

first publication

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The emergence and ways of functioning of contemporary networks give the illusion of an independence of place. The geographical factor manifests itself historically – the cultural background of places is embodied in the language of the network. Nothing is free from history, cultural backgrounds the least of all. Language reflects the different social, historical and cultural boundary experiences of people. A direct, even a carefully adapted translation is often not efficient enough for communication – neither in daily life nor in the politically established norms for environmental issues, in human rights discussions, in literature or in the industry. Often the different layers in the lingual images lead to subtle misunderstandings or obvious failures to understand, and – even worse for the functioning of networks – a mimicry of understanding. The process of building networks that operate inter-culturally is deeply influenced by the quality of understanding between the participants and their ability to communicate about their way of communication. The different meanings and historical understandings of notions that are crucial for the functioning of the network are often not recognised since every participant presupposes that a certain knowledge and specific meanings of words are already known and agreed upon. However, this knowledge and these meanings that are taken for granted differ in different contexts. There occurs a culturally multilingual communication within the intercultural net even when the participants are using only one language of communication. The way we define words in a certain context greatly influences our activities and the way we communicate. The boundary between being unsure and being arrogant remains very unclear and the reason for misunderstanding could as well be a lack of ability as a lack of the will to understand. The choice of words we use or do not use, and the boundaries we keep or open by that choice depends on our own cultural experience, our history. My history is not necessarily your history, and none of the different histories are more or less important than the other ones. The preliminary belief that everything unknown – according to our experience – should be something less worthy, updated or strange, serves only the contemporary structure of power and contains no will for a network, for communication.

The object of the network is defined by the interests of the participating subjects and most of the networks function on the basis of interest-oriented pragmatic goals. The cultural influences on the activities, which are subtle and difficult to measure, the passions as interests, are often not taken into account. Since every network today is more a project in emergence than the identity of a settled structure, passions and interests belong more or less together.

It is certainly no coincidence that today one can observe the cultural, linguistic and literary controversies in Europe facing the hard task of re-thinking historical processes in the different countries. It is evident that the burdens of the whole legacy of the 20th century matters: the Nazi and the Communist ideologies, but also the '68ers with excessively extreme standpoints of »anything goes« and »everything goes«, and not least also globalisation. The experiences with Islam as well as the transformation of the terminology of and about terrorism could certainly be added. Different cultures deal in different ways with historical and political narratives, questions other issues, emphasise different ways of looking at events. These differences are particularly strong between the Eastern and the Western European countries.

The development of networks also depends on various other factors, such as number, age and gender of participants or the branch of their activity and their relation to power, etc., which are not discussed here. However, as I already stressed, the geography and history behind the networks remains today in the era of the Internet the aspect that is least taken into account and that deserves our focus. This aspect manifests itself in the cultural background and in the language as a culture. A scientific network has a centre and a periphery, which do not necessarily coincide with the political and cultural centres and peripheries. The scientific periphery can be a cultural centre or a cultural province. This has influence on the success of any cultural implantation, any transfer of knowledge, including also action knowledge. The ability of the cultural background of the scientific periphery to communicate with the scientific centre is of importance for the efficiency of the process of building of a network. The new and growing network-peripheries are a challenge to the centre. Knowledge-deficits often emerge in the communication and it is the intercultural communication that highlights the specific burdens carried by specific words. The practice of the centre in generating and trans-

ferring knowledge is then partly or fully questioned. The picture of the transfer becomes more complicated when mediators trying to compete with the centre or the presence of a variety of cultures within the centre are taken into account. The transfer faces more obstacles, when it happens indirectly and includes many narratives. This factor has the potential of being very creative for the development of the network and in the long run resulting in a shift within the centre. The network peripheries are culturally very important because on the one hand they challenge the centre and therewith encourage its development, and on the other hand they link it to the ways of thinking of other networks.

The idea to communicate on these issues brought together 1996 in Stuttgart and Berlin several authors, colleagues and friends of mine, and engaged them in controversial discussions about »*Verbotene Worte*« (»Forbidden Words«) since then. The particular problems of the translation and perception of literature of other cultures provoked the beginning of a network concentrated on political abuse of words and their role as well as the role of language and literature in the intercultural communication today, what do we do with them and how they differ in different countries. There are words that were emptied of their original content and have been left in silence, making texts that employ these words literarily and politically incorrect. Most of these words are related to identification and different cultures carry different forbidden words (e.g., many books translated from different languages carry too much *pathos* for the German language, without being perceived so in the language they were originally written). In the beginning, a large role was played by the fact that my knowledge of German history was good but that of German language was non-existent, which brought with it my high sensitivity in the observation of the object, in the setting of the aims and in the establishing of links in the circle I had initiated. The shift of the burdened words across borders was and is interesting since many cultural misunderstandings are based on them. The misunderstandings that are present within Europe are only at a first glance less to be expected than those that occur with more distant cultures.

During 1999 and 2000 I asked several colleagues to write a short story about how we abuse, misuse, violate, outrage, avoid or abandon words, which often means to abuse, misuse, violate, outrage, avoid and abandon cultures and people. The story of the anthology of these texts became itself a story about how we meet and say farewell to words, cultures and people. Many of the texts were read in different places in Europe and some were published in the *Sprachbuch* by the Ernst Klett Sprachverlag Stuttgart, where the network was presented in 2003. The unification of Eastern and Western Europeans into a larger European Union questions in new ways the (hi)story of the European countries during the last century. This intensified our work and confronted it with power structures in the process. These usually do not recognise the interplay between economic interests and political visions on the one hand and literary and linguistic passions on the other. It is rarely understood that communication lies at its basis – words, notions, cultural experience and invisible knowledge that is presupposed as preliminarily existing and agreed upon. There is a need of a mutual effort to de-mythologise history and to build bridges in a time when historical experiences become fictional narratives on the search for a European identity today. The consciousness of the diversity of the historical narratives is virulent in contemporary European literature and writers who come from all European countries join the network. Scholars, publicists and institutions got involved in 2002. The network develops interculturally, interdisciplinary and intermedially. The significant geographical points in the development of the project that carries the network are Berlin and Sofia, Stuttgart and Budapest, Wetzlar and Vienna, Bitterfeld and Wrocław, Frankfurt/Oder and Prague, Dortmund and Paris, Leipzig and Helsinki. Writers, with their private contacts and personal communication, poems and stories, essays and theatre plays are the basis of the network, numerous readings and discussions in many cities, symposia und series of readings, the involvement of artists and scholars, made the network a working organism, where many new texts emerged and/or were/are influenced as development. A meta-communication within the network about the network-communication itself is very important for the project *Verbotene Worte (Forbidden Words)* – as for building any intercultural network.

