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Translation of Theories – Theories of Translation

The aim of this handbook is to trace those intensive intellectual movements in Central and East-Central Europe that provided the impetus for the development of literary theory (or theories). Particularly in the early twentieth century, ideas and individuals – and with them concepts and theories – migrated back and forth between the cultures of the German-speaking areas, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Russia, creating common theoretical field. Even if in the course of the century the opportunities for this exchange were limited due to the political conditions that prevailed for long periods, exiled scholars still transported theories to the Western literary-theoretical discourse, where some of them enjoyed divergent careers and were transformed within new cultural contexts. Both translators and the transformation translation necessarily entails thus play a decisive role for the entangled movements examined by this handbook.

An important consideration is what emphasis we should place on the relationship between concepts and actors when describing such migratory movements. Can such an entangled history of literary theory (or theories) be understood in the classical tradition of the history of ideas and concepts? Should then the focus be on each specific development of concepts and terms in their various contexts, meaning that the aspect of entanglement would consist in ascribing particular significance to reciprocal exchange of these contexts? Or would it be better to trace the entangled history in terms of specific, individual actors who served as mediators, and often as translators, of concepts?

In Slavic literary theory, the classic example of a wandering actor is Roman Jakobson, who took the concepts of Russian formalism with him to Prague, where he entered into intensive exchange with the members of the Prague Linguistic Circle before finally further disseminating and developing the concepts of Russian formalism and Prague structuralism in the USA. Mediating, wandering actors like him initiated, one might say, the migration of concepts.

In Slavic studies, the classic example of concepts taking on a life of their own due to their migration is probably the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin: in Western Europe, his theory of dialogicity became a theory of intertextuality, and the concept of hybridity emanating from his concept of carnival took on innumerable guises in post-colonial studies. Another actor comes to the fore in this shift from dialogicity to intertextuality: Julia Kristeva, who as a Bulgarian emigrée took Bakhtin with her to Paris, where she was able to render his ideas compatible with the local scene's then nascent discussions on poststructuralism. It is much harder

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to establish the originator of the transfer of hybridity as a characteristic of the post-colonial. It would thus seem to be primarily the concepts that unfold new semantic potential, even if they are initially communicated by wandering actors (like Kristeva): for instance, in the concept of intertextuality, dialogicity, which in Bakhtin's concept is always bound up with its author, becomes a relationship between texts, and hybridity becomes a key term in post-colonial studies, a discipline Bakhtin himself never pursued.

Our example shows that neither concentrating on the mediating and translating actors, not all of whom cannot be identified either, nor focusing only on the travelling concepts is an appropriate strategy for tracing literary theory's entanglement, since the concepts themselves are transformed in the course of their transfer by various readings. Such shifts can be well explained using the concept of cultural translation, in which an important role is played by the attention paid to the reception context in the target language or culture. In our case, we would have to speak of reception contexts of various cultures of theory.

1 Translation(s) as a method, object and example

From a methodological perspective, our focus here is on cultural studies' understanding of translation as transfer not just from one natural language to another, but also between cultural contexts. However, in the following exemplary discussions, translation also becomes an object, since we shall be concerned with translated theory which itself (also) examines translations. Here the question concerning the role and the weight of the actors will continue to be of interest, since the example centres on such an actor who was a mediator in the best sense of the term: at the initiative – and probably also under the leadership – of Jurij Striedter, in the first half of the 1970s a German translation of the works of Felix Vodička was produced by the Research Group for Structural Methods in Linguistics and Literary Studies at the University of Konstanz. It includes a selection from his volume *Struktura vývoje* (1969, *The Structure of Development*) and an essay on Josef Jungmann's translation of Chateaubriand's *Atala* from Vodička's book *Počátky krásné prózy novočeské* (1948, *The Beginnings of Modern Czech Prose*). Striedter's two-part treatise, just short of 100 pages in length but merely listed as an "Introduction", shares important considerations on the development "From Russian Formalism to Czech Structuralism" (in Part I), followed by an examination of "Felix Vodička's Theory of Reception and Structuralist Literary History" (in Part II). Here, Striedter discusses how it was via a translation that Vodička first elaborated his understanding of concretisation: the translation of *Atala* allowed

him to demonstrate the extent to which one of the leading protagonists of the national revival, Josef Jungmann, adapted Chateaubriand's original text to the demands of the then renascent Czech literature (or to what he understood to be the demands of the time). Later, in a study concentrating, unlike Vodička, not so much on the history of Czech literature as on Czech cultural history, Vladimír Macura typologised the manifestations of the culture of the era of national revival as "translationism" (*překladovost*), showing how in their efforts to realise a comprehensive Czech culture as swiftly as possible, the actors of this renaissance often turned to translation, not with a view to faithfully reproducing the originals, but catering to the desiderata of the Czech target culture (Macura 1995, 61–78).

