Language Paths. Methods for a New Cultural Geography of (East-Central) Europe[1]

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During state socialism the east and central European art scenes and its agents were connected through mediations and appropriations of (foreign) languages. Be it discursive content transmitted through texts from abroad that was integrated into further discussions or into the production of innovative artworks, or the border-crossing events organized by multi-lingual cultural networkers, language appears in both the production and theorization of the region's art. In this essay I argue that language is a cornerstone for the complex cultural geographies of east-central Europe and that it can give us access to a method aligning to cultural paradoxes and cultural transfers across different socialist countries. The interaction between native and foreign languages played a pivotal role in shaping art production, theory development, narrative construction, and exhibition practices in the culture of advanced socialism. This paper explores the editorial work of the Romanian Dan Hăulică in the journal *Secolul 20*, the networking activity of the Poland-based Hungarian art historian János Brendel, and the intellectual and creative atmosphere at the National Gallery in Prague in the circle of Czech artist and art historian Karel Miler, art critic Helena Kontová, and philosopher Petr Rezek. Each case study will be the subject of thorough analysis based on the idea of an expanded concept of translation (*erweiterter Übersetzungsbegriff*) and Emily Apter's translation zone.
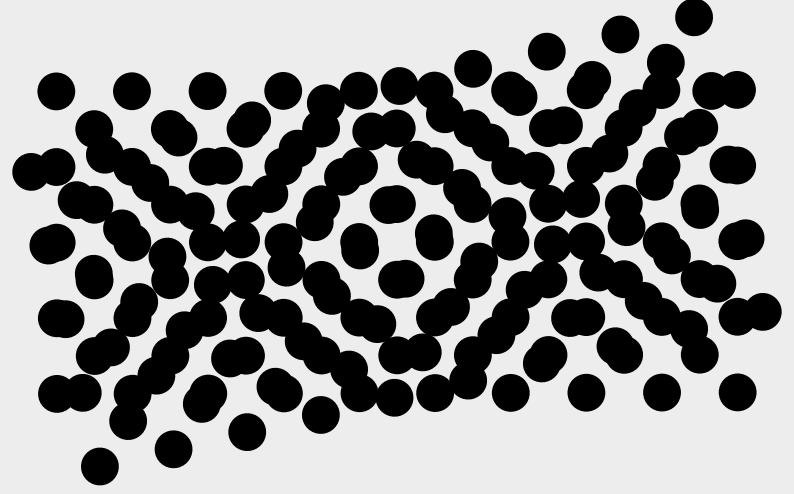
On Language and Cultural Geography

In Andrea Bátorová's 2021 review of the anthology *Tomáš Štrauss. Beyond the Great Divide. Essays on European Avant Gardes from East to West* (2020), the issue of language in east central[2] European art history was addressed. The intellectual universe of the Slovak art critic's theory and criticism was characterized by a richness, diversity, and plurality of cultural facets. During his career, Tomáš Štrauss (1931–2013) wandered different geopolitical territories and was always a bi-, if not multi-lingual figure of the (east-central) European art scenes. Štrauss can serve therefore as an object lesson through which to observe and examine artistic thought's genuinely linguistic potential and challenges. Additionally, in her review, Bátorová stresses how important it is that Štrauss's work will finally be available in English after being already accessible in Slovak and German,[3] and adds: "And there are yet more crucial texts, written by the critic after he moved back to Bratislava, that are awaiting their translation in future."[4]

While Štrauss's intellectual oeuvre as a multi-lingual legacy deserves attention in its own right, Bátorová's highlighted remarks draw our attention to east-central European art scenes' visibility and accessibility through translation into an international art language. It seems that the international "readability" of the region's art history is secured through the medium of English[5] that opens the gates for the chance of a broader geo-cultural recognition. To eastern and central European artists, the knowledge of foreign languages was a necessity to look beyond the borders of state socialism. Yet, if not spoken with proficiency or not being able to speak it at all, it caused misunderstandings or cultural marginalization. Because language generated exchanges and appropriations of different kinds, in this essay, inspired by translation theory and the discourse of cultural transfer, I would like to contour methodical considerations for a transregional analysis of postwar east-central European art – an art that, as the example of Tomáš Štrauss shows, was frequently created on the grounds of multiple languages.

I will use an expanded concept of translation (*erweiterter Übersetzungsbegriff*)[6] as my point of departure. This notion of translation will be discussed in relation to when, how, and why translation, among many relatively recent cultural turns, has been accepted as a concept in the humanities. My introduction to the case studies will further address Emily Apter's "translation zone"[7] and Catherine Evtuhov's "cultural gradient"[8] which together form a matrix to investigate social, cultural and intellectual transfers, transmissions and integrations attached to language. When discussing

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2   Like elsewhere in my research, I decided to use the categories of "central" and "eastern" Europe mostly as geographical signifiers with a small "c" and "e". Capital "C" and "E" are only applied when the ideological and/or political connotation of the terms "Central" and "Eastern" are to be highlighted. I follow here the lead of the following publication: Beáta HOCK, "Introduction – Globalizing East European Art Histories. The Legacy of Piotr Piotrowski and a Conference," in: Beáta HOCK – Anu ALLAS (eds.), *Globalizing East European Art Histories. Past and Present*, London – New York: Routledge 2018, pp. 1–20, here p. 7.

3   Andrea BÁTOROVÁ, "'Ostkunst, a Different yet Similar Art': Some Notes on the Complexity of Tomáš Štrauss's Thought," *ARTMargins Online*, February 5, 2021, https://artmargins.com/ostkunst-a-different-yet-similar-art-some-notes-on-the-complexity-of-tomas-strausss-thought/ (accessed September 22, 2023).

4   *Ibid.*

5   We have already seen how the translation of the region's nonconformist art in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (2002) (as cited in Jérôme BAZIN – Pascal DUBOURG GLATIGNY – Piotr PIOTROWSKI, "Geography of Internationalism," in: Jérôme BAZIN – Pascal DUBOURG GLATIGNY – Piotr PIOTROWSKI (eds.), *Art beyond Borders. Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe [1945–1989]*, Budapest – New York: CEU Press 2016, pp. 1–28, here p. 5) and the Museum of Modern Art's digital site and blog *post – notes on art in a global context* have fueled intense debates.

