

This volume of articles originated as a result of an initiative during 2010 and 2011 among researchers in the cultural disciplines in the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State to form an interdisciplinary research group which discussed readings of mutual interest. The broad topic of these seminars was the *Translatability of Cultures*. As teachers of culture at a tertiary institution in South Africa we are constantly confronted with questions about the modes in which cultural translations continuously take place between “Africa” and “the West”, sometimes unnoticed and sometimes in a premeditated way. A number of research articles grew in this context and related articles were solicited from colleagues in Africa, Europe and America to form this collection.

The articles interrogate either cultural products which disclose the enigma of cultural distance, approximation and blending between African and other cultures, or historical and methodological processes associated with cultural translation and change. Paradoxically it is their sameness which makes diverse cultures commensurable and translatable. On the other hand it is their difference which suggests incommensurability, intranslatability and friction. The strangeness of other cultures may inspire curiosity (a form of estrangement) e.g. in the distant tourist; or sympathy and friendship (a transportation of minds as described in the German tradition of *Verstehen*) e.g. in ethnologists, historians, translators, linguists, writers, artists and musicians. Cultural processes usually take place in the awareness, co-presence or neighbourhood of other cultures. The experience of mutual translations among cultures may entail realisations varying from loss, trauma, invasion, conflict, alienation, clarification, transfiguration, self-transformation, conversion, integration, liberation, revivification, re-assurance, symbiosis and melting or holy mating. Cultural objects and products more often than not are themselves traces of, and incorporate marks and sutures of cultural crossroads, separations and intersections.

The eight articles in the volume are from the fields of music, visual art, dance, and translation studies and exploit varied research methods from philosophical inquiry to field research and archival studies. They investigate the phenomena of acculturation and adaptation (Gregory Barz, Grant Ntuli and Hilde Roos), Africa as inspiration (Julien Vermeulen, Hans Huyssen, and Martina Viljoen), as well as disciplinary questions entailing the enrichment of a field through cultural translation (Kobus Marais and Suzanne De Villiers-Human).

I would like to thank prof. Lucius Botes, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, for his immediate support when I proposed the idea of the research group to him, and his astute suggestion to co-opt the enthusiasm of Willem Ellis, a trained facilitator, who helped me to convene the group.

Suzanne Human (Guest editor)
Department of History of Art and Visual Culture Studies
University of the Free State, Bloemfontein
humane@ufs.ac.za