

# Cultural Transplantation and Problems of Transferability

Anna Malinowska

University of Silesia  
E-mail: anna.malinowska@us.edu.pl

## Abstract

The article addresses the concept of ‘cultural transfer’ in terms of ‘cultural transplantation’ – a procedure to challenge the adaptability of practices, objects, and, more broadly, narratives of culture, as they become grafted from one ‘cultural body’ to another and function in different social and political contexts. Cultural transplantation is not a fixed term, although it is occasionally used in translation studies and is introduced here as a synonym for ‘cultural transfer’ to extend the meaning of the latter as well as to highlight the physicality of the processes discussed in the context of cultural transfer. The article exposes transferability as the main factor of transfer to analyse problems of cultural adoption and adaptation, showing deformations of globally practiced theories, concepts, discourses, and ideas (which I will call ‘texts of culture’) as they clash with (and crash against) local systems of meaning and local interpretative communities.

**Keywords:** *transferability, cultural transplant, popular convergence, cultural adoption, textual solidarity*

## Introduction: Transfer and Transferability

In the era of accelerated global circulation (of information, objects, commodities, ideas, and practices), *culture clash* and *cultural transmission* have become notions of special significance and common use. Present in many contexts of cultural encounter, they inform about the trajectories of transfer processes as well as name the nature of cultural interaction, in which phenomena converge, permeate and thus exert mutual impact. An interesting aspect of cultural exchange is the transformational quality of transmitted content and the adaptability of cultural phenomena to new cultural settings. How and to what extent products of individual cultures adapt to foreign circumstances is central to the process of cultural migration and the understanding of cross-national migration and mergence.

Transferability of cultures has been the focus of scholarly attention for quite some time, mainly as an important reference point in exposing the complexity of cultural exchange. It lent a new dynamic to the study of cultural exchange and enriched analytical perspectives. More importantly, it called for new, more inclusive, and thus more interdisciplinary methods of approaching cultural processes. The old tools, as Stephen Greenblatt observed, ‘have [too much] taken for granted the stability of cultures’<sup>1</sup>; they concentrated on national cultural self-sufficiency. The old methods

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Cultural Mobility: An Introduction’, in *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

defined ‘cultural at-homeness’ as purely local and homogeneous and, by doing so, developed a systematic fallacy to dominate the concepts of ‘local heritage’, ‘cultural canons’ and ‘national’ for a long time – a fallacy that kept those central components of culture ignorant of their transcultural dependencies. The change in methodology came in the 1980s, when Michel Espagne and Michael Werner introduced a model of cultural transfer that allowed for identifying new dimensions and qualities of cultural exchange.<sup>2</sup> It meant a departure from the long established modes of assessing cultural practices and a turn towards new scholarly directions set by postcolonial approaches and the perspectives of New Historicism. Cultural transfer – as a process and method – aimed ‘to overcome the methodological shortcomings of comparative studies in history and literary criticism.’<sup>3</sup> Having originated from the revision of research on the eighteenth century, it addressed problems of culture ‘as a whole way of life’<sup>4</sup> to expose mechanisms responsible for a broader spectrum of the cultural condition as well as to characterize modernity from a postmodern methodological angle.

Although present at different stages of discovering the postmodern method, cultural transferability gained prominence with the evolvement of global economies that, together with technological growth, have extended the range and meanings of cultural permeation. Transfer Studies, which have examined globalization and tracked its origins back to the early-technological era, link the rise of global processes with, among many others, ‘the enlightened republic of letters.’<sup>5</sup> The role of language, writing and other textual practices is crucial for understanding the processes of cultural exchange. Organization of contemporary social media places language in the very centre of transcultural relations. The growing intensity of discursive presence (much heightened, if not aggressive) is currently marked by two major phenomena: the evolvement of modern communication technologies and the prevalence of the English language in many spheres of life and cultural production. The emergence of English as new *lingua franca* has substantially contributed to the inflation of textual practices and, therefore, radically enhanced cultural exchange. The new technocratic and pan-linguistic patterns redefine the nature and functions of transfer today. Its role is no longer to establish that *cultural areas* are ‘dynamically interrelated systems;’<sup>6</sup> it is rather to focus on the processes behind that interrelation and establishing how cultures involved in global exchange cope with the aforementioned hegemonies.