A further case of translation relevant to the history of theory and on which Striedter elaborates in his introduction is Vodička's shifting reference to Ingarden. Both Ingarden's concept of spots of indeterminacy (Ingarden 1986 [1931]) and Vodička's linking this model with Mukařovský's notion of the work of art in his concept of concretisation served as significant impulses for Konstanz reception aesthetics, especially Wolfgang Iser's gap model (Iser 1970; 1978 [1976]). It can be assumed that Striedter both disseminated and discussed these matters with them. Just how closely the discussions were related is demonstrated by the fact that the reception aesthetics reader edited by Rainer Warning in 1975 included two of Vodička's texts that had been translated for the German Vodička edition that appeared a year later: the section on "Die Rezeptionsgeschichte literarischer Werke ("The Reception History of Literary Works") from the extensive treatise "Literaturgeschichte: Ihre Probleme und Aufgaben" ("Literary History: Its Problems and Tasks"), originally from 1942, and "Die Konkretisation des literarischen Werkes: Zur Problematik der Rezeption von Nerudas Werk" ("The Concretization of the Literary Work: Problems of the Reception of Neruda's Works"), originally from 1941.

In the following, I seek to demonstrate that translation in this network of relationships was not merely a recurrent object and repeated practice but also – in the broader sense of transfer between different contexts – a common basis for questions of structuralist aesthetics of the work, reception aesthetics and cultural semiotics. To this end, I will first examine cultural studies' broader concept of translation, with particular focus on Lotman's cultural semiotic theories on the subject, before returning to indeterminacy and concretisation in Ingarden and Vodička and Striedter's thoughts on their relationship.

2 Translation as a category in cultural studies

In cultural studies, translation has recently become a programmatic category. The focus is no longer on the mere transfer of individual texts from one language to another, but about the processual nature and dynamics of cultural translation. As translators know from their daily work, texts simply cannot be 'transported' from one shore in the source language to another shore in the target language, as the oft-cited metaphor of a bridge suggests. Such frictionless and unbroken 'transport' from one language to another is hardly possible; it is prevented not only by the respective linguistic peculiarities, but also – indeed, especially – by the different contexts in which we find the *translandum* or the *translat* at the translation process's point of departure and destination. In this respect, every translation is accompanied by a transformation. This elasticity inherent to translation has made it interesting for a cultural studies that no longer assumes that cultures are fixed entities but especially examines those processes connected with cultural contacts.

Hence, Doris Bachmann-Medick thus already considered the translational turn, which has recently enjoyed something of a revival, one of the important "cultural turns" in her 2006 survey of *Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Bachmann-Medick 2006, 238–283; English translation: *Cultural Turns. New Orientations in the Study of Culture*, 2016, 175–209). In a more recent study, she observes: "translation also turns into a model for the study of culture as it transforms cultural concepts by making them translatable and translating them consciously into different fields" (Bachmann-Medick 2012, 26–27).

Thus it was especially the dynamics and processuality associated with translation that made this category attractive for cultural studies beyond its object in the narrow sense. The road from the practice of translation as 'translation proper' to translation as part of cultural studies it has inspired is traced by Dilek Dizdar (2009), as Bachmann-Medick explains:

> In these moves outward to wider horizons, clearly the role of language, and with it 'translation proper', cannot be ignored. However, in the disciplinary framework of translation studies, 'translation proper' itself suggests a concept of translation that undermines representationalism: a multilayered, complex concept that is constantly generating difference and hybridity and confounding tendencies towards homogenization through what translation studies scholar Dilek Dizdar refers to as its 'third-party position' (Dizdar 96). Dizdar shows how 'translation proper', as a language-oriented procedure, can offer valuable insights for the investigation of in-between positions and ethical implications as opposed to mere transcodings, thus making visible the translation process and the actions of translators themselves. (Bachmann-Medick 2012, 28–29)

