and drowsing, energy and dream, delight of the flesh and delight of the spirit, sensuality and thought, the satisfaction of an appetite and the contemplation of a moment's illusion, calories of nourishment and puffs of fantasy, undifferentiated and commonplace anonymity from the cradle and aristocratic individuality recognized wherever it goes [...]. Sugar cane was the gift of the gods, tobacco of the devils; she is the daughter of Apollo, he is the offspring of Persephone*" (1940/1995: p. 6).

[11] ORTIZ (1940/1995), p. 99.

[12] Oliver HAHN (1997): *ARTE. Der Europäische Kulturkanal: Eine Fernsehsprache in vielen Sprachen.* Munich: Reinhard Fischer, p. 47.

[13] Dietrich BUSSE (1997): Das Eigene und das Fremde. Annotationen zu Funktion und Wirkung einer diskurssemantischen Grundfigur. In *Die Sprache des Migrationsdiskurses. Das Reden über "Ausländer" in Medien, Politik und Alltag*, ed. Matthias Jung, Martin Wengeler and Karin Böke, 1-35. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

tural constitution of the Self is always simultaneously, and often implicitly, a con-stitution of the otherness of the Other."[14] (RÜSEN 2007: 49)

What was praised in the past as a cultural and humane utopia, Universal Brother-hood, and never attained an empirical quality, now becomes a very real cultural challenge if the "clash of civilisations" is not to reign as the alldetermining reality – for that clash is inscribed, so to speak, into the processes of cultural identity for-mation outlined by Rüsen.

If, in the course of globalisation, a human and universal "we" is now to emerge, it will have to be constituted as a "we" without an "Other" – assuming that is even pos-sible. It would probably be without historical precedent, so looking back in time will provide no indication of the routes we might be able to take. It seems that only art offers us starting points for something genuinely universal. This is because it is dis-burdened of the constraints of the real – yet what can be thought can also, perhaps, find its way into reality …

It is certainly no coincidence that interest in Karl Jasper's notion of the "axial age" has recently been increasing. The question has arisen whether the sense of upheaval attending the emergence of the "global village" shows parallels with the axial age of the ancient high civilisations (so looking back, after all!). In view of the preceding, though, would it not be necessary first to re-examine and rethink all the construc-tions of the past that were based upon the duality of "us" and the "others", and, in most cases, to replace them with transcultural constructions? Jörn Rüsen important-ly identifies the possibility of an **inclusive** conception of humanity like this, observ-ing – very cautiously – that cultural difference and diversity should be regarded as an individualisation of the generally human. For Rüsen, inclusive conceptions of humanity can accommodate the "harshness of reality in cultural difference" into

> *"a **civilising act** of cultural identity formation. Only then would the normative quality of being human truly become universal without cancelling the distinctions of its specific cultural imprint. This concept of individualisation does not culminate in an intercultural relativism, but rather in a reformulation of universalist claims to validity with a view to difference. Difference is not **removed from view** through abstraction, but acknowledged through understanding as regulated by the idea of reciprocity."*[15]

Against this backdrop, it will also seem more than pure coincidence that translator or interpreter figures are appearing more and more frequently in modern literature, film and theatre. As we saw recently at the *Transfiction* conference here at the Cen-tre, very often these are characters who settle in the interstices and work through identity conflicts with themselves and their surroundings. If we take seriously these aesthetic figures of an interstitial population, and thus pay due respect to art as a way of knowing, we can – without hubris – assume that they stand symbolically for Rüsen's "understanding as regulated by the idea of reciprocity", with all the consid-erable difficulties imposed by this changed position in the world. The labour of de-territorialisation and reterritorialisation appears to be what draws them into the texts, onto the stage or screen and changes them as individuals – not always, and not

---

[14] Jörn RÜSEN (2007): Kulturelle Identität in der Globalisierung – Über die Gefahren des Ethnozent- rismus und die Chancen des Humanismus. In *Grenzen, Differenzen, Übergänge. Spannungsfelder inter- und transkultureller Kommunikation*, ed. Antje Gunsenheimer, 49-54. Bielefeld: transcript, p. 49.
[15] RÜSEN (2007), p. 53.

even usually, as congenial figures; far from it. Symbolically, they seem to stand for an internalised transfer, for a "between each other".