The interest of this paper is in *transferability* – the procedure and quality of cultural transfer, which, in my view, determines the contemporary meanings of transfer and informs about novel dimensions of its practice. Like many other properties behind cultural change, transferability exceeds its cultural context and relates to mechanisms responsible for the development of an entire culture. As such, it brings forth problems that condition and constantly redirect the trajectories of cultural exchange. To learn more about these trajectories, the essay will address the possibilities and flexibilities of

---

<sup>2</sup> The term was used by the authors many times and in different contexts, but first appeared in Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, ‘Deutsch-Französischer Kulturtransfer im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Zu einem neuen interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramm des C.N.R.S.’, *Francia* 13 (1985): 502–10.

<sup>3</sup> Stephanie Stockhorst, ‘Introduction: Cultural Transfer through Translation. A Current Perspective in Enlightenment Studies’, in *Cultural Transfer through Translation: The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation*, ed. Stephanie Stockhorsk (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (New York: Anchor, 1960), xiv.

<sup>5</sup> Stockhorst, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Stockhorst, 19.

transfer as practiced in contemporary culture, especially its popular, mainstream current. It will touch upon the circumstances of recent cultural tendencies to examine the level of impact they exert on the circulation of cultural content. It will discuss the quality of cultural transfer through the lens of positive and negative transferability as well as attempt to deconstruct its workings through the following channels of analysis:

- (1) identification of contemporary settings for cultural transfer;
- (2) recognition of the main axes/powers of cultural production;
- (3) examination of transfer and transferability through the mechanics of cultural transplantation;
- (4) explanation of the role of popular culture (its aesthetics, narratives, distribution, marketability and its American/Anglo-Saxon context);
- (5) redefinition of interpretive communities and the social practice of interpretation in conditions of 'forced' transculturalism and the changing character of 'textual solidarity.'

### **Difference in Motion: Transplanting the Other**

Two solid paradigms to characterize culture today are *cultural mobility* (Greenblatt, 2010) and *social acceleration* (Rosa, 2014) – both having a significant impact on the nature and location of transfer today. Whereas the mobility paradigm identifies the trajectories of cultural move, describing it as the transnational/transcontinental circulation of ideas, activities, concepts, and things, whose choreography, as defined by Stephen Greenblatt, 'implies a history of cultural adjustment and accommodation – from the learning of languages to the transformation of gender roles, from new foods to new laws,'<sup>7</sup> the acceleration model defines the temporal character of this motion, communicating that cultural exchange today, when it happens, happens fast.

With the change of speed, the impact cultural mobility exerts on the life of societies has shifted from single (personal) to plural (group or communal). Although cultural transfer still 'leaves traces in the lives of the individuals,'<sup>8</sup> it predominantly affects collective entities, spreading on classes, groups, and communities to manifest its agency on a macroscopic social scale. This operational extension stems from technological advancement (reflected in the new media), and the emergence of a new pace of life (new motilities) that have accelerated cultural flow and relocated the majority of exchange into the popular. *The popular* – which I use to denote the central platform of cultural functioning, with popular entertainment and everyday activities – is currently the main area of cultural transmission. Embracing the social norm and, at the cultural level, the production of narratives and narrative forms to reflect it, the popular makes the main arena for cultural permeation that addresses and challenges the normative social organization. As a field where most of cultural manufacturing and social transactions take place, the popular, is a ground for merging variety. It translates

---

<sup>7</sup> Harvard University, 'Cultural Mobility', accessed 10 October 2014, <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic733185.files/Greenblatt.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Harvard University, 'Cultural Mobility'.

difference into the language of 'well-liked' and 'widely favoured'<sup>9</sup>, which dominates the dialectic of cultural identity.