Such an understanding of translation thus implies a departure from holistic concepts of text and culture. For if an examination of translational practice makes a mockery of the idea that a text can be transported unchanged and hence "undamaged", then this casts doubt not only on traditional categories such as authorship and "original, representation, equivalence", which are replaced by "new guiding categories such as cultural transfer, foreignness and alterity, cultural differences and power" (Bachmann-Medick 2004, 449). In particular, this shows the extent to which cultures cannot be imagined as hermetically sealed entities, developing rather via these very processes of translation. "Cultures are not only translated; rather, they are constituted in translation and as translation" (Bachmann-Medick 2004, 454). "Culture [...] is both transnational and translational" (Bhabha 2004 [1994], 247), as Homi Bhabha put it programmatically as well as succinctly. That also brings us to the discursive context within which the category of translation has recently received particular attention: the field of post-colonial theory, which is concerned with both the analysis of largely present-day cultural reciprocal relationships and their practice, not least with respect to their (power-)political and social aspects.

3 Translation in cultural semiotics: Lotman's semiosphere model

While we mostly refer in this context to reflections in English-language cultural studies, here, particularly given the focus of this handbook, we should also remember the important role translation plays in Iurii Lotman's theory of cultural semiotics. *Semiosphere* is the term Lotman (1990) uses to describe a model of culture as a semiotic space that is always penetrated by several languages. By languages, he means both natural languages and all other forms of codes (such as behavioural norms and conventions); the crucial aspect is the idea of reciprocity to which all these codes are subject. Processes of translation that always generate additional information are constantly taking place both within a semiosphere and at its boundaries, for it is the very inadequate aspects inherent to a greater or lesser extent to every translation, the other, foreign contexts encountered by the *translandum* in the target language, that allow new semantic potential to emerge:

> Because the semiotic space is transected by numerous boundaries, each message that moves across it must be many times translated and transformed, and the process of generating new information thereby snowballs. (Lotman 1990, 140)

While Lotman assumes that every semiotic system, especially in the centre, which is the most organised and structured, has a tendency for self-organisation and self-description, he leaves us in no doubt that he also recognises in this phenomenon the danger of ossification. He clearly prefers the semiosphere's periphery, those edges where less-organised semiotic practices are encountered, where confrontations with other semiotic systems and processes of translation into and out of them take place, in the course of which said intensification of semiotic processes (Lotman 1990, 142) emerges. Here, the translations function on the one hand as processes of appropriation and domestication of the foreign, the other, while on the other hand they always simultaneously disturb the structure of one's own code and one's own norms. This becomes clear in Lotman's discussion of the boundary, which forms the site of the most productive exchange:

> But the hottest spots for semioticizing processes are the boundaries of the semiosphere. The notion of boundary is an ambivalent one: it both separates and unites. It is always the boundary of something and so belongs to both frontier cultures, to both contiguous semiospheres. The boundary is bilingual and polylingual. The boundary is a mechanism for translating texts of an alien semiotics into 'our' language, it is the place where what is 'external' is transformed into what is 'internal', it is a filtering membrane which so transforms foreign texts that they become part of the semiosphere's internal semiotics while still retaining their own characteristics. (Lotman 1990, 136–137)

In semiotic terms, then, in Lotman too we encounter those points that are emphasised in the current discussions on cultural translation: cultures are not to be understood as holistic and essentialist; rather they are constituted by diverse codes that are in constant processes of reciprocal exchange and translation within which meaning is not simply transferred but is also always transformed. Here we can observe both centripetal movements that seek to incorporate that which is to be translated into the respective prevailing code and norm system and centrifugal movements that infiltrate the existing entrenched systems and enable the creation of new meanings.

The extent to which this model, related to all kinds of cultural communication, is inspired in its emphasis of centrifugal dynamics by the special case of communication via and in the presence of a (verbal) work of art might become clear if we now return to the attempts to describe how the artwork functions in its concretising reception, which itself always bears the characteristics of a translation insofar as its results vary according to the context of its reception.

4 Reception as an act of (concretising) translation

To this end, it is first necessary to consider the reception-aesthetic implications of Vodička's concept of concretisation, which is a transfer of theory in itself and in this respect a kind of translation of Ingarden's (1986 [1931]) layered model of the literary artwork. While Ingarden's model entails spots of indeterminacy that must be filled by the recipient, Vodička reads it against the background of his contemporary Prague discussions on the development of a structural aesthetics. In his introduction to Vodička's writings on literary history, Striedter summarises the different readings thus:

> Since the historicity of every concretization of aesthetic objects is fundamental for Prague Structuralism, the interest of the Structuralists progresses from the structure of the work of art to the conditions for its concretization, which are given outside of the work itself, are collectively handed down, and are historically variable. This concept of concretization differs importantly from that of Ingarden, who expressly allows that such factors do exist and contribute, but for his own part concentrates on the relationship between the work of art and the perceiving subject, aspiring in the final analysis to an ideal concretization, independent of time, realizing "*all* the aesthetic qualities in the work"—even if he posits this only in the sense of a theoretical postulate. (Striedter 1989, 125–126; citing Vodička 1976, 95; emphasis by J. S.)