If we wish to set out what the concept of transculturality needs to deliver in the context of translation studies – and this is how I see my task this evening – then the question arises of the transfer processes we carry out through translations and the ways that these impact upon the "transculturalisation" of identity construction.

Various disciplines in the academic world have addressed the theme of knowledge transfer. In the process, the initial, static image of "finished" contents being transported to a different location has come under increasingly critical scrutiny. Michel Espagne, for example, commented during a panel discussion that the introduction of Italian architecture to Dresden in the seventeenth and eighteenth century did not make Dresden into an "Italian" city, even if its nickname "Florence on the Elbe" was intended to suggest as much; he went on to emphasise the "intertwining" and processual character of the transfer. Yet even this model of cultural transfer makes do with just three basic factors – originating or source culture, mediating agency, and receiving or target culture – and thus remains largely linear. Mitchell G. Ash, criticising linear notions, therefore addresses primarily the changes to **content** during the transfer that arises through the migration of people or of objects – such as books, or tobacco and sugar, to go back to Ortiz. In fact, aiming to enhance the "circulation internationale des idées"[16] in the social sciences, Bourdieu already noted the large number of factors that influence the circulation of knowledge. For our purposes: What function does the text have in the sending culture? Who selects it for translation? Who translates, who publishes it, who writes the preface? The list could be continued. What effects can the text potentially unfold within the target audience, and what effects does it in fact unfold?

The case of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* translated from American English into German – Klaus Kochmann was the translator – indicates that the target audience's discursive **willingness** for reception can be a decisive factor. The Kochmann translation has been the object of, as far as I know, two analyses within translation studies. Juliane House used it in her revised model of quality assessment,[17] concluding that the translator would have been better off not applying a cultural filter, but attempting an open translation – a translation that is recognisable as such and is more strongly oriented on the source text. She believes this might have avoided the damning headline in the news weekly *Der Spiegel*: "Übersetzung glättet Goldhagens Thesen", "Translation Softens Goldhagen's Claims".

I would argue that this evaluation falls short, because it fails to take into ac- count Klaus Kochmann's no-win situation. Even if he had delivered the ideal translation (whatever that may be!), it would still have been made a scapegoat, since the text and its author themselves could not be criticised directly for reasons of political correctness. But in Germany the theme of fascism and Shoah is a thing of the past! It's dealt with! The discourse, satiated, has retired to bed. The topic is now only cast in bronze or carved as memorials – one for the Jews, one for the Sinti and Roma, one for the deported Jewish children … And then along comes an American Jew, the son of survivors of the Shoah, and wants to stoke up the debate afresh – yet another dispute over the interpretation of Nazism? No thank you! We don't want any disputes at all, let's just get rid of the text! That's why the translation is bad. It's a new variant

---

[16] Pierre BOURDIEU (2002): Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 145: 3-8.

[17] Juliane HOUSE (1997): *Translation Quality Assessment. A Model Revisited.* Tübingen: Gunter Narr.

on the old game of *traduttore – traditore*. At issue here is the relationship of text and discourse: German historians' discourse on the Shoah has long since settled upon its readings, and the wrong person is punished for breaking the unwritten rules. This has been well analysed by Susanne Lauscher in her own treatment of the Goldhagen translation: quality is a social construct! And it is as such that a translation's quality is acknowledged or denied.[18]

However, before moving on to the role of translation and its significance, we first need to look at the forms, the possible manifestations, of transcultural communication.

I believe these may include the following:

It seems that communication using **body language** may be transcultural, so that, of the performing arts, ballet finds it easiest to succeed in an international space. However, this form of communication has a limited range, which is why it was rejected at the very beginning of human history in favour of oral language. Nevertheless, it is clearly a communicative form, even if a restricted one, as we see in the notion of "speaking with your hands", and it is highly regarded among anthropologists because human beings are apparently far less able to dissimulate through body language than through words. At times, the expressions of body language supply anthropologists with an alternative yardstick for the truth content of verbal utterances. But as a sole form of communication in the absence of shared stores of acoustic signs, it is quite restricted.