According to Arjun Appudurai, *difference* is the defining concept of cultural identity today. He describes difference as the main power behind cultural processes: as what enforces change by providing distinctive markers to cultural practice.<sup>10</sup> 'Culture as difference' or 'difference as a system of culture' is what, in his view, triggers global exchange and allows for reconceptualization of cultural structures and phenomena. Appudurai presents difference in terms of conceptual distinction and defines it as 'a useful heuristic that can highlight points of similarity and contrast between all sorts of categories: classes, genders, roles, groups, and nations'.<sup>11</sup> The 'contrastive rather than a substantive property of certain things,' difference makes, transforms it from a flat concept of separation into a multidimensional space of exchange where *otherness* and *variety* are communicated towards (and against) 'something local, embodied and significant.'<sup>12</sup> Culture, as Appudurai observes, is a multifaceted construct determined by difference, which is 'better regarded as a dimension of phenomena'<sup>13</sup> – a dimension that accommodates difference at the variety of levels of cultural practice. 'Stressing the dimensionality of culture rather than its substantiality', he adds, 'permits our thinking of culture less as a property of individuals and groups and more as a heuristic device that we can use to talk about difference.'<sup>14</sup>

The concentration on the dimensional quality of cultural phenomena exposes the extent (rather than essence) of contrast they carry to different cultural environments. What it offers for the study of transfer is a shift of focus in examining the processes of cultural exchange from their mechanics to their contexts, i.e. from the transfer of cultural phenomena to their transferability. *Transferability* is known in qualitative research as a method for assessing the compatibility of research results with cases and phenomena from outside the context of analysis. It offers measurement devices to validate research outcomes by examining 'contextual similarities and differences between the site studied and the site to which [other cases] hope to transfer its findings.'<sup>15</sup> I am borrowing the concept of transferability from transfer studies to address the contrasting potential of difference as exerted by cultural mobility (and its velocities) as well as to verify the agreement between the conditions of cultural exchange and the conditions of phenomena engaged in the global flow. In this context, I will use transferability to denote (1) procedures behind cultural transfer and their dependence on cultural distinction on the way to developing transcultural norm, as well as (2) adaptability of cultural phenomena to new environments settings and the capabilities of the latter to incorporate the migrating objects of difference.

Transferability is what (pre)conditions cultural transfer and is an aspect of global circulation to regulate processes of exchange. It marks a certain predisposition of cultural phenomena (as occurring individually or in groups), and informs about their

---

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Fontana Press, 1983), 236.

<sup>10</sup> Arjun Appudurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Appudurai, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Appudurai, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Appudurai, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Appudurai, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Marguerite G. Lodico, Dean T. Spaulding and Katherine H. Voegtle, *Methods in Educational Research: From Theory to Practice* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 173.

ability for, and behaviour in, the transfer process. Its role, using the perspective proposed by Greenblatt, is to investigate the *homeliness* and *unhomeliness* of cultural phenomena in global motion, as well as ‘trace the itineraries that lie behind them, as well as the intellectual and material investments that have been conferred upon them in the process of circulation’<sup>16</sup>. Since transfer is a form of repositioning, we need to analyse both the routes of travel and the subjects or objects that take them. Therefore, ‘their *places* and their *out-of-placeness* (italics mine) – two sides of the same coin – [must be] described and analysed in a way that puts the management of movement (its restriction, its amplification and, above all, its diffusion) at the centre.’<sup>17</sup>

Both unhomeliness and out-of-placeness are notions that connote a certain procedural negativity that includes the likelihood of transitional failure, i. e., the possible inadaptability or non-transferability of contents in processes of cultural flow. Not every product of culture adapts to new settings. Chopsticks, for example, have never managed to replace the cutlery of ‘the West’, and, despite their tremendous popularity in the western world, have never stopped being exotic. The same is true for concepts, political practices, and cultural patterns: taken from one context to another, they do not necessarily translate into the tongues of new environments. Many post-communist countries, for instance, still cope with discourses of democracy, finding its languages of economic, social and ideological ‘freedom’ incomprehensible and often too advanced.

Transferability is what addresses the problems of cultural adoption by inquiring after the procedures of transfer as well as examining the varying flexibility of cultural products and environments to adopt them. It identifies ‘contact zones’ and spheres of possible clash; it questions adaptability asking about the circumstances of collision Greenblatt formulates as follows:

What are the mechanisms at work when movement encounters structures of stability and control? How do local actors accommodate, resist or adjust to challenges posed by outside movement? What are the cultural mechanisms of interaction between states and mobile individuals? What happens to cultural products that travel through time or space to emerge and been shrined in new contexts and configurations? How do they set in motion – imaginatively as well as geographically – people who encounter them and, in turn, are set loose themselves?<sup>18</sup>

The usefulness of transferability is thus in its potential for assessing the quality of cultural transfer (its accuracy, adequacy, efficiency etc.). It is also in its aptitude for unveiling problems that result from changing, uneven and uncertain compatibilities between objects, practices, texts of culture etc., and the foreign cultural bodies they are transplanted onto.