6   "Cultures of Translation // Different Work. IFK_Research Foci," https://www.ifk.ac.at/index.php/research-focus.html (accessed October 2, 2023).

7   Emily APTER, *The Translation Zone. A New Comparative Literature*, Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press 2006.

8   Catherine EVTUHOV, "Introduction," in: Catherine EVTUHOV – Stephen KOTKIN (eds.), *The Cultural Gradient. The Transmission of Ideas in Europe, 1789–1991,* Lanham – Boulder – New York – Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield 2003, pp. 1–10.

the conceptual relevance of translation theory for the art history of eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s I will expand on its methodological connection to the research on cultural transfer (*Kulturtransferforschung*). The central idea I am addressing is that the interaction with native and foreign languages in the culture of advanced socialism was a formative element of art production, theorization, narrativization and exhibition. Case study number one will briefly explore how mediators, like János Brendel, regularly wandering between different linguistic cultures (here, Hungarian and Polish) can be regarded as translators – both in practice and metaphorically. The second example will focus on translated culture in print following the overview of the Romanian literary and art magazine *Secolul 20* (20th Century) under editor-in-chief Dan Hăulică. My final focal point will bring me to the National Gallery in Prague and the exciting language paths of the performance art circle, that include both translations of art materials into Czech and bodily incorporations of foreign language in the form of event-based art. An additional example from east-central European conceptual art which involved working with language will lead me to my concluding remarks, in which I regard artistic appropriations of language as experimental translation following Kimberly Quiogue Andrews.[9] These examples stretch across the cultural geographies of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania to show the readers that engagement with (foreign) languages was a broadly prevalent practice in the contemporary art of state socialisms. Instead of presenting instant conclusions, since this essay is an excerpt from an ongoing research project, I revisit selected cornerstones of language/translation as main protagonists of eastern European transregional studies.

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Language is a fundamental key to accessing information, distributing it, and keeping the exchange circles running that are currently the focus of scholarly attention in eastern European art history. Despite its comprehensive importance under state socialism, language was often treated as a mere tool of the researcher to access historical source material and to collaborate on projects across national borders to achieve a broader geo-cultural scope. Language was often overlooked as a concept or method, and the little conceptual attention it received in the past few years was, for instance, reflected in the research of art historian Zsuzsa László, who confirmed the linguistic focus of conceptual art and its global presence in raising English as international contemporary art's *lingua franca*.[10] According to László, with conceptual art's triumph in the 1970s, translation became common in artistic practice and communication. Participation in international projects, first and foremost exhibitions, required the use of a second language (most commonly English). László calls collaborations and exchanges "transnational artistic situations" in which language was at the heart of "misunderstandings as well as cultural translation."[11] To László, in these scenarios of colliding languages a third space emerges that allows for the negotiation of cultural strata expressed through the spoken or written word.[12]

Another rare example of language's methodological considerations in Area Studies in the past few years can be found in an essay in *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies,* published in 2019. The author of this

9   Kimberly Quiogue ANDREWS, "What does translation know?," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 31, 2017, No. 2, pp. 339–363.

10   Magdalena MOSKALEWICZ, "Language of Art in Central Europe. Participation, Recognition, Identity," in: Marcin MOSKALEWICZ – Wojciech PRZYBYLSKI (eds.), *Understanding Central Europe*, London – New York: Routledge 2018, pp. 541–548, here p. 544.

11   Zsuzsa LÁSZLÓ, "East European Art as a Third Space – Circulating Works, Words, and Agents," in: Katalin CSEH-VARGA – Cristian NAE (eds.), *Exhibitions as Sites of Artistic Contact during the Cold War*, publication in progress.

12   László also recognizes a strong tie between translation theory and cultural transfer, that she argues peaks in postcolonial theory's third space. *Ibid*.

text, philologist Jürgen Erfurt, convincingly shows how language is a constituent of geography, and how it is attached to human actions.[13] According to Erfurt, linguistic action is embodiment; it can be "demarcation," "symbolic power" and "market." Language leaves us clear tracks to follow people and media that unfold through "tongue." We can only understand social relations, the creation of space, and appropriation when we understand language(s).[14] In the eastern European case, the practical relevance of knowing a language can be determined, in that mastering a language opens up opportunities to participate in the bloodstream of international art that was "unconstrained and unregulated" compared to eastern European artists' experiences under state socialism.[15] Together, the discursive intentions of conceptual art, along with the aestheticization and politicization of (foreign) language basically turned language and its translations into a method which could be used to broaden art production and theorization.

Motivated by these thoughts, I decided to stimulate methodological discussion on the issue of language and its transmission in art production from the period of state socialism. While topics such as decolonizing east and central European art[16] or investigating the region's international

connections[17] have gained significant attention recently, I consider language to be an even more essential analytical approach given the multilingual and transnationally connected realities of the region. Individuals such as Austro-Hungarian artists Dóra Mauerer and Tibor Gáyor can be mentioned here, each having had dual residency in Vienna and Budapest which enabled them to master both German and Hungarian and to make language their cultural capital when regularly returning to Hungary to become the "key link figures between Hungarian colleagues and the international art world."[18] My take on a transregional analysis will follow the path of languages: first methodologically, then through three short case studies. The languages I trace in this essay are constantly on the move, and are embodied, infiltrated, appropriated, and re-circulated in different ways. Fluid though anchored in physical spaces, the cultural geography of the region I am interested in is (or has been) reliant on translation – a process that keeps languages, and art likewise, in circulation and exchange.

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13   Jürgen ERFURT, "Languages and Spaces. La Francophonie and Other 'Phonies'," in: Matthias MIDDELL (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies*, Oxon – New York: Routledge 2019, pp. 159–168, here p. 159.
14   *Ibid.*, pp. 159–163.
15   MOSKALEWICZ, "Language of Art in Central Europe," p. 545.
16   A very fresh example is: *A Lexicon of Decoloniality in Eastern Europe: How to Decolonize an Art Organization?*, February 18–19, 2022, a zoom event organized by *new media center_kuda.org. a collective dedicated to activism, art and politics*, http://kuda.org/en/kudaorg-announces-webinars-lexicon-decoloniality-eastern-europe-how-decolonise-art-organization (accessed October 2, 2023).