Multilingualism is another form of cross-cultural communication. However, how far does individual multilingualism – something that is strongly promoted by the EU – actually reach? Even for "linguistic geniuses", the apparently "perfect mastery" of languages claimed by themselves or others usually stretches to a number of languages that can be counted on one hand, rarely on two. Considering the diversity of languages in the world, therefore, it is at most a limited form. Collective multilingualism is normally restricted to bilingualism; on rare occasions more than two languages are involved. I will not comment on the quality of this collective multilingualism, or on the reach of most multilingual communication. Certainly, I have met impressive speakers in Bukovina, for example – such as a village shop assistant who spoke to her customers in Ukrainian, Hungarian, Romanian, Russian or German as relevant, and answered my question concerning the number of languages she spoke by turning the question back on me. When I mentioned French, she said Yes, she had learnt French and English at commercial college as well. But however striking this linguistic performance may be at first sight, it is hard to know how far it actually reaches. When the need arises to deal with different and unaccustomed communicative situations, limits usually become apparent.

That brings us to **lingua franca** communication, which nowadays almost automatically means communication in English. A veritable magic formula for some, this mode of communication appears (and I am very cautious here) to function rather well, especially in specialist communicative situations. Yet is that success not largely due to the fact that specialised communities share the background of a particular discursive structure of knowledge, that their communication occurs within an internationally conventionalised discourse, ma- king it relatively easy to utilise a shared lingua franca – just as, in the past, diplomacy was carried out in French? How far does this form of communication reach when it moves beyond the space of common

---

[18] Susanne LAUSCHER (2000): Translation Quality Assessment: Where Can Theory and Practice Meet? *The Translator* 6, no. 2: 149-68.

expertise? And what does lingua-franca specialised communication mean for the profile of the languages in which specialised communication is now no longer conducted? Our Copenhagen colleague Gyde Hansen has frequently pointed out that in Denmark, within certain disciplines it has now become virtually impossible to hold a specialist discussion in Danish.

That leaves **translation**: the only form of communication crossing linguistic and cultural borders on which there are no restrictions. In principle, any text can be transferred into any culture – though only if there is a will to do so and, of course, only if the economic resources are available. In principle, however, it is unrestricted, and the only form of which that can be said.

Now, what does the transcultural perspective imply for the construction of theoretical models in translation studies, if the target audience is not a relatively "definable" one, but one that is profoundly heterogeneous and operates "between each other"?

Slavicist Klaus Städtke, of Berlin and later Bremen, notes in his essay on the quandaries of interpreting Russia that Russian culture has, throughout its entire modern development, been a culture of translation.[19] (STÄDTKE 1999: 166-178). He does not mean by that some kind of imitative copying, but instead identifies a positive dynamic whereby Russian culture has been **willing** and **able** to absorb innovation, and has thus translated into itself, appropriated for itself, everything that was new and regarded as necessary. With this in mind, perhaps it is not surprising that the Russian cultural sphere is home to one of the most positively marked translator characters in literature, the hero of Ludmila Ulitzkaya's novel *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*, who is honoured at Yad Vashem towards the end of the novel.

Since the work of Itamar Even-Zohar, we have assumed that the target culture's requirements for knowledge of all kinds – including literary knowledge, and including scholarship – determine what it will find interesting and therefore what will be translated. Occasionally that view has resulted in a somewhat simplistic understanding of the target audience for whom the translation is to be made. Certainly, relatively sound assumptions can be made about the potential circle of recipients in cases (such as a specialised academic discipline) where a shared international or transcultural discursive space exists and there is a common basis not only for content, but also for the conventions of speaking or writing in a particular way. But that process is far more difficult when a discourse has not yet formed. I think this is well demonstrated by the translations of the early Foucault into German. In 1976, a collection of Foucault texts was published in a slim volume entitled *Mikrophysik der Macht* [Microphysics of power]. The translators were academics, such as the Viennese philosopher Walter Seitter or the German writer and cultural researcher Ulrich Raulff. What prompted them to make these translations was probably an interest in Foucault and a desire to create a home for his exciting ideas in German- language academia and societies; the West Berlin publisher Merve offered them a platform for their undertaking. Reading the volume, it becomes obvious how much difficulty the translations have in pushing their way into the German language. The discourse simply does not yet exist, there are not yet any conventions for constituting the texts. The translation seeks a route and simultaneously establishes that route. The text – and also the translated text – searches out its own audience.