‘Transplantation’ is what defines transferability at its core. I am employing this term for the redefinition of transfer and the introduction of *cultural transplant* as a coinage that extends (and more accurately conveys) the meanings of transfer. Cultural transplants, although different from their prototypes in medicine, just like in medical procedures, are about the moving of selected (but not necessarily individual) parts of one body to the body of a different subject. But the transplant material in their case are ideas, concepts, customs, styles, and other cultural forms that grow on one living

<sup>16</sup> Greenblatt, ‘Cultural Mobility: An Introduction’, 19.

<sup>17</sup> Greenblatt, ‘Cultural Mobility: An Introduction’, 19.

<sup>18</sup> Greenblatt, ‘Cultural Mobility: An Introduction’, 19.

organism and relocate in search for new cultural entities. In contrast to medical transplants, cultural grafts are not necessarily conscious and meticulously planned acts. They operate by similar objectives, however, and, like in medicine, they might be reconstructive, rejuvenating, purely aesthetic, and happen (or be performed) to support an ailing cultural body or invigorate a perfectly healthy one. Unlike surgical procedures, cultural transplants do not require a complete removal of a body part: to use the example of chopsticks again: these objects do not need to leave their original system of growth to circulate and function in systems they transfer to. Cultural transplants are not reductive procedures, and in the majority of cases they do not require depletion of one culture to save another. Rather, they aim at extending the body of culture (or the bodies of its organism) by organs from parallel, i.e. concurrently developing systems of culture, with the use of transplant material coming predominantly from living donors, in procedures that focus on the cross-species replanting of cultural phenomena.

Cultural transplants involve high risks of rejection. Culture is a body where unsuccessful grafts happen relatively often and, like in medicine, mark an immune response from individual and integrated systems (tissue, organs) towards a foreign invasion. Transplant rejections signal a refusal of acceptance. They are negative reactions to prevent the accretion of foreign 'material' and its spread onto internal stabilities developed by individual areas of culture. Substances to trigger such negative reaction are, to use a biological term, transplantation antigens, which in any culture may represent all the traditional, ethnic, national, and minority markers of identity that, 'expressed on the surface (...), *stimulate the rejection response and act as target molecules* for the various effector mechanisms of rejection.'<sup>19</sup>

Different cultural entities (nations, societies, minorities) or cultural systems develop different forms of immunitary reactions; they also reject transplants for different reasons. Some activate resistance to protect their autonomies and maintain a certain level of cultural 'purity' (preservation of national languages and their protection from foreign influences is only one example). Others prevent transplantation for the simple reason of being unable to adopt a foreign cultural structure. As it turns out, there are many areas of culture unprepared for the reception of imported content. Most of them are systems that, even if willing to accommodate foreign phenomena, lack proper background or sufficient cultural 'infrastructure'. The wide and constantly widening range of transfer poses an adaptability challenge for many societies. Entangled in mechanisms of transfer, individual systems struggle to change their conditions. Efforts that accompany this change concentrate mainly on raising cultural compatibility and minimizing difference. The effects are, however, paradoxical: what happens instead of reduction is often the multiplication of dissimilarities, which are brought to the surface to facilitate processes of transfer. As observed by Henry Jenkins, 'the result is not so much a global culture that eradicates local differences but rather a culture that continually produces local differences in order to gain a competitive advantage within the global marketplace.'<sup>20</sup> Transcultural exchange is hence what destabilizes cultural integrity and creates a level of difference compatible with variations necessary for global transfer to 'flow'.

---

<sup>19</sup> Ian V. Hutchinson, 'The Biology of the Major Histocompatibility Complex', in *Transplantation Surgery*, eds Nadey S. Hakim and Gabriel M. Danovitch (London: Springer, 2001), 23. Italics in original.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 158.