17   See, e.g., Beata HOCK – Anu ALLAS (eds.), *Globalizing East European Art Histories. Past and Present*, London – New York: Routledge 2018; *Resonances: Regional and Transregional Cultural Transfer in the Art of the 1970s* (research project), Artpool Art Research Center Budapest – Comenius University Bratislava – Academic Research Center of the Academy of Fine Arts Prague – Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central Europe at the Adam Mickiewicz University, 2021–2024; *Die globale DDR: eine transkulturelle Kunstgeschichte (1949–1990)* (conference), Staatliche Kunstsammlungen – Technische Universität Dresden, June 9–11, 2022; Bojana VIDEKANIĆ, *Nonaligned Modernism. Socialist Postcolonialist Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945–1985*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 2020; Caterina PREDA, *Art and Politics in Modern Dictatorships. A Comparison of Chile and Romania*, London – New York – Shanghai: Palgrave Macmillan 2017; Special Section: Artists' Networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe," *ARTMargins*, Vol. 1, 2012, No. 2–3; *Socialist Exhibition Cultures. International Exhibitions in the Socialist World, 1950–1991* (research project and workshop series), 2021, https://socialistexhibitions.com/ (accessed October 2, 2023).
18   Klara KEMP-WELCH, *Networking the Bloc. Experimental Art in Eastern Europe, 1965–1981*, Cambridge – London: The MIT Press 2018, here pp. 158–161.

Expanded Concepts of Translation, Cultural Transfers, and the Translation Zone

In recent years, trans-disciplinarity and border-crossings in art historical and visual studies became common sense, and also expanded into the analysis of east and central European art during state socialism. From among the complex of different discursive traditions that prepared and supported trans-disciplinarity and a border-crossing approach, the work of semiotician Julia Kristeva stands out, whose theory of intertextuality may serve as the essence of translation, of transfers between languages.[19] Before the background of structuralist, but more essentially post-structuralist thought, her theory of intertextuality indicates that texts rely on other texts and form and exist as parts of systems. The interlinked nature of different texts also shows that they accumulate different cultural traditions in the form of a network.[20] If each text is interlinked with other texts of interlinked meanings, cultural connotations, etc., then its transformation into a different language means that meaning across space and time and cultural context is an exercise of historical, geographical, as well as cultural transformation. In my understanding, approaches such as intertextuality (amongst others) remodeled translation-as-copy[21] and revised the act of translation as purely instrumental.[22] Through its introduction into genuinely networked cultural studies, and hermeneutical theories of translation, of course, the exercise of translation reached beyond ensuring linguistic equivalence.[23]

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In the context of translation as a potential method to examine cultural collisions and interferences, scholarly programs implementing such concepts also play a role. For instance, in 2016, the program of the Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften (International Research Center for Cultural Studies) at the University of Art and Design Linz in Vienna established a research focus on "Cultures of Translation." The foundation of this program is the previously mentioned broadened concept of translation that, in its expansion, incorporates society, media, and the history of technology.[24] The discussion spans attempts to transfer architectural constructions, landscapes, images, and musical compositions into texts, signs, diagrams, and codes – and vice versa. Similarly, the integration of text, image, and music in diverse media can enliven debates on the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Information, signs, and behavioral and emotional patterns transmitted through various cultural and knowledge systems are at the core of the *erweiterter Übersetzungsbegriff*. This concept of translation echoes Kristeva's intertextuality of related and interwoven texts, which since its introduction in 1967 has developed into a theory and practical implementation which translation theorist Lawrence Venuti describes "as an interpretation of the source text, whose form, meaning, and effect are seen as variable, subject to inevitable transformation during the translating process."[25] Venuti's hermeneutic model of translation allows for a more in-depth interaction with the translated text and defines innovation and change as constitutive elements of translation[26] – conceptualizing an expanded transformation of language that is essentially open. Back in the 1920s, critical theorist Walter Benjamin's translation theory and language philosophy was already characterized by openness, opening, and

19   Julia KRISTEVA, *Séméiotiké. Recherches Pour Une Sémanalyse*, Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1969.
20   *Ibid.*
21   James KELLY, "Towards a Deleuzian Theory of Translation," *Deleuze Studies*, Vol. 11, 2017, No. 3, pp. 379–404, here p. 389.
22   Lawrence VENUTI, "Genealogies of Translation Theory: Jerome," *Translation Studies*, Vol. 37, 2010, No. 3, pp. 5–28, here p. 8.
23   KELLY, "Towards a Deleuzian Theory of Translation," p. 389.

24   "Cultures of Translation // Different Work. IFK_Research Foci."
25   VENUTI, "Genealogies of Translation Theory," p. 6.
26   *Ibid.*, p. 8.

leaving open. To Benjamin, translation is an action that opens up language to deeper understanding that discloses itself through readings in its cracks and gaps. The connection between languages becomes visible through translation and the analysis of languages in relation to each other.[27] All these translation (and language) theories have in common that they set up transformations from one language into another, directly or indirectly, as analytical frameworks captured above in the term *erweiterter Übersetzungsbegriff*. Considering the historical fluctuations or continuation of the philosophical understanding of translation, the Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften formulated the aim of exploring and further expanding the contours of a translational turn.[28]

Scholar of literary and cultural studies Doris Bachmann-Medick suggested that the translational turn forms "part of a wider cross-disciplinary chain of 'cultural turns' [like] the interpretive turn, performative turn, iconic turn, postcolonial turn, spatial turn, etc."[29] At the end of the 1990s, translation started to gain acceptance as a "methodologically reflected analytical category across disciplines."[30] Society, culture, and this essay's field of interest, the arts, all have countless contact points (not necessarily without conflicts or ruptures) that can be grasped if their content becomes the subject of translation. When translation goes beyond pure metaphor, it can support researchers of cultural history to study "cultural differences, power imbalances and scopes for action […] [when] overlapping[s], passage[s], transmission[s] and transformation[s] […] are at work […]."[31] Looking at these categories of investigation

and the idea of cultural turns, translation as a method has an organic connection to the research into cultural transfers (*Kulturtransferforschung*). As already highlighted by Zsuzsa László, cultural transfer research in the 1980s basically emerged from language transfers between cultures.[32] Literary translations between German and French and their effect in the "receiving" countries' historiography was the subject of the first *Kulturtransferforschung* debate executed by sociologists Michael Werner and Michel Espange.[33] Transfer is analogous to translation because the semantics of its subject is transformed by its process, and these transformations are disclosed by hermeneutic analysis.[34] As our societies were and are transcultural, they should be investigated as multi-cultural contact zones. Cultural transfer research offers a close view of linguistic action, broader cultural actions, and forms of expression that span from everyday rituals and oral communication to written literature and audiovisual media.[35]