The same may be true for the translations following the "new literalness", like Hanswilhelm Haefs's much-maligned German translation of Lawrence Norfolk's

---

[19] Klaus STÄDTKE (1999): Fragwürdigkeiten der Russlandinterpretationen. *Leviathan 27*, no. 2: 166-78.

Lemprière's Dictionary or Wilhelm Ratjen's translation of *Moby-Dick*, which Hanser refused to publish. However controversial, these translations evidently capture the taste of an audience that wants to see the English text shimmering through the German one, that – for example in the case of *Moby-Dick* – may already know the original or an earlier translation and now wants the pleasure of a new interpretation. It is not unlike a new production of an opera, or a new recording of a Beethoven concert. "Read them in parallel!" demands the Munich translator Mascha Tietze, reviewing two Dostoevsky translations that appeared simultaneously.

In other words, one precondition for transculturality would be a target culture that can create links, that is able to accept and take on translations. And these capacities to connect become more and more sophisticated as translations proceed – again, "between" each other.

Looking at the translation market, we see that translations of fiction **into** English have accounted for less than 5% of the world's translated fiction every year since 1945. Translation into French and German stands at around 10–12% percent annually, with the German language taking the lead in terms of absolute numbers. For Italian and Spanish, the figures fluctuate between 12 and 20%, for Swedish and Dutch at around 25%, for Greek around 40%. Flows of translation – just like other flows of goods – thus reflect the hierarchies of the global market and its power structures.

Perhaps we need to begin by mapping the translation flows in different epochs, a kind of quantitative foundation for translation studies. Those flows would reveal much about power, influence, prestige and interpretive authority. Turning to the **source languages** of translated fiction, in 2003 English headed the list with 49.3%, followed by French with 7.7%, Russian with 3.3% and Italian with 2.8%. Other source languages each accounted for 2% or less.[20] Behind all this, of course, lie factors of power: economic power, political power. Does economic power result in cultural autism? Surely that is not inevitable ….

And now, despite my earlier comment, let me look back into history, for perhaps there is something to be found there after all:

Economic power in nineteenth-century Germany pressed for larger markets and greater political influence; as a result, the feudal structures of the particularist states were defeated and replaced by national markets. Political and cultural legitimation was forged by intellectual elites, most importantly philologists, who supplied a cultural construction of the nation. Norbert Reiter has called them the high priests of nationhood. With the aid of language, history and literature – that is, with the aid of a textual canon – they built an intellectual and moral idea of the nation that could bestow unity.

On the positive side, this means first of all that it is possible to construct an identity, or a new identity.

In the course of its history as a separate discipline, in other words since the late 1970s, translation studies has extended the boundaries of its object several times. These expansions are sometimes called "turns", though if the connotation of "turnabouts" is troublesome, perhaps "reorientations" would be an alternative formulation. Translation studies turned to function, to culture, most recently to society … At

---

[20] Statistics from Norbert BACHLEITNER and Michaela WOLF (2010): Auf dem Weg zu einer Soziologie der literarischen Übersetzung im deutschsprachigen Raum. In *Streifzüge im translatorischen Feld. Zur Soziologie der literarischen Übersetzung im deutschsprachigen Raum*, ed. Norbert Bachleitner & Michaela Wolf, 1–25. Berlin: LIT.

approximately the same time, the humanities and social science disciplines interested in culture were making their own turns, including, eventually, the "translational turn". Perhaps this brings us to the make-or-break question of translation studies, one that has been broached occasionally but upon which only individual conclusions have, to my knowledge, so far been drawn: should we enter into the whole idea of translating cultures? Does it form part of our research object? Is translation studies a "cultural science"? There are good reasons to avoid a boundless expansion of concepts. The wider they're spread, the thinner they get – a very real argument against stretching the translation concept to embrace the translating of cultures. Yet the translation concept is being used in this way, and after all, we have no sole and exclusive right to it.