What Striedter doesn't mention is that in the early 1940s, around the same time as Vodička's foundational text (cited here), Jan Mukařovský's thoughts on the realisation of the aesthetic object in the act of reception led him to stress the unintentional as a most essential characteristic of the artwork. A path-breaking analysis in this respect is his study "Záměrnost a nezáměrnost v umění" (1943, "Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art"). While in Ingarden, the act of filling spots of indeterminacy tends to be led by the intentionally layered structure of the work of art, for Mukařovský it is the very unintentionality that guarantees the work's lasting vitality and potency: as long as shifting aspects of an artefact are perceived as unintentional in different contexts, the artefact will always be realised as an aesthetic object in ever-new ways. What triggers these ever-new acts of reception is the work's quality that resists a harmonious reading, countering the impression of a harmonious interplay of the individual elements forming the whole. Here, Mukařovský uses the term "thing": the very quality that repeatedly makes the work a "matter of vital import" (Mukařovský 1978 [1943], 122) is that which the work of art does not permit us to encounter as a sign – as an ultimately decipherable sign – but presents to us as a thing to which we cannot immediately assign meaning. The aesthetic object, which is always initially created and constantly recreated in the act of reception – and indeed can only be created by such a process – is thus imagined as possessing maximal flexibility, without being arbi-

trary however, since it remains connected to the artefact that gives rise to its reception. The work of art is thus created in a complex reciprocal relationship and interplay between the artefact and the individual and collective reception context. In his introduction to his reader on *Rezeptionsästhetik* (1975, *Reception Aesthetics*), Rainer Warning notes just how difficult it is to grasp this relationship between individual and collective traits (Warning 1975, 9–41, esp. 13–19 on Vodička). Felix Vodička was certainly influenced by the Prague School's understanding of the work of art with its consideration of both production and reception, although as a literary historian he was primarily interested in a work's concretisation at the time of its creation. He was also fascinated by a work's value for the development of literature, that is, to what extent it provided the impulse for new developments. This literary-historical interest may explain why it was a literary translation and not an original work upon which he first elaborated his concept of concretisation (cf. Striedter 1989, 136–137). For he considers translation a form of concretisation:

> Particular problems arise when we observe the reception of a work of art in a foreign literary environment. A translation is already a concretization in a certain sense, provided by the translator. The readerly and critical response to a work of art in a foreign environment is often completely different to its reception in its native environment, since the [literary] norm is also a different one. (Vodička 1976 [1942], 71)

Specifically, following Ingarden's layered model, Vodička describes in great detail how Josef Jungmann went about his translation of Chateaubriand's *Atala*, where he departed from the original not only in terms of language but also in the axiological presentation of the topic, thus adapting the *translat* to the demands of his target context – the emerging Czech literature that was foundational to the national renaissance and whose further development Jungmann sought to influence with his translation.

The cultural-semiotic dimension to this analysis was later emphasised by Vladimír Macura, whose typological examination of the culture of revival era (1995) identified translation as one of its characteristic traits. In their attempt to accelerate the complete and comprehensive development of the Czech culture they sought to establish, the revivalists used translation wherever they saw a lack of original Czech cultural products (in all areas of written culture, not only *belles lettres*), with a clear orientation around the target context. These were not translations following the principle of remaining faithful to the original; rather, they even omitted or added passages in line with the demands of the contemporary Czech circumstances – or, as Vodička demonstrated in the case of Jungmann, they made stylistic or axiological changes. Macura, who as a historian of Czech literature and culture was at least as familiar with the works of Prague structuralism as Iurii Lotman, with whose cultural-semiotic method he engaged closely during

a period studying in Tartu, was able to apply it in inspiring fashion to the revival era following Vodička's foundational study.