Scholar of intercultural communication Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink defines *Kulturtransferforschung* as research on the transfers and transmissions of cultural artefacts between cultural systems, with a threefold focus on processes of selection, mediation, and reception.[36] Helga Mitterbauer, who has published widely on cultural transfers, was involved in classifying *Kulturtransferforschung*'s methods into network analysis and the more elastic

27   Caroline SAUTER, *Die virtuelle Interlinearversion. Walter Benjamins Übersetzungstheorie und -praxis*, Heidelberg: Winter Verlag 2014, pp. 10, 13, 29, 191–192.
28   "Cultures of Translation // Different Work. IFK_Research Foci."
29   Doris BACHMANN-MEDICK, "Translational turn," in: Yves GAMBIER – Luc van DOORSLAER (eds.), *Handbook of Translation Studies.* Vol. 4, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company 2013, pp. 186–193, here p. 186.
30   *Ibid.*, pp. 186–187.
31   *Ibid.*

32   LÁSZLÓ, "East European Art as a Third Space."
33   Michel ESPANGE – Michael WERNER, "Deutsch-französischer Kulturtransfer im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Zu einem neuen interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramm des C.N.R.S.," *Francia,* Vol. 13, 1985, pp. 502–510; Michel ESPANGE – Michael WERNER, "La construction d'une référence culturelle allemande en France: Génése et Histoire (1750–1914)," *Annales*, Vol. 42, 1987, No. 4, pp. 969–992.
34   Katalin SINKÓ, "A kiállítás mint kulturális transzfer (Exhibition as Cultural Transfer)," in: *Nemzeti Képtár: Emlékezet és történelem között* (National Picture Gallery), Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Galéria 2009, pp. 147–163, here p. 147.
35   Hans-Jürgen LÜSEBRINK, "Kulturtransfer – neuere Forschungsansätze zu einem interdisziplinären Problemfeld der Kulturwissenschaften," in: Helga MITTERBAUER – Katharina SCHERKE (eds.), *Ent-grenzte Räume. Kulturelle Transfers um 1900 und in der Gegenwart*, Wien: Passagen 2005, pp. 23–41, here pp. 23–24.
36   *Ibid.*, p. 28.

frameworks of cultures inspired by postcolonial thought. According to her, interwoven, overlapping connections should be investigated taking into consideration the historical, social, economic, and technical frameworks in which transfers occur.[37] If we consider language both as a carrier of cultural attributes and diverse contexts and as a medium of exchange (including the risk of misunderstanding or misinterpretation), its process of semantic transmission can be understood as a form of cultural transfer. Thinking in these broader terms of *Kulturtransfer* and the methodological implications of the *erweiterter Übersetzungsbegriff,* translation can serve as a looking glass through which we can explore the transregional dynamics at play in east European art.

The contact points between different (linguistic) cultures that trigger moments of shared historical experience or suggest a belonging to (Western) European modernism are visible in the three case studies I present in this essay. One such contact point could be the cultural-political perception of the shared trauma of the 1956 revolutions in both Hungary and Poland, and how the tensions caused by the memory of this event were manifested in artistic transmission. The language barrier between Polish and Hungarian artist circles was first and foremost overcome through the translator-mediator role of János Brendel, a Hungarian émigré residing in Poland. In another case, such a contact point is represented by the carefully curated international content of the journal *Secolul 20.* Questions in the exploration of this essay's topic could go as follows: What kind of contemporary, modern or classic works of art and literature were translated into Romanian? Why were original Romanian texts translated into French and English in a Romanian magazine? What was the status of French

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culture at that time? What were the ambitions of the magazine's editor-in-chief? And which local and international circumstances in cultural politics made the publication of translations possible?

The translation zone is a framework that integrates social, political, and cultural components in its language transmission analysis. Introduced by Emily Apter in her 2006 book *The Translation Zone. A New Comparative Literature,* this concept was foundational to the translational turn. As Apter departs from language and text, she clearly does not limit her exploration to a purely linguistic analysis, but also involves various aspects of social, cultural, economic, and political life. As Apter explains:

> The translation zone defines the epistemological interstices of politics, poetics, logic, cybernetics, linguistics, genetics, media, and environment; its locomotion characterizes both psychic transference and the technology of information transfer.[38]

Apter's translation zone thus emphasizes the equally important status of the elements involved in transmission (even those preventing or disturbing these flows), and challenges how language-bound (spatial) borders are drawn.[39] Hegemonies and hierarchies can also be detected through applying the translation zone concept to our field of interest. In the Soviet Union and its zone of influence in eastern

37   Helga MITTERBAUER, "Dynamische Vernetzungen: Theoretische Prolegomena zu kulturellen Transferprozessen," in: Ewald MENGEL – Ludwig SCHNAUDER – Rudolf WEISS (eds.), *Weltbühne Wien. World Stage Vienna*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier 2010, pp. 51–75, here pp. 52–53, 69–70.

38   APTER, *The Translation Zone*, p. 8.
39   *Ibid.*, p. 12 and non-paginated pages.

and central Europe, the dominance of Russian[40] was supposed to lead to a "harmonious unity in a single world language."[41] Instead, the reality was closer to "linguistic multiplicity and phantom inter-nations"[42] that had their own cultural dynamics, carriers, and actors not detached from mainstream structures. In the translation zones I investigate here, I cannot regard their agents as (entirely) non-conformist, since their partly dissenting activities were within/through institutions of the state, and their positions were integrated into the socialist infrastructure. The multi-polar translation zone represented by the activities of Helena Kontová, Petr Rezek, Karel Miler, and Petr Štembera (among others) was physically attached to an office space in the National Gallery in Prague or carried on into the Czech urban and rural landscape through performances, but crossed Czechoslovakia's borders intellectually. In this lively translation zone, the transmission of ideas happened daily (yet often at different times). Historian Catherine Evtuhov explains this as follows:

> As they travel across time and space – transmitted by individuals, by texts, by media – ideas become grafted onto, assimilated into, the "next" cultural sphere in which, by virtue