## Popular Convergence: The Problems of Transcultural Textualities

A key area for cultural transfer is popular culture. As I have already pointed out, most world cultural exchange today happens in popular culture and is facilitated by popular processes that embrace all the social, economic, ideological, aesthetic mechanisms, and routes of cultural production responsible for the emergence and maintenance of wide-ranging modes of communication and cultural consumption. The change in cultural and social organization we have witnessed for the past few decades, has radically transformed the meaning of the popular (both, the notion and the area of cultural activity), now defining it by means of cultural non-limitedness, far-reachingness and availability. As David Morley and Kevin Robins observe in relation to global information and communication media:

We are seeing the restructuring of information and image spaces and the production of a new communications geography, characterized by global networks and an international space of information flows; ... Our senses of space and place are all being significantly reconfigured. ... Increasingly we must think in terms of communications and transport networks and of the symbolic boundaries of language and culture—the ‘spaces of transmission’ defined by satellite footprints or radio signals—as providing the crucial, and permeable, boundaries of our age.<sup>21</sup>

New geographies have facilitated global cultural convergence, Jenkins identifies with new media patterns and defines as ‘the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kind of entertainment experiences they want’.<sup>22</sup> Cultural convergence, as he adds, ‘is more than simply a technological shift’ but a force which ‘alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences’.<sup>23</sup> Cultural transfer convergence relies on the exchange and transformation of popular content, whose circulation ensures the making of new cultural facts and new meanings to develop along mainstream trajectories. The convergence of cultural content through media is thus what emerges from the flow of popular culture and depends on the influx, permeation and cross-pollination of popular themes as produced in everyday lives, popular news and popular entertainment.

As a defining category for global convergence, the popular is a site of regulating cultural thinking and cultural practices. Both popular thinking and popular practice communicate the quality of global exchange represented in pop cosmopolitanism: ‘the ways that transcultural flows of popular culture inspires new forms of global consciousness and cultural competency.’<sup>24</sup> Two most important factors to shape the character and trajectories of pop cosmopolitanism for cultural transfer are:

---

<sup>21</sup> David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*, 155.

<sup>24</sup> Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*, 156.

- (1) transcultural exchange of popular artefacts, most vividly marked by the influence of other than American products and tastes on American culture industries, and
- (2) the emergence of English as a dominant language of cultural production, which regulates the unification of media and facilitates global flow.

These two factors create conditions for the development of culture that merges homogenous means of communication with complex (and often conflicting) heterogeneities of content. World popular culture as practiced today is a diverse field of cultural production to promote complexity, sophistication and cross-cultural intertextuality. Contrary to many theoretical presentations, its migrated aesthetics, although globalizing cultural experiences by means of the free circulation of cultural content, multiply cultural diversity and extend it by engendering new genres, new cultural applications and uses, as well as novel interpretations of cultural practices and contents. These impact on the cultural stability of many popular texts. At the same time, they unveil the dynamic intrinsic to popular culture which, multifaceted and changing in itself, relies on a changing semiotics of its texts and products. As John Fisk explains,

popular culture is always in process; its meanings can never be identified in a text, for texts are activated, or made meaningful, only in social relations and in intertextual relations. This activation of the meaning potential of a text can occur only in the social and cultural relationships into which it enters. The social relationships of texts occur at their moment of reading as they are inserted into the everyday lives of the readers.<sup>25</sup>

This activation of meaning through popular culture (and mainstream experience) changes transfer processes because they are shaped by a globally growing Englishness. According to recent statistics, most of popular entertainment (fiction, TV series) as well as most cultural media (books, television, Internet) come from the Anglophone environment.<sup>26</sup> What is more, many 'national' products, even if produced locally, are being released in English for better marketability and communication with world audiences. Textualities to arise from these conditions, although multicultural<sup>27</sup>, are popular and linguistically singular, and thus offer narratives and representations immersed in a specific cultural context. Being popular, they spread the context to non-English systems of culture, grafting the context to their cultural and social realities.

The inseparability of language and culture has been central to the study of transfer since the first analyses of transfer in world literature.<sup>28</sup> Translation studies show that conveyance of content from one language to another is never a purely linguistic process, and indicate that textual practices take place at the intersection of linguistic divergence and cultural distance. For this very reason literature (and any other narrative art) constitutes a primary field for the study of transfer and transferability flunks. Before I

<sup>25</sup> John Fisk, *Reading the Popular* (London: Routledge, 2006), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Worldmeters. Real Time World Statistics, 'Books'; accessed 13 October 2014 <http://www.worldometers.info/books>.