But perhaps this is where our own history can help us. For centuries, the untranslatability of languages was debated while the business of translating and interpreting flourished unabated. The step change in theory formation came with the realisation that it is not languages but texts that are translated, and texts are fundamentally translatable – as is obvious both theoretically and in everyday practice. Now, cultures can just as little be translated as can languages; what's translatable is the cultural product, and for our purposes such products are texts: oral and verbal and multimedia texts, perhaps even ones that are only thought, what semiotician Roland Posner would call mentifacts. At stake are always signs, are always processes of semiosis, are always ostension and inference.

In his encyclopaedia of Russian culture, which he entitles "Constants"[21], Russian semiotician Iurii Stepanov shows how the metamorphoses of signs occur. For the forms of signs and their contents – signifiers and signifieds – do not change simultaneously. Persuasively, he presents the development of the automobile as a parallel. When the coach was progressively being superseded by the car, the car largely retained the coach's outer form, even though that form contradicted the aerodynamic principles of the car's construction. It simply wasn't yet possible to imagine the car as looking different from the coach. Only gradually did the new content, the automobile, acquire the form that suited it. Again, when the first airports were built, they looked like train stations except that the passengers had to be taken to the aircraft: the new form of transport did not yet come to them. It took time for airports to change their form, with planes now coming closer and closer to their passengers. The converse complaint was voiced in the nineteenth century by Romanian philosopher Titu Maiorescu, who accused the new Romanian national elites of having brought (mainly from France, where they had been students) forms without content to Romania and implanted them there. It was now important, he argued, to develop contents to fit these forms. We might add that what is called democracy in some countries probably includes only the signifier, not the signified or content of the associated idea. Perhaps the most charming use I have encountered was one winter in Moscow when, as usual, the street had not been cleared and two old ladies were trudging beside me through the snow. One of them grumbled about the state of the street: "Is this what you call democracy?!" Democracy is what's now, what is still relatively new.

Taking as an example the problem described by Doris Bachmann-Medick for translation in cultural anthropology, the difficulty of cultural translation would be located at the point where other cultures must be "translated" into the language, categories and imagination of Western recipients while at the same time ensuring "that these

---

[21] IU.S. STEPANOV (1997): *Konstanty. Slovar' russkoi kul'tury.* Moscow: Shkola IAzyki russkoi kul'tury.

other cultures are grasped along the guiding threads of their own interpretation of themselves; that is, through their indigenous ways of thinking, symbols and concepts", including "implicit meanings".[22] For Bachmann-Medick, that firstly means reconstructing the cultural context of spoken words and actions – a thoroughly understood and comprehensive interpretation. In a second step, it means translating the indigenous concepts and reconstructed cultural contexts into "language and representational conventions with which the readers are familiar".[23] In other words, cultural translation is essentially the transfer of alien ways of thinking into familiar forms of representation and languages.

Yet translation has been doing just that for many centuries, more or less effectively, with more or less success and more or less recognition. When the foreign – what has not yet been introduced, is unknown or just partially comprehensible because of its alterity – makes its way only slowly and laboriously into the new language and conceptual world, the result has sometimes been a practice of retranslation. In this process, the languages concerned always changed as well, for the new always had to take shape within them before it was able to articulate anything. In any good history of language, there is always at least one chapter on the role of translations in the evolution of the national language, the standard language or norm.