40 Magdalena Moskalewicz also writes that "Russian was the obligatory second language across the Soviet Bloc: taught in schools and used in diplomacy, it infiltrated many elements of cultural life. Additionally, and most importantly for the art scene, the visual language of socialist realism was also imposed on the region." MOSKALEWICZ, "Language of Art in Central Europe," p. 543. Similarly relevant is Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny, and Piotr Piotrowski's observation that: "Besides the problem of national language, the postwar period brought the issue of the dominant international languages to the fore. In the socialist period, Russian – the language of the socialist revolution – was supposed to be the legitimate international language and was to be learned by all school pupils. But actual knowledge of this language was sometimes very weak and we do not know exactly to what extent Russian was the language of communication. Other dominant languages, such as German, English or French, were often preferred as a result of old intellectual traditions that remained strong and attractive (especially in the case of English) for the younger generation, too." BAZIN – DUBOURG GLATIGNY – PIOTROWSKI, "Geography of Internationalism," p. 9.
41 APTER, *The Translation Zone*, not paginated.
42 *Ibid.*, not paginated.

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of translation, communication, and repetition, they instantaneously and sometimes imperceptibly mutate into something new.[43]

In the case of the Prague performance circle consisting of Miler, Štembera, Rezek, and Kontová, transmission and translation resulted in artworks, interviews, articles, samizdat publications and philosophical dialogues, as I will touch upon in the next section of this essay.

Ambassadors, Media, and Intellectual Circles of Translation

It was most probably Klara Kemp-Welch's seminal book *Networking the Bloc. Experimental Art in Eastern Europe, 1965–1981* (2018) that first drew attention to the figure of János Brendel, who became an important personality promoting Hungarian neo-avant-garde art in Poland. Brendel was a networking figure in-between cultures, as well as a character who was also particularly important for research on cultural transfers. Figures of intercultural mediation are catalysts who carry socio-cultural roles and functions to connect diverse cultural spaces[44] – in Brendel's case this socio-cultural role was to import and implement Hungarian language, culture, and the arts into the Polish cultural landscape. Art historian Piotr Piotrowski called Brendel an "émigré and a sort of ambassador of Hungarian culture, [and his] long-time colleague in the Department of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań."[45] Piotrowski, known for his substantial

43 EVTUHOV, "Introduction," in: *The Cultural Gradient*, p. 4.
44 LÜSEBRINK, "Kulturtransfer – neuere Forschungsansätze zu einem interdisziplinären Problemfeld der Kulturwissenschaften," p. 33.
45 Piotr PIOTROWSKI, "Nationalizing Modernism: Exhibitions of Hungarian and Czechoslovakian Avant-garde in Warsaw," in: BAZIN – DUBOURG GLATIGNY – PIOTROWSKI, *Art beyond Borders*, pp. 209–223, here p. 215.

work on east and central European art history beyond the region's borders, must have profited from in-depth discussions with Brendel who had direct access to post-war Hungarian cutting-edge art. This Polish-Hungarian knowledge exchange cemented both Brendel's and Piotrowski's networker position in both cultures.

As much as Brendel was an ambassador of Hungarian culture, the more ambivalent relationship he had with socialist Party politics in Hungary. Through his involvement in the 1956 revolution Brendel comprised himself in Hungary politically and tried to leave the country a couple of times before he finally found a home in Poland. There he studied art history, and before his return to Adam Mickiewicz University in 1975, Brendel was an employee of the National Museum in Poznań.[46] It was during this time that the art historian and networker discovered his interest in conceptual art[47] and intended to "translate" its Hungarian "variant" into his adopted home. Transferring political connotations through the means of art was part of his mission of the early 1970s. The *Wystawa zbiorowa artystów węgierskich* (Group Exhibition of Hungarian Artists) Brendel organized in 1972 toured from the Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych (Bureau of Artistic Exhibitions) in Poznań to Łódź and then to Szczecin.[48] Among the 26 participating artists were the most important Hungarian neo-avant-gardists of the time, and probably the most politically provocative was a piece by Gyula Konkoly called *Vérző emlékmű* (Bleeding Memorial).[49] First shown in Budapest in 1969, that sculpture, which was basically "a human-sized block of ice sprinkled with permanganate

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crystals and covered in gauze and cotton wool, redefined simple three-dimensional artworks and broke with materiality. While in the process of melting, the ice block dripped a red fluid onto the floor."[50]

Both Kemp-Welch[51] and art historian Géza Boros highlighted that "the red-colored liquid referenced the bloody strike-down" of the 1956 revolution which was an attempt to reform and democratize state socialism.[52] Brendel was aware of the *Vérző emlékmű*'s commemoration of the reform movement.[53] Any mention of the events of 1956, even metaphorically, was a delicate matter for the bilateral cultural relations of Hungary and Poland. Despite both countries' leaning towards cultural freedom and intense international collaborations in the arts, Hungary's and Poland's open socialism had strict limits in terms of expressing political opinion. This limitation applied to aesthetic translations and mistranslations of the 1956 revolutions. This moment of disobedience against Soviet rule was thus a contact zone for both cultures in which Brendel served as a translator. Klara Kemp-Welch wrote that although Brendel

claimed that [the selection of the artworks for the exhibition] had been arbitrary, he noted [...] that "definite conditions have imposed upon the works their peculiar and various power of expression." [...] Reading between the lines, contemporary spectators would have understood that Brendel was

46 "2010. december 14-én, Poznanban eltemették Brendel Jánost," *Polonia.hu. Országos Lengyel Önkormányzat*, December 17, 2010, https://polonia.hu/index.php/hu/cikk/6488-2010-december-14-en-poznanban-eltemettek-brendel-janost (accessed September 22, 2023).

47 Brendel seem to have admired the work of László Lakner the most: János BRENDEL, *Lakner László budapesti munkássága 1959–1973*, Budapest: Új Művészet Kiadó 2000.

48 Klara KEMP-WELCH, *Networking the Bloc*, p. 174.

49 Kemp-Welch uses the title *Monument*. *Ibid*.

50 Katalin CSEH-VARGA, *The Hungarian Avant-Garde and Socialism: Art of the Second Public Sphere*, London – Oxford – New York – New Delhi – Sydney: Bloomsbury 2023, p. 111.