<sup>27</sup> In *Fans, Blogger and Gamers*, Henry Jenkins comments upon influences of Asian and Indian culture on American popular culture which shows that what we consume as Anglo-American popular culture is in fact the product of a long-term transfer and trans-continental, trans-national, trans-cultural influences, which proves popular culture an exceptionally complex phenomenon.

<sup>28</sup> See Petra Broomans, Sandra van Voorst, 'Introduction', in *Rethinking Cultural Transfer and Transmission: Reflections and New Perspectives*, eds Petra Broomans and Sandra van Voorst (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2012), 8-14.



address one particular example of a narrative transferability failure (that aptly reflects the meanings of transferability, grafting and transplant rejection I offer), I would like to briefly comment on the character of world literature today that, at least to my conviction, has been practically reduced to the expanding genre of popular fiction. Definitions of world literature present it as national literary practices and products that migrate and circulate beyond their national contexts to communicate ethnic-national otherness. In the process, they allow the foreign perspectives of the Orient and the 'West' to meet across borders. When we switch to the criteria of market economies and look at sell statistics, however, we notice that in order to reach world audiences and actually count on international book markets, 'national literatures' are organized around specific genres.<sup>29</sup> Nordic noir would be a good example here. It is fiction dealing with national themes produced in an internationally best-selling genre. (Crime fiction is the other, next to romance literature the leading genre on the book market, which transmits the idea of contemporary Scandinavianness to a world-cultural consciousness.) Designed as foreign, Nordic noir does not need to adopt to the cultural systems of target markets. Such literature hardly creates any transferability conflicts because the cultural difference and social uniqueness it gives off is so explicit that when we read it, we know we are dealing with a product of a distinct and clearly defined (if unstable) national identity.

The situation is different with foreign popular literature that relies on cultural sameness, i. e. literature that assumes social-cultural affinity with the system of the target market. In this case, we are dealing with literature that is unaware of the possibility of marking cultural distinction - if it happens, it happens against the intention of the text. The example I want to use to illustrate my point is very infamous and relates to the recent emergence of the so-called porn romance, the symbol of which became the *Fifty Shades* series. I am not interested in the novels as such but in the transferability case they have made in the Polish context. When the books were released to the Polish market in 2012 in the atmosphere of an international scandal, most critical attention concentrated on the cultural compatibility between what the fiction offered to the Polish literary and social context, on the one hand, and the background of the latter, on the other. The massive popularity of the novels proved the Polish translation to communicate well to a Polish audience. A closer analysis revealed, however, that there are many discrepancies between the original text and its Polish translation. As Monika Wiśniewska, the Polish translator of the series, admits, it was a text that posed exceptional linguistic difficulty: 'I had problems with finding vocabulary for the practices depicted in the book. I had to invent new Polish words, terms and phrases to be able to convey the plot.'<sup>30</sup>

The translational impossibility stemmed from the lack of correspondence between the American and Polish cultural systems and their different sexual traditions.<sup>31</sup> The American genre of porn romance brought to the Polish culture a history of sexual practice supported by years of public sexual education, sexual revolutions, liberation of

---

<sup>29</sup> I would like to draw a distinction between world literature and international literature at this point: the former defined as national literatures to communicate ethnic difference, and the latter as literature that sales on an international scale. Currently both terms are used interchangeably to designate world literature.

<sup>30</sup> Monika Wiśniewska, e-mail, 08. 08. 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Particularly in this context seems the fact that almost all the sexual objects (gadgets, toys) featured in the book are available on the Polish market but have not transferred to the language of common practice.

sexual taboos, and the variety of social and private exploration of sexual behaviours. On its way to the Polish reader, it clashed with an underdeveloped social sexual culture, which is the result of Poland's hindering past, the unfinished waves of feminism, limited sexual awareness and almost no mainstream vocabulary for sexual expression.<sup>32</sup> From the perspective of cultural transfer, the Polish encounter with 'American kink' is an example of a very much desired and anticipated cultural transplant doomed to failure for the incompatibility between the receiver and the donor. It is also a transplantation of numerous attempts in which the receiver struggles to develop proper adoptive conditions to be able to accommodate the foreign body.