In Lotman's idea that, from a semiotic perspective, it is mistranslations that generate additional information, we might recognise traces of or at least a parallel with the reception-aesthetic concept of concretisation as the different realisation of the aesthetic object according to its individual and collective context. While Mukařovský's and Vodička's – and indeed Iser's – approach is ultimately bound up with the aesthetics of the work, that is, remains concerned with the concept of the work as an initiator but also an authority restricting diverse concretisations, Lotman's approach is primarily descriptive in its focus on communication structures as presented in his model of the semiosphere. That he thereby constantly reveals a preference for centrifugal semantic processes that shatter ossified meanings may be a consequence of his examination of the specificity of literary texts, which he too used as his point of departure.

5 Actors and/or concepts?

I opened by connecting these observations on an entangled history of literary theory (or theories) with the question as to whether the focus should be on the mediating actors or the travelling concepts. This attempt to show an exemplary excerpt of such an entangled history focused on concepts that can be outlined by the keywords reception as concretisation as translation. Jurij Striedter is a prime example of *mediating actor* in the best sense of the term, since he was clearly an academic teacher with the ability to inspire his students, initially in Konstanz and later in Harvard (where Barack Obama also took in his lectures). In the German-speaking world, he first came to attention with the volume *Texte der russischen Formalisten* (1969, *Texts of Russian Formalists*), to which he wrote an in-depth introduction. He later used this introduction and his two-part "introductory treatise" prefacing the German translation of Felix Vodička's works in his 1989 study *Literary Structure, Evolution and Value. Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered*, written while he was in America. When Striedter wrote his introduction to Vodička's works in 1976, he thought contemporary readers no longer needed to be made acquainted with Russian formalism and Czech structuralism, "[u]nlike in the introduction to the first volume on the Formalists of 1969, which sought to make the German reader more familiar with Formalism as a phenomenon in the history of scholarship by demonstrating its relevance to the recent discussion of theory" (Vodička 1976, VII). After the Prague School had become well known for its theoretical writings due to the pre-existing translations

of Jan Mukařovský's works on poetics (*Kapitel aus der Poetik* [1967, *Chapters from Poetics*]) and aesthetics (*Kapitel aus der Ästhetik* [1970, *Chapters from Aesthetics*]), presenting Vodička's works was intended to fill a gap, since they offered insights into their hitherto unknown "actual literary-critical implementation and [...] analytical and literary-historical practice" (Striedter 1976, VIII). Later, in 1989, Striedter revised his assumption that the Western theoretical discourse was familiar with the basic theoretical positions of Czech structural aesthetics primarily advanced by Jan Mukařovský. In his introduction – written when poststructural criticism of structuralist positions prevailed – Striedter observed that "the earlier and in many respects different Czech version" of structuralism "has remained unknown or was underestimated", particularly in the French discussions, which sought the dissolution of, above all, French structuralism. His book, especially the last part, written in 1989, is an attempt to remedy this situation: "Therefore the achievements of the Czech Structuralists have to be rediscovered and reevaluated beside this well-known mainstream and to be compared with other approaches to the same issues." (Striedter 1989, 9–10)

Above all, Striedter sought, then, to emphasise the potential connections Russian formalism and Czech structuralism could have offered the era's debates on theory and still offered more recent ones. By contrasting them with newer approaches, he advanced a re-reading of the 'old' texts both in the light of the problems they themselves had raised and in the light of the problems demonstrated by later theories in order to show the stimulus that was still offered by these often tentative blueprints for what was then still a relatively young literary theory. It is in this sense that his closing argument must be understood. Given that Bernd Stiegler, for instance, wrote in his introduction to *Theorien der Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften* (2015, *Theories of Literary and Cultural Studies*) that "Structuralism is very interesting but – admittedly – also pretty much as dead as a doornail, since today there are hardly any scholars who would call themselves Structuralists" (Stiegler 2015, 11), only for the relevant chapter to cover solely French structuralism in the figures of Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, unfortunately Striedter's remarks remain no less relevant today:

> The idea that we are somehow beyond Structuralism is not a valid excuse for continuing to neglect the insights of the Czech Structuralists. [...] To reconsider what these once groundbreaking schools [Russian formalism and Czech structuralism] have tried or achieved in the study of literary structure, evolution, and value might – even even in an era beyond Formalism and beyond Structuralism – be a worthwhile task for anyone who wishes to understand the function and value of literature. (Striedter 1989, 261)

In this sense – and this is the second conclusion we can draw from Striedter– it would mainly be concepts and their transformations that would have to be the focus of a history of theory oriented towards entangled history. Ultimately, it is concepts and their transformations that are able to unfold inspiring potency and fascination – and certainly most effectively if they are communicated by charismatic figures.

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