51 KEMP-WELCH, *Networking the Bloc*, pp. 174, 178.

52 CSEH-VARGA, *The Hungarian Avant-Garde and Socialism*, p. 112; Géza BOROS, "Tabu és trauma: 1956," in: Edit SASVÁRI – Hedvig TURAI – Sándor HORNYIK (eds.), *Art in Hungary 1956–1980. Doublespeak and Beyond*, New York: Thames & Hudson 2018, pp. 193–207, here pp. 198–202.

53 KEMP-WELCH, *Networking the Bloc*, pp. 174, 178.

alluding to the particular cultural politics of the country [...].[54]

Indeed, reading between the lines is the actual challenge of the Benjaminian translation and language philosophy, and is the task of a translation zone expanding on the circumstances of visual presentation involving different cultural backgrounds. A reference to the bloody crackdown on an anti-Soviet reform movement was the hidden message of the *Vérző emlékmű*, aesthetic signs were in this case translated well by visitors to the exhibition, even though Brendel intended to cover the intentions of political meaning in the preface of the *Wystawa zbiorowa artystów węgierskich*'s catalog.[55] Such contradictions in the interpretation of semiotically complex artworks show that language requires close attention when reconstructing cultural (political) landscapes. Given Brendel's trans-cultural engagement, and his later founding of the Hungarian Chair at Adam Mickiewicz University and the establishment of the book series *Biblioteca Hungarica* on Hungarian-Polish relations, he can be described as a "cultural broker"[56] who adopted an in-between position.

Brendel, like many fellow cultural networkers of state socialism in the same period, was himself located between the lines. Most of Brendel's activities were carried out in/through language and can be read through Mikhail Bakhtin's appropriation of the spoken and written word.[57] Brendel as an ambassador of translation populated his curatorial project with personal, social, and historical experiences; he "appropriate[d] the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intentions."[58] It is especially true

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that people had their own (linguistic) relationship with the 1956 revolution, and carried different expectations of commemoration. Appropriation begins with the consideration of these factors, carried on into the production of an artwork and mediated through a transfer figure who understands a broad set of cultural and linguistic implications. Brendel initiated the exhibition that was to bring the countries' respective progressive art scenes closer together and to showcase that Hungarian and Polish artists both hold a commitment to the principle of the freedom of expression. Yet, the project must have triggered diverging, perhaps unintended interpretations in which the "text enter[ed] its self-staging"[59] – meaning a point from which the translated subject begins to write its own story, thus potentially detaching itself from the original intentions.

Discursive topics can be translated into different creative artistic methods and follow a curatorial concept, as we have seen in the case of art historian János Brendel. What texts, as parts of print media, can do when they enter the process of circulation is the subject of my second case study. Under the editorial guidance of art critic and art historian Dan Hăulică from 1963 until 1989, the cultural and literary magazine *Secolul 20* grew into an international vessel for artistic journey reports and translations. *Secolul 20*, even published today, first came out in 1961 and included, in addition to literature, fields such as the visual arts, theater, architecture, aesthetics, music, cinema, dance, science, and history. From early on the dialogue between these spheres was essential to the journal's content.[60] The establishment of world literary magazines across people's democracies in the Soviet Bloc was a direct order from Moscow,[61]

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54   *Ibid.*, p. 178.
55   *Ibid.*
56   BACHMANN-MEDICK, "Translational turn," p. 188.
57   Mikhail BAKHTIN, "Discourse in the Novel," in: Michael HOLQUIST (ed.), *Dialogic Imagination*, Austin: University of Texas 1981, pp. 259–422.
58   MOSKALEWICZ, "Language of Art in Central Europe," p. 547.

59   APTER, *The Translation Zone*, not paginated.
60   See e.g., the thematic issue on science and literature (1964, issue 2) or music and literature (1965, issue 3).
61   Sanda VISAN, "De la *Secolul 20* la *Secolul 21* (interview with Alina Ledenau)," *Adevărul*, July 20, 2015, /adevarul.ro/news/societate/de-secolul-20-secolul-21-1_55ac-ceb3f5eaafab2cbca6e1/index.html (accessed March 25, 2020).

because the Soviet Union wanted to profile state socialism as modern and progressive. Despite the socialist motivation of *Secolul 20* the content of which should undergo strict Marxist-Leninist supervision,[62] the journal functioned as a portal to Western culture. From 1965 editor-in-chief Dan Hăulică found ways to surpass socialist censorship and control given his international positions, such as his presidency of the International Art Critics Association.[63] Similar to Brendel as a networker of different cultural (linguistic) systems, Hăulică was himself an interesting personality, and the catalyst behind the journal's scope and reach. The editor-in-chief was a factor in determining Romanian contemporary art and its discourses, while simultaneously stressing an active engagement with the histories and actualities of the Cold War's divided art worlds. Hăulică was a talented maneuverer between official Party regulations and progress-driven, non-political art.[64] His personality, which was anchored in both the Romanian and French literary and art scenes, predetermined the transmission of multi-lingual content in the journal.

Under Hăulică *Secolul 20* synthetized local and international texts on a broad temporal axis, aligning both to socialist modernism and to more liberal approaches on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Russian authors and artists always had prominent positions in Hăulică's journal, but the scope of its content spread across the globe. The cross-cultural interest of the journal is characterized through sections devoted to Yugoslav avant-garde literary tradition, interviews with Spanish film directors, and

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an overview of Brazilian contemporary literature, to name but a few topics touched upon in the 1963 issues alone.[65] The journal's 1987 "Award for the Best Literature and Art Magazine in the World" during the UNESCO Biennial (at the Centre Georges Pompidou)[66] illustrates the international recognition *Secolul 20* had gained on the Paris-Bucharest connection. As previously observed regarding conceptual art, English became the substantial international art language from the 1970s, taking over from French which had held this position previously, and which was sustained in Romania.