It is nevertheless a fallacy, though an excellent marketing idea, that the German Dostoevsky translations by Swetlana Geyer are works of genius because they are the works of Swetlana Geyer. No: by now such a plethora of readings, by literary scholars and translators, has accumulated that every re-translation can immerse itself in a stream of interpretations and attend to the fine detail – if you like, with a view to a new audience. That also goes for the new Dostoevsky translations by Margit and Rolf Bräuer, which had the bad luck to appear almost simultaneously with Geyer's. Likewise, if the 1976 Foucault translations strike us as clumsy and rough-hewn, that is not due to in-competence or lack of professionalism on Raulff's or Seitter's part; their work was at the beginning of a discourse, in this case of the discourse on discourse.

I find the beginnings of discourses fascinating from a translation studies point of view, as I have confessed in other contexts. For theory formation in translation studies they mean, I believe, that the skopos concept founded by Vermeer must not be oversimplified, thus trivialised, as referring simply to the "purpose" of a translation. Rather, all the factors influencing all the positions taken up within the translation process form a relational configuration by means of which each textual individual is allowed its translation strategy under the specific conditions of time and space. And the beginnings of discourses see an interplay of multilingualism, lingua-franca communication and perhaps even body language. It is unlikely that every first translation will succeed; instead, the concepts, mental images and linguistic shapes will have to be slowly and painstakingly sought and elaborated before the form can match the con-tent. It's an *opera aperta*, or endless semiosis – let us recall the first automobiles and the long path they have taken to reach today's Porsche.

Consequently, cultural – and specifically transcultural – translations would be those that carry a way of life, an imagination and linguistic form into a new environment and simultaneously give their readers the opportunity for profound understanding, in other words create new conventionalisations. This process needs to be critically

---

[22] Doris BACHMANN-MEDICK (2007): Kulturanthropologie und Übersetzung. In *Übersetzung: Ein internationales Handbuch zur Übersetzungsforschung*, vol. 1, ed. Harald Kittel, Juliane House and Brigitte Schultze, 155-65. Berlin: de Gruyter, p. 155.
[23] BACHMANN-MEDICK (2007), pp. 155-6.

accompanied by the discipline attached to it, and to form the basis of models that both reflect what is general and allow us to identify the specific conditions of the translated product's emergence. As Erich Prunč has said:

> *"In pursuit of a critical scholarship, it is therefore also the task of translation studies to analyse the configurations of power behind conventionalisation processes, and especially their impact on translatorial practice, and to query reflexively its own role in the social positioning of translation".[24]*

Does this make translation studies a critical cultural studies?

In my view, it is in part a move towards what Walter Benjamin called the task of the translator, for the diversity of interpretations through all kinds of translations (from the first, tentative one to the most recent one that builds upon it), the diversity of conventionalisations of what is new and cannot yet be said, joins together what Babel put asunder – and thus brings us closer to the one language.

In pursuit of this goal, the University of Vienna's Centre for Translation Studies is a good place to start; it has the vigour, the dimensions and – following Benjamin and his *Aufgabe*, the **task**. Perhaps my own personal motto matches it rather well: Never begin to stop, never stop beginning!

References

ANDERSON, Benedict (1988): *Die Erfindung der Nation: zur Karriere eines folgenreichen Konzepts*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus-Verlag.

ASH, Mitchel G. (2006): "Wissens- und Wissenschaftstransfer – Einführende Bemerkungen". *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 29 (2006), 181-189. https://doi.org/10.1002/bewi.200601158

BACHLEITNER, Norbert & WOLF, Michaela (2010): "Einleitung: Zur soziologischen Erforschung der literarischen Übersetzung im deutschsprachigen Raum". In: BACHLEITNER, Norbert & WOLF, Michaela (eds): *Streifzüge im literarischen Feld. Zur Soziologie der literarischen Übersetzung im deutschsprachigen Raum*. Münster: LIT-Verlag, 15ff.

BACHLEITNER, Norbert & WOLF, Michaela (2010): "Auf dem Weg zu einer Soziologie der literarischen Übersetzung im deutschsprachigen Raum". In: BACHLEITNER, Norbert & WOLF, Michaela (eds): *Streifzüge im translatorischen Feld. Zur Soziologie der literarischen Übersetzung im deutschsprachigen Raum*. Münster: LIT-Verlag, 1-25.