Cultural transplantations as occurring through popular processes expose the tension between the locality of languages and the globality of cultural forms; they uncover gaps between singular cultural norms and plural social experiences. Popular textualities that emerge in the process document the possibility of different cultural meanings for different social practices. As Stanley Fish observes,

meanings come already calculated, not because of norms embedded in the language but because language is always perceived, from the very first, within a structure of norms. That structure, however, is not abstract and independent but social; and therefore it is not a single structure with a privileged relationship to the process of communication as it occurs in any situation but a structure that changes when one situation, with its assumed background of practices, purposes, and goals, has given one way to another.<sup>33</sup>

## New Textual Solidarity

Cultural transfer, however we approach its functions and processes, presents itself as a trans-cultural exchange of meanings that enhances the emergence of new texts of culture. These cultural texts bring forth new textualities that arise from the circulation of cultural phenomena (objects, activities, trends, works of literature etc.) and the ways they contextualize in new cultural settings. These new textualities also produce new cultural canons and, subsequently, organize new interpretative communities to respond to the meaning the canons propose. Since canons, as Peter Sloterdijk observes, are no longer 'associated with national boundaries'<sup>34</sup>, the character of interpretative communities extends beyond the geographies of national traditions and heritage, which brings forth a new textual solidarity to serve as a new model of cultural identification.

The new textual solidarity, born from the processes of transfer, offers new forms of social and cultural organization – one in which cultural belonging develops along the changing identities of cultural phenomena. To function within such organization, build around the transferring texts of culture, interpretative communities form imagined communities of cultural practice which interact across cultures for the development or extension of their geographical, social, and cultural identities. The cultural solidarity they practice is a solidarity against the obviousness of cultural meaning (as imposed by

---

<sup>32</sup> The same was confirmed in a study conducted by Polish Sexological Society and published in their journal in 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in the Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 319.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, 'Rules for the Human Zoo: a Response to the Letter of Humanism', *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 27 (2009): 13.

local social practices), which stems from the awareness that one kind of 'obvious', placed into a different context, produces another, often very different kind of obvious.<sup>35</sup>

The textual solidarity of transfer processes is also a solidarity against the fixity of the political and economic organization of the world. Like imagined communities, the new form of cultural togetherness or union points to the short-sightedness of global nationalisms: Americanism, Asianism, Europeanism etc. It also shows the growing invalidity of geographical-political divisions (the West, the East etc.) Furthermore, it exposes local diversities to exist or emerge within such constructs and unveils the unevenness of cultural practices within their structures (EU member countries). As shown by the example of the failed accommodation of liberated American sexualities by the Polish society, economic and political systems do not suffice to grasp the nature of nations they represent. Conversely, the nations within the systems do not reflect on the character of the incorporating structure (the Polish inability of adopt the 'progressive' and 'liberated' sexual content, makes Poland diverge from the common idea of Westernness)<sup>36</sup>.

Cultural transfer, although accused of its homogenizing tendencies, is a progressive process that creates an opportunity for the cultural development for many social structures worldwide. Thanks to global exchange, as facilitated by the world-wide circulation of ideas and goods, the limitedness of one cultural perspective can be extended by its reformulation through the impact of another culture. Jenkins aptly states that

the 'surrender' of oneself to a foreign culture enables fresh perception upon which a deeper understanding can be built. While the uneven flow of cultural materials across national borders often produces a distorted understanding of national differences, it also represents a first significant step towards global consciousness.<sup>37</sup>

A global consciousness does not correspond to homogenous thinking. It rather communicates the new awareness of global diversity, the migration and exchange of which allow for developing broader and more inclusive approaches to understanding current processes of cultural change. In addition, it involves a departure from the solid semiotics of cultural phenomena, which makes us growingly aware that the meanings of objects and concepts that circulate in culture arise through transcultural interactions. Cultural transfer can be thus seen as a form of symbolic interactionism, triggered by the flow of cultural contents that, by means of changing textual practices, produces new cultural texts to counterbalance the local solidity of meanings. Through the advancement of popular processes, this global or – putting it in a less negatively loaded way–transcultural reciprocity, establishes new patterns of cultural development, the full understanding of which, as Jenkins explains, will require some 'pedagogical interventions'<sup>38</sup>.

---

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Fish, *Is There a Text in the Classroom*, 309.

