



FRAGMENTATION AND
RECONFIGURATION
experiencing the city
between art and philosophy

CONFERENCE

**TRANSLATION AND THE URBAN LANDSCAPE:
THE AFTERLIFE OF THE ARCADES**

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ABSTRACT / ANNOUNCEMENT

What connects the everyday life of cities to the images of language? To what extent is it possible to reflect on the city through the lens of translation, and vice versa? At such an intersection, this issue is as ancient as it is pressing. Indeed, the manifold linguistic and cultural forms that pervade today's cities are in many respects a lively and paradoxical re-enactment of the ancient myths of the fragmentation of language such as the Tower of Babel. This conference will explore the many faces of the act of translating within and throughout the urban landscape, taking as its starting point Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, a philosophical reflection on the relationship between different historical epochs based on the history of the city of Paris.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

What connects the everyday life of cities to the forms and images of language? What is it that draws us to transpose or translate a work of art in space and in time, as when we recognize for instance the history of nineteenth-century Paris in our present history? These and other questions can be looked at more closely by reflecting on the city through translation and on translation through the city.

In his essay “The Task of the Translator”, Walter Benjamin speaks of the transparency and the truth of translation by choosing the *word*, as opposed to the *sentence*, as the “primal element of the translator”, adding that: “if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade”.

In turn, the conception and execution of the *Arcades Project* are pervaded by the very gesture of translating. Indeed, the method of literary montage – the juxtaposition of quotations and images in a network of nearly infinite references and ramifications – necessarily implies the movement of translation as much as its transformation. In fact, the *Arcades Project*, which roughly coincides with Benjamin’s project to translate Proust in collaboration with Franz Hessel, eventually expands into a broader, essentially metaphorical idea of translation. Thus Benjamin speaks for instance of the possibility of transposing or translating “the commodity character onto the cosmos”, and says of Grandville’s “belated fantasies” that they transpose or “translate commodity’s character into the universe”. Translation thereby exceeds the literary space, and extends into the world. In the Parisian arcades – interior and exterior spaces at the same time, pathways in which objects and experiences intersect – the ambiguity of life in modern cities and metropolises is made visible: in the passerby’s movement as in the displacement of historical times, in the flow of languages and cultures as in the dynamics of tradition and modernity. They are thus immediate places of translation, understood no longer merely as the relation of one language to another, but as an art of space projected onto history by what Benjamin called the continuous life, the “afterlife” of a work.

ABSTRACTS / BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Alexandra Dias Fortes

IFILNOVA, NOVA FCSH

Wor(l)d Cities: Translating Writing into Built Form

If the way we think is bound up with our language, is the way we organize space – with walls, floors, squares, etc. – related to the way we visually express that language, graphically, on a page? Can we learn anything about the way cities are planned by investigating written texts?

By inquiring into the spatial arrangements involved in both practices, we can view the design of cities throughout the world as a translation of the symbols used in writing. Bearing in mind Walter Benjamin's observation that "the city is a linguistic cosmos" by virtue of "its street names", I will explore these topics in order to finally ask: How can the *Arcades Project* help us understand the continuum between the interior and the exterior, especially in the figure of the Parisian *Passagen*, as well as the continuum between writing and built form?

Alexandra Dias Fortes is an integrated member of the Nova Institute of Philosophy (IFILNOVA) and holds a PhD in Philosophy (2016) from NOVA FCSH, with a thesis on Wittgenstein's thought: *The importance of aesthetics for Wittgenstein (Philosophy, method and style)*.

With an abiding interest in Wittgenstein, she also researches questions, authors, and concepts that are connected with and are integral for her investigations as part of the working group, "Art, Critique and Aesthetic Experience" (CultureLab, IFILNOVA), and as a team member of the FCT-funded Project "Fragmentation and Reconfiguration: Experiencing the city between art and philosophy". The field – and the idea – of religious naturalism also interests her, arising from a long-standing curiosity in finding out what Wittgenstein meant when he talked about "a religious point of view", and due to her being a team member of the FCT-funded Project "Epistemology of Religious Belief: Wittgenstein, Grammar and the Contemporary World".