BOURDIEU, Pierre (2002): «Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées». In: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, Année 2002, Vol. 145, 3-8.

BURKART, Günter (2004): "Niklas Luhmann: Ein Theoretiker der Kultur?". In: BURKART, Günter & RUNKEL, Gunter (eds): *Luhmann und die Kulturtheorie*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 11-39. (= Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft; 1725).

BUSSE, Dietrich (1997): "Das Eigene und das Fremde. Annotationen zu Funktion und Wirkung einer diskurssemantischen Grundfigur". In: JUNG, Matthias; WENGELER, Martin & BÖKE, Karin (eds): *Die Sprache des Migrationsdiskurses. Das Reden über „Ausländer" in Medien, Politik und Alltag*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 17-35.

---

[24] Erich PRUNČ (2007): *Entwicklungslinien der Translationswissenschaft*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, p. 30.

DELEUZE, Gilles & GUATTARI, Félix / SCHWIBS, Bernd & VOGL, Joseph (transl.) (2000): *Was ist Philosophie?* Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp. (= Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1483).

ESPAGNE, Michel (1999): *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands*. Paris: PUF.

GEERTZ, Clifford / ENGELMANN, Herwig (transl.) (1996): *Welt in Stücken. Kultur und Politik am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Wien: Passagen.

HAHN, Oliver (1997): *Arte. Der Europäische Kulturkanal: Eine Fernsehsprache in vielen Sprachen*. München: Verlag Reinhard Fischer.

HOUSE, Juliane (1997): *Translation quality assessment: a model revisted*. Tübingen: Narr. (= Tübinger Beiträge zur Linguistik; 410).

KITTEL, Harald et al. (ed.) (2004): *Übersetzung. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Übersetzungsforschung*. HSK 26.1. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.

LAUSCHER, Susanne (2006): "Translatqualität – ein Konsens". In: SCHIPPEL, Larisa (ed.): *Übersetzungsqualität: Kritik – Kriterien – Bewertungshandeln*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 55-73. (= Reihe: TRANSÜD – Arbeiten zur Theorie und Praxis des Übersetzens und Dolmetschens, Bd. 8).

MANN, Thomas (1914): "Gedanken im Kriege". In: MANN, Thomas: *Essays*. Volume 1: Frühlingssturm 1893-1918. Ed. by Hermann KURZKE and Stephan STACHORSKI 1993. Frankfurt/Main: Fischer.

MAIORESCU, Titu (1868): *În contra direcţiei de astăzi în cultura română*, 153.

ORTIZ, Fernando / MEYER-MINNEMANN, Maralde (transl.) (1987): *Tabak und Zucker. Ein kubanischer Disput*. Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag.

PRUNČ, Erich (2007): *Entwicklungslinien der Translationswissenschaft: von den Asymmetrien der Sprache zu den Asymmetrien der Macht*. Berlin: Frank & Timme. (= Reihe: TRANSÜD – Arbeiten zur Theorie und Praxis des Übersetzens und Dolmetschens, Bd. 14).

RÜSEN, Jörn (2007): "Kulturelle Identität in der Globalisierung – Über die Gefahren des Ethnozentrismus und die Chancen des Humanismus". In: GUNSENHEIMER, Antje (eds): *Grenzen, Differenzen, Übergänge. Spannungsfelder inter- und transkultureller Kommunikation*. Bielefeld: transcript, 49-54.

STÄDTKE, Klaus (1999): "Fragwürdigkeiten der Russlandinterpretationen". *Leviathan* 27, Heft 2, 166-178.

STEPANOV, Jurij (2012): *Konstanty. Slovar' russkoj kul'tury*. Moskva: Akademičeskij proekt.

WELSCH, Wolfgang (2010): "Was ist eigentlich Transkulturalität?". In: DAROWSKA, Lucyna; LÜTTENBERG, Thomas & MACHOLD, Claudia (eds): *Hochschule als transkultureller Raum? Kultur, Bildung und Differenz in der Universität*. Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 39-66. https://doi.org/10.14361/transcript.9783839413753.39