Paris was the key reference point and international art center for east-central European cultural players following the establishment of state socialisms. Art historian Magdalena Moskalewicz wrote that "French was the language of the educated and cultured social spheres before the Second World War, and [east European countries'] pre-war artistic connections with French art circles […] conditioned the direction of their postwar longing."[67] Against this background and based on Hăulică's personal connections to the French art scene, the translation zone he created with his literary and art journal maintained an intimate connection to the French language. Indeed, French served as a window to other cultures beyond the socialist hemisphere. Not only was this the case for *Secolul 20*, French was also regarded an "access code" by Romanian émigré artists during the 1960s and 1970s who left for the market-dominated and institutionalized art scenes in Western Europe. Conceptual artist André Cadere, for instance, who left Romania in 1967 and hoped for a smooth integration into the competitive art scene in and beyond France, was confronted with numerous rejections and exclusions. Cadere turned his marginal position into critical commentaries on hierarchies in the

62   Cassian Maria SPIRIDON, "Revista Secolul 20(21), o fereastră deschisă către marea literatură a lumii," *Memorie Culturală*, January 6, 2017, https://memorieculturala.ro/revista-secolul-2021-o-fereastra-deschisa-catre-marea-literatura-a-lumii/ (accessed March 25, 2020).
63   VISAN, "De la *Secolul 20* la *Secolul 21*."
64   *Ibid*.; SPIRIDON, "Revista Secolul 20(21), o fereastră deschisă către marea literatură a lumii;" Magda CĂRNECI, "Dan Hăulică – Unpapă al criticii de artă," *Revista 22*, August 18, 2014, https://revista22.ro/cultura/dan-h259ulic259-un-pap259-al-criticii-de-art259-romane537ti (accessed March 25, 2020).

65   See the following issues of *Secolul 20* from 1963: issues 1, 2, and 4.
66   VISAN, "De la *Secolul 20* la *Secolul 21*."
67   MOSKALEVICZ, "Language of Art in Central Europe," p. 543.

art world.[68] His performative interventions at exhibitions were comments on institutional barriers that couldn't be swiped out of the way by simply having a command of French.

Using French from the opposite end of transmission and appropriation, namely integrated into *Secolul 20*'s program, seemed to be a more successful undertaking. Translation was an essential part of the magazine's structure – not only in the strict sense of the word (in terms of the actual translations of literary texts), but also figuratively in that the journal's content was a vessel for inter- and transcultural information distribution. If we apply translation's understanding along the lines of poststructuralist thought here, then *Secolul 20* implemented a language (culture) transfer that was essentially creative in which the journal's content curated "linguistic and cultural elements between the source and target languages."[69] Especially important is how the translation was taken up by the journal's readers: whether they interfere with the multiple points of view captured, and how the reader "transforms and deforms" the essentially multi-perspectival text.[70] In the context of art politics in Romania, the journal was "cross-cutting binary pairs and [was] breaking open formulaic clusters"[71] in a translational manner. The multipolarity and entanglement of the magazine's analyzed aspects and the "mutual translations and transformations"[72] it generated across art in the East, West (and South) is perhaps the most vibrant point of current discussion on eastern Europe's transregional research agenda. Today a close look at the translation zone of *Secolul 20* allows us to browse through the Ceaușescu regime's cultural paradoxes which

discuss political announcements and Party congress reports[73] and Dan Hăulică's meeting with neorealist film director and screenwriter Renato Castellani in Rome[74] on the same platform.

The third and final translation zone I touch upon in this essay is the intellectual hub centering around performance art in Prague in the 1970s. The circulation and debate of incoming foreign discourses and information on art trends or interpretation of fiction published in a non-native language materialized here in open-minded discussions, thought-provoking publications, or bodily enactments. Translation had a different output for all members involved. This time again, the jumping off point in my research was a passage in Klara Kemp-Welch's book on the activities taking place in art historian and artist Karel Miler's office at the National Gallery. Kemp-Welch quoted critic and curator Helena Kontová: "Every day someone would come to our office – an artist or a critic or a theoretician. Petr Rezek was part of the group […] they were always bringing translations of new essays […] from *Avalanche* and other magazines."[75] Taking this location, namely Miler's workroom, as a physical and metaphorical center of intellectual radiation, I became interested in what types of international sources were processed, distributed, and appropriated by the people accessing this zone. Kontová connected the group of artists and thinkers to the international art world. She was responsible for discussing and promoting the work of Czech and Slovak action artists in the pages of renowned art journal *Flash Art*. In 1978 she carried out an extensive interview with Jan Mlčoch, Petr Štembera, and Karel Miler, and also put together a piece on the role of photography in contemporary arts in Czechoslovakia in the same year.[76]

68   Magda RADU, "André Cadere," *Flash Art*, July 2, 2016, https://flash---art.com/article/andre-cadere/ (accessed September 20, 2023).
69   KELLY, "Towards a Deleuzian Theory of Translation," p. 389.
70   *Ibid*., pp. 384, 401.
71   BACHMANN-MEDICK, "Translational Turn," p. 190.
72   *Ibid*., pp. 188, 189.

73   See *Secolul 20*, 1965, issue 7–8, pp. 3–10.
74   Dan HĂULICĂ, "Conservatii la Roma," *Secolul 20*, 1966, issue 1, pp. 13–23.
75   KEMP-WELCH, *Networking the Bloc*, p. 373.
76   Helena KONTOVÁ – Jaroslav ANDĚL, "ČSSR fotografija," *Spot*, 1978, No. 11, pp. 7–29.

Surpassing the channels and presentations Kontová opened up in this "performance circle," Miler and Štembera created their own knowledge pathways and expanded their interest beyond the limitations of a Eurocentric cultural perspective.

Miler and Štembera were both taken by phenomenology and Zen-Buddhism, ideas which were accompanied by extensive readings, discussions, and artistic experiments. In 1970, the magazine *Orientace* included translated excerpts from Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki's *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1934)[77] that was most likely Miler's inspiration in starting his performative meditations and stand-stills. In these performative meditations, for instance, the artist aligned himself to geometric signs or lay on a field in nature or on the sidewalk. Miler's actions were minimalistic, and quite often staged for the camera; carefully orchestrated scenes were cut out from either a single action or series of actions. In the frozen moments of Miler's ephemeral art, human movement was broken down to its essence. Miler's most private resource to balance out rationalism and romanticism in his life and art was Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* (1974).[78] Paradoxically the book's title does not fully reflect its content. It tells the story of the protagonist's and his son's motorbike trip from Minnesota to North Carolina that is accompanied by discussions on philosophical themes. What resonated with Miler must have been issues such as the struggle for inner peace and pure truth or the dissatisfaction with a technicist modernity that were addressed in the bestseller and which he translated into minimalistic actions. Miler's work notes, as a synergy of body and text, mirrored the meditative moments of

the performances,[79] inspired by the artist's translations of philosophical and lifestyle readings. In Miler's case the performing body was the main medium of discursive translations.

