

**Facing asymmetry**  
**Nordic perspectives on transnational intellectual history**

In the 1880s, the promising young philosopher Hjalmar Neiglick claimed that the only thing worse for Finland than its geographical position was its place on the European cultural map.<sup>1</sup> An admirer of Georg Brandes, the leading figure among Scandinavian cosmopolitan intellectuals at the time, Neiglick belonged to a younger generation of Finnish intellectuals who challenged the national romantic idealism of the previous generation. One-sided cultural nationalism, the radicals argued, stood in the way of progress and transnational modernity. Besides, the small nations of Europe could not allow themselves to be self-absorbed. Instead, Neiglick and his collaborators wanted to reverse the perspective, emphasizing the need to import international modernity in order to “catch up”.

Cultural asymmetries and center-periphery dynamics played a crucial role in the lives and careers of small country intellectuals in Neiglick’s time and beyond. In a culture that conceived of itself as peripheral there was a strong notion that the “real” discussions were taking place elsewhere, and that any ambitious scholar, writer or intellectual needed to approach the cultural centers in order to develop professionally. However, as a result of economic, social and cultural obstacles, gaining access to the core was bound up with difficulties, and having a major impact on the discussion in the centers was rarely possible. More often, “Europe”, “Paris”, “Vienna” or “London” became arguments by which the cosmopolitan avant-gardes fashioned themselves as local representatives of the modernity of the core. This core was understood both spatially and temporally, both as a geo-cultural place and as an expression of advanced modernity.

This article addresses the role of asymmetry in the interaction between intellectual fields in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from the perspective of the periphery. By focusing on the hierarchies implicit in the way intellectuals such as Neiglick perceived and made use of backwardness, our aim is to bring a peripheral perspective to the discussion on transnational intellectual history and the study of cultural transfers. The search for alternatives beyond “methodological nationalism” – i.e. the tendency to separate historically interwoven cultural and political realities from each other and to treat the nation as a largely self-sufficient and enclosed unity – has come a long way in shifting our attention to previously overlooked mechanisms of cross-fertilization, hybridity and reciprocity in the interaction between two or more national cultural fields.<sup>2</sup> But at the same time there is a

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Neiglick to the writer K. A. Tavaststjerna cited by Gunnar Castrén in *Nya Argus* 16.2.1938.

<sup>2</sup> For overviews and references, see e.g. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Comparative and transnational history: Central European approaches and new perspectives*, New York ; Oxford : Berghahn

danger that the emphasis on entanglement compels us to paint a too harmonious picture of the international cultural space, to reproduce the ideal of a republic of letters, a borderless intellectual community where hierarchies between national cultural fields matter very little or not at all. Clearly, however, nationality, language and cultural capital do matter, perhaps more than we like to think, and pretending that all intellectuals participate on equal terms amounts to a naivety no less obscuring than that of methodological nationalism.<sup>3</sup>

The examples mentioned in the article are drawn from the experiences of intellectuals from the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden), focusing particularly on internationally oriented intellectuals<sup>4</sup> for whom it was imperative to follow intellectual life in the centers of Europe in order to stay in pace with modernity. They were to some extent opposed to national intellectuals, who were concerned primarily with strengthening the integrity and independence of the national culture and for whom modernity often was conceived of as a threat.<sup>5</sup> Temporally, we focus on the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, a period when nationality, internationality and cosmopolitanism were intensively debated all over Europe. The general argument will, however, be familiar to anyone who has been engaged in the intellectual history of a small or peripheral culture, and many of the arguments will surely remain relevant even in the increasingly complex context of globalization.

The article is divided into three parts. The first discusses cultural asymmetry and the limits of reciprocity, as well as the strategies developed by peripheral intellectuals to deal with this asymmetry. The second part calls attention to the double – local or national and international – frames and strategies of small country intellectuals, and particularly to the extent to which international trajectories are locally determined. The implications of multiple frames and positioning strategies are explored in the final section, where we discuss the advantages and disadvantages of backwardness, and the specific role of peripheral intellectuals in the international sphere.

## **Part I: Asymmetrical relations**

### ***Degrees of reciprocity***

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Books, 2009; Matthias Middell and Lluís Roura (eds.), *Transnational challenges to national history writing*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> As suggested by recent studies on the transnational socio-cultural history of intellectuals. See Gisèle Sapiro (dir.), *L'Espace intellectuel en Europe, XIXe-XXIe siècles : de la formation des Etats-nations à la mondialisation* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009) ; Anna Boschetti (dir.), *L'espace culturel transnational* (Paris : Nouveau Monde, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> We are concerned here with “public intellectuals”, i.e. academics, writers and artists engaged in public debates, rather than for example professional experts.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that while international networks may have been just as important for the latter, the former, for reasons that we shall return to, were more inclined to emphasize the importance of transnational forms of culture.

In the nineteenth century and beyond, the intellectual fields in Europe were clearly nationally constrained, in the sense that national institutions, audiences and publication forums were decisive.<sup>6</sup> But it is equally true that transnational references and comparisons constituted an inseparable part of each national space. Moreover, intellectual life revolved around a tension between, on the one hand, the notion that all national cultures and languages are equal, and, on the other hand, the inevitable inequality resulting from disparities of prestige and power. The representatives of young nations struggled for recognition abroad, in a process where cultural import and export played a major role. International acknowledgment of the national culture often being the ultimate aim, this exchange, as well as every other aspect of intellectual life was conceived of as part of the national project.

While many intellectuals gladly accepted the national paradigm, finding it an honor to represent their nation in international arenas such as international congresses or world exhibitions, those who suffered under the strong national imperative mobilized internationality differently. By forming alliances with intellectuals abroad, taking detours via foreign contexts and adopting cosmopolitan positions in local debates, they challenged dominant positions within their native intellectual fields. In the 1880s the Swedish writer August Strindberg did not try to hide the fact that conquering Paris would enable him to have his revenge on the cultural elites in Stockholm.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, having been denied a position at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark's leading intellectual Georg Brandes, the "good European" as he was called by Nietzsche, spent a significant part of his life in Germany and travelling around Europe, because he saw this as the most effective way to influence Danish cultural politics, while remaining part of the *contre-pouvoir*.<sup>8</sup> And Henrik Ibsen, the icon of Scandinavian modernism, spent altogether 27 years abroad, in Italy and Germany, carrying out an aesthetic revolution from a distance.<sup>9</sup> Ibsen, Strindberg and Brandes – and writers such as Kafka, Joyce and Borges beyond the Scandinavian context – are perhaps the most well-known, but there are numerous examples of how the interplay between the local and the transnational can be used as a means to achieve a birds-eye perspective on national questions. Such voluntary exiles also served to underline the detached position sought after by those intellectuals who opposed the predominant ethical-political role<sup>10</sup> of nineteenth-century European intellectuals.

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<sup>6</sup> Sapiro 2009, especially the introduction by Sapiro and the reprinted article by Bourdieu.

<sup>7</sup> For a dissertation on this topic, see Stellan Ahlström, *Strindbergs erövring av Paris. Strindberg och Frankrike 1884-1895* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1956).

<sup>8</sup> See Jørgen Knudsen, *GB: en Georg Brandes-biografi* (København: Gyldendal, 2008); *Georg Brandes e l'Europa*, vol. I-II, *Studi Nordici*, vol. IX-X, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> See Narve Fulsås, "Ibsen Misrepresented