<sup>36</sup> According to research and comments, the reception of the same porn fiction in other European Union countries was less turbulent than in Poland. The Polish case illustrates how the same content/product of popular culture is received in the so-called Old West (countries of Western Europe) and New West (former Eastern Bloc peoples and current EU members) and points to adaptive discrepancies within the politically, monetarily and socially homogenizing body of Europe.

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, *Fans, Blogger and Gamers*, 170.

<sup>38</sup> Jenkins, *Fans, Blogger and Gamers*, 171.

The interventions Jenkins suggests comprise all the approaches and steps necessary for the development of novel ways of thinking that will allow us adopt to new cultural circumstances exerted by change. As he assures us, embracing these steps will help us adjust, and '[w]e will develop new skills for managing that information, new structures for transmitting information across channels, new creative genres that exploit the potentials of those emerging information structures, and new modes of education.'<sup>39</sup> This will ultimately mean another phase in human evolution, and yet another step on the way to domesticate culture that growingly gets a little out of hand.

## References

1. Appudurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
2. Broomans, Petra and Sandra van Voorst. 'Introduction'. In *Rethinking Cultural Transfer and Transmission. Reflections and New Perspectives*. Edited by Petra Broomans and Sandra van Voorst. Groningen: Barkhuis, 2012. 8-14.
3. Espagne, Michael and Michael Werner, 'Deutsch-Französischer Kulturtransfer im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Zu einem neuen interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramm des C.N.R.S.' *Francia* 13 (1985): 502–10.
4. Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in the Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998.
5. Fisk, John. *Reading the Popular*. London: Routledge, 2006.
6. Greenblatt, Stephen. 'Cultural Mobility: An Introduction'. In *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*. Edited by Stephen Greenblatt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 1-23.
7. Harvard University, 'Cultural Mobility'; accessed 10 October 2014, <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic733185.files/Greenblatt.pdf>.
8. Hutchinson, Ian V. 'The Biology of the Major Histocompatibility Complex'. In *Transplantation Surgery*. Edited by Nadey S. Hakim and Gabriel M. Danovitch (London: Springer, 2001), 23-42.
9. Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
10. Jenkins, Henry. *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
11. Lodico, Marguerite G., and Dean T. Spaulding and Katherine H. Voegtle. *Methods in Educational Research: From Theory to Practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010.
12. Morley, David, and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity. Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
13. Sloterdijk, Peter. 'Rules for the Human Zoo: a Response to the Letter of Humanism'. *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 27 (2009): 12-28.
14. Stockhorst, Stephanie. 'Introduction: Cultural Transfer through Translation. A Current Perspective in Enlightenment Studies'. In *Cultural Transfer through Translation: The*

---

<sup>39</sup> Jenkins, *Fans, Blogger and Gamers*, 155.

*Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation*. Edited by Stephanie Stockhorst. Amsterdam, New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010. 7-28.

15. Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society*. New York: Anchor, 1960.
16. Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Fontana Press, 1983.
17. Wiśniewska, Monika. Email. 08. 08. 2013.
18. Worldmeters. Real Time World Statistics, 'Books'; accessed 13 October 2014 <http://www.worldometers.info/books>.

## **Transplantarea culturală și problemele transferabilității**

Articolul abordează conceptul de „transfer cultural” în termeni de „transplantare culturală”<sup>40</sup> – o procedură care să provoace adaptabilitatea practicilor, obiectelor și, într-un sens mai larg, a narațiunilor culturale, așa cum acestea trec de la un „corp cultural” la altul și funcționează în diverse contexte sociale și politice. Deși este adesea folosit în studiile de traducere, termenul de „transplantare culturală” nu este un termen fix. În acest text este introdus ca sinonim pentru „transferul cultural” și are scopul de a extinde sensul acestuia pentru a sublinia importanța proceselor discutate în contextul transferului cultural. Se expune astfel transferabilitatea ca factor principal de transfer, folosit cu scopul de a analiza problemele adopției și ale adaptării culturale, arătând deformări ale teoriilor practicate în mod global, conceptelor, discursurilor și ideilor (pe care le voi numi „texte de cultură”) care intră în contradicție cu sistemele de sens și comunitățile interpretative locale.

---

<sup>40</sup> Cultural transplantation is not a fixed term, although it is occasionally used in translation studies. I introduce it as a synonym for “cultural transfer” to extend the meaning of the latter as well as to highlight the physicality of the processes discussed in the context of cultural transfer.