Against the backdrop of conceptual art's overarching presence, artists like Miler opened up towards philosophical texts,[80] their readings, translations, and interpretations, resulting in embodied performances based on the fusion of word and artistic creation. Taking Miler's output as a translation zone, his work brings together a creative dialogue between foreign linguistic sources, philosophical readings, exchanges with like-minded colleagues, and the bodily fusion of all these activities. The philosopher Petr Rezek, who was also associated with the Prague performance circle in the 1970s, elevated the intellectual engagement and event-based art production to the level of discourse in 1982, when his philosophical sketches on action and body art, but also on other contemporary art tendencies, were brought together in a comprehensive monograph.[81] In this particular publication, based on essays and lectures from 1976 until 1981, Štembera, Miler, and Mlčoch are discussed together with similar art practices on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Rezek, compared to Kontová, turned around the course of cultural transfer and translation and recycled international sources on contemporary art in his 1976 samizdat series[82] that includes philosophical (written) meditations on pop art, land art, action art, and the theorist's relationship to art practice.[83] The translation zone which Miler created through the synergy of body and word is in Rezek's case a philosophical exercise not entirely cut off from the body in action, but rather in a creative dialogue with it that

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77   Luba KMEŤOVÁ – Adam DRDA, "Ukončete to, radím vám! / s Karlem Milerem hovoří Luba Kmeťová a Adam Drda," *Revolver Revue*, 2017, issue 109, pp. 37–69.

78   I am grateful to art historians Pavlína Morganová and Lujza Kotočová for this comment.

79   Karel Miler's work notes, 1970–1980. Provided by Pavlína Morganová. Source: Research Center. Academy of Fine Arts Prague (VVP AVU).

80   MOSKALEWICZ, "Language of Art in Central Europe," p. 545.

81   Petr REZEK, *Tělo, věc a skutečnost v současném umění*, Praha: Jazzpetit 1982.

82   Petr REZEK, *Filosofické skici k umění poslední doby* (samizdat), Praha 1976.

83   *Ibid.*

resulted in textual output. Translations that wander across multi-lingual disciplines and various carriers including the immersion of practice and theory have proved themselves to be rich and fruitful in terms of what transregional research can learn, for example from embodied artistic appropriations of language in terms of generative methods.

The Translation Zone and Artistic Appropriation

This essay has demonstrated that eastern European art scenes under state socialisms were multilingual and connected to other regions through the cultural ties of language. While this connection wasn't often smooth or free of mistranslations, it was the source and medium of communication beyond national (state socialist) borders. Language and cultural transmissions in the region were carried out by mediators, highly complex circulations of information, and embodiments and appropriations of different kinds. Entering the translation zone through the case studies of this essay supported the reconstruction of the multiple roles cultural brokers, such as János Brendel, played since the 1960s and how they mediated political dissent across actual and linguistic borders via their chosen curatorial and artistic strategies. The journal *Secolul 20*'s position between progression and socialist conformity showed how translation simultaneously fixed and opened up cultural geographies. Last but not least, the Prague performance circle's example, and especially Karel Miler's case, was used to reflect on the mutually fruitful entanglement of word, body, and action taking discursive material as its origin. All three case studies demonstrated that translation as a method opens a creative space for historical analysis that intends to retrace mechanisms of cultural transfers.

While in entering the above translation zones we have already left the tangible sphere of language, it remains at hand to close this paper with a flashback on conceptual/project art and its application of language in most creative

settings. In August 1972, Hungary's non-conformist cultural ambassador László Beke organized a meeting of Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian artists as an act of artistic solidarity after the Hungarian army's military intervention as part of Soviet-led Warsaw Pact forces in the crackdown on the 1968 Prague Spring. A series of different actions were planned and executed at the Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár, one of the most important venues of experimental art in Hungary of the early 1970s. Transregional collaboration and various practices of cultural translation were on the program from the Chapel Studio's beginnings. One part of Beke's actions motivated by solidarity was a dictionary installation inside the chapel consisting of Czech, Hungarian, and Slovak words in their linguistic equivalence.[84] Visitors' attention was likely to have been caught by the words that seemed most similar in their phonetics. Some words were written on cards and pinned on the wall; others were thrown on the floor to encourage visitors to interact and interfere with them by e.g., finding the Hungarian equivalent of a Slovak expression. There was also a transparent paper attached to the wall with comments on similarities and differences in linguistic expression accompanied by dictionaries of the languages in question. These dictionaries, similar to the distributed cards, were likewise an invitation to attendees to engage in interactive use. Visitors could either juggle with Czech, Hungarian and Slovak as proposed by linguistic norm or could involve themselves in a playful, ironic immersion with words and phonetics. Beke offered a variety of interpretations and access points in this project to everyone interested in it to make use of language as opportunity, and to really use language as a tool of communication and cultural (mis)understanding.

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84   "Cseh-szlovák-magyar művészek találkozója Beke László szervezésében. 1972. Augusztus 26–27," *Balatonboglári Kápolnaműterem*, https://artpool.hu/boglar/1972/720826b.html (accessed May 31, 2023).

This example of Beke's actual practice strongly reminds me of what Kimberley Quiogue Andrews understood as experimental translation, no matter how close Beke stayed or how far he departed from the written word. Andrews writes that "experimental translators engage with their source texts as highly active and textually conspicuous interlocutors."[85] This avant-garde practice of translation navigates originality, the translation of cultural contexts and historic positions including the translator's own plus the original texts' background. Like Beke's, Andrews's creative activities with language went beyond translation-as-copy, and paved the way for a "language limbo" that readers enter.[86] While the literary translation Andrews looks into is far more complex, and even chaotic, then with Beke's installed dictionary, the Hungarian networker still managed to offer us the potential of language appropriation and an autonomous way to creatively engage with the cultural transfers, even their blind alleys, carried in linguistic expression. Applying the concept of the translation zone to transregional and transnational transmissions, mediations and appropriations of text-based content in east and central European studies is most beneficial because it enables researchers to reconstruct the motivations, opportunities and resources of cultural brokers and artists that resulted in the production of contemporary art works, its presentation and historiography.

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85   ANDREWS, "What does translation know?," p. 340.
86   Emily APTER cited in *ibid*., p. 348.