Daniel Weidner

ZfL – Berlin, Humboldt University of Berlin

Translating the Name of the City. Walter Benjamin and the Afterlife of Charles Baudelaire and Marcel Proust

Walter Benjamin's engagement with the urban landscape was preceded by an engagement with city literature, namely with the poems of Charles Baudelaire and the prose of Marcel Proust. The paper discusses how by reading and translating these two authors Benjamin detects the central figures and poetic strategies to represent the urban space and develops the theoretical tools that will become essential later for his project of the *Passagen*. Both the notion of afterlife of cultural artefacts, developed in the essay on the translator, and the idea of a web of textuality organized by allegorical techniques and the shifting function of the ego, prefigure the experience of the flâneur and the analyst of history.

Daniel Weidner, Professor for the Study of Culture and Religion at the Humboldt-Universität Berlin and Associate Director of the Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung. He has been Visiting Professor in Stanford, Giessen, Basel, Chicago, Zürich, and Yale. His main areas of research are the interrelation of religion and literature, theories of secularization, the history of philology and literary theory, and German-Jewish Literature. Among his publications are *Gershom Scholem: Politisches, esoterisches und historiographisches Schreiben*, (2003), *Profanes Leben. Walter Benjamins Dialektik der Säkularisierung* (ed., 2010), *Bibel und Literatur um 1800* (2011), *Sakramentale Repräsentation. Substanz, Zeichen und Präsenz in der Frühen Neuzeit* (with Stefanie Ertz und Heike Schlie, 2012). *Blumenberg lesen. Ein Glossar* (ed. With Robert Buch, 2014), *Handbuch Literatur und Religion* (ed. Metzler 2016) Recent English publications include: *The Rhetoric of Secularization. New German Critique* 120 (2014); *The Political Theology of Ethical Monotheism*, in: M. Kavka, R. Raskover (Hg.): *Judaism, Liberalism, and Political Theology*, Indiana UP 2014.

José Miranda Justo

CFUL, Universidade de Lisboa

Displacements: complex metaphors, artworks and translation

The aim of this paper is to establish in general terms an analogy between the artwork and translation. First, the paper tries to develop a conception of the artwork from the point of view of a philosophy of art that envisages the work of art as a transcendent living being interconnected with humans. Both the artwork and the human beings exist in a process of becoming that implies different kinds of displacements.

The second part of the presentation is dedicated to translation observed in the framework of a philosophy of translation that underlines the transcendence of the translational activity and the crucial esthetical difference that is at play in this activity. The displacements that are observable in the field of translation are treated here in their points of contact with those that permeate the modes of existence of the artwork.

José Miranda Justo took his PhD in 1990 at the University of Lisbon with a thesis on Hamann, Herder and Kant in the History of the Philosophy of Language. Before he retired in 2017 he was Associate Professor at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon. He is a member of the Centre for Philosophy at the University of Lisbon where he directed three research projects funded by the national Foundation for Science and Technology. His fields of lecturing, publication, translation and solo conferences include History of the Philosophy of Language, Hermeneutics, German Idealism, Philosophy of History, Philosophy of Art, Aesthetics, Philosophy of Translation, Hamannian Studies, Kierkegaardian Studies and Deleuzian Studies.

Maria Filomena Molder

IFILNOVA, NOVA FCSH

La question de la transposition: phénomène originaire, origine et image dialectique

Mon but est de répondre à la question dont mon titre s'occupe concernant la thèse de Benjamin (*Das Passagen-Werk*, [N 2a, 3]) sur la «transposition» [*Übertragung*] d'un concept goethéen développé dans un régime naturel et païen à un autre régime, historique et judaïque. Dans ce mouvement de transposition, la ville de Paris, sous son emblème moderne primordial, i.e., les Passages architectoniques, est concernée de haut en bas.

Qu'est ce qui se passe avec cette transposition? Quels sont les changements qui subit le concept goethéen d'*Urpänomen* pour pouvoir s'appliquer à la compréhension des Passages parisiennes en tant qu'origine [*Ursprung*], qui dans ce contexte reçoit le nom d'image dialectique? La transposition de quoi il s'agit peut-elle être comprise comme une traduction?

Maria Filomena Molder is Full Professor at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. She took her PHD in 1991 with a thesis on *Goethe's Morphological Thinking* at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa and is an integrated member of the Nova Institute of Philosophy. She has published several books about the relationship between arts, poetry and philosophy. Some among them have won the Pen-Club Prize for Essay (*Semear na Neve. Estudos sobre Walter Benjamin*, 2000; *O Químico e o Alquimista. Benjamin Lector de Baudelaire*, 2012; *Dia Alegre, Dia Pensante, Dias Fatais*, 2018) and the AICA Prize (*Rebuçados Venezianos*, 2017). She has also written for artists catalogues mainly in the Portuguese context, and for Art, Philosophy and Literary International Revues, as *RuDescartes*, *La Part de l'Oeil*, *Lettre International*, *Electra* or *Diaphanes*. She coordinates the FCT-funded research project "Fragmentation and Reconfiguration: Experiencing the City between Art and Philosophy".

Nélio Conceição

IFILNOVA, NOVA FCSH

Translating ambiguities: prostitution, gambling and thresholds in the *Arcades Project*

The materials – quotations and short remarks – that Walter Benjamin gathered together in the *konvolut O* of the *Arcades Project* concern prostitution and gambling. Indeed, the prostitute and the gambler are two important figures of his description of modernity and capitalism (and modernity's ambiguities). In that same context, Benjamin's sharp remarks on the notion of threshold spreads into the entire *konvolut* an atmosphere of the in-between spaces. How do these figures and the very notion of threshold allow one to understand Benjamin's historical materialism? How do they translate the ambiguity of dialectical images? Translation, in this sense, is a process that makes use of a physiognomic and figurative understanding of history. One can think of it as metaphorical, but it is literal at its very core, while also doing justice to the "methodological" motto: "To read what was never written".

Nélio Conceição obtained his PhD in Philosophy (Aesthetics) from the FCSH - Universidade Nova de Lisboa (2013). His thesis focuses on the relation between philosophy and photography, paying special attention to the thought of Walter Benjamin, while exploring phenomenology and the work of Fernando Gil at the same time. Currently working as a research fellow in FCSH, he is an integrated member of the IFILNOVA – Nova Institute of Philosophy (CultureLab). He is developing a project on aesthetics, focusing on the concepts of play, room for play and experimentation, as well as on the philosophical and artistic ramifications of Walter Benjamin's work. He co-coordinates the FCT-funded research project "Fragmentation and reconfiguration: experiencing the city between art and philosophy".

Sherry Simon

French Department, University of Concordia

Arcades, Bridges, Hotels, Monuments and other Translation Sites

Walter Benjamin's arcade will be the starting point for this presentation on translation sites—structures of the urban landscape that draw attention to and tell stories about translation. Walter Benjamin saw the arc of the nineteenth-century shopping arcade as a form of a literal translation. The glass roof allows light to flow through matter, just as the literally translated text is a transparent surface that allows the light of the original to fall onto the new version creating an interplay of surfaces. Both translator and historian rely on the unexpected encounter of objects and words, the confrontation of languages and temporalities, to jar the viewer into a renewed understanding of the present. The work of translation, like the work of history, provides forms through which the past and the present 'flash' into uneasy constellation. Beginning with Benjamin's arcade, I will explore other translation sites in the city—bridges, hotels, monuments—that similarly foreground dissonance, communicating the affective charge of linguistic and political conflict and unsettling narratives of identity. This tour of translation sites will explore such cities as Lviv, Vienna and Toledo.

Sherry Simon is Professor in the French Department at Concordia University. She has published widely in the areas of literary, intercultural and translation studies, in particular exploring the cultural history of linguistically divided cities and the multilingual cities of the former Habsburg empire. Among her publications are *Translating Montreal. Episodes in the Life of a Divided City* (2006) and *Cities in Translation: Intersections of Language and Memory* (2012), both of which have appeared in French translation, and the recent *Translation Sites: A Field Guide* (Routledge 2019). She has edited or co-edited numerous volumes, including *Translation Effects: The Shaping of Modern Canadian Culture* (with K. Mezei and L. von Flotow), (2014) and *Speaking Memory. How Translation Shapes City Life* (2016). She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a recipient of a Killam Fellowship, and a member of the Académie des lettres du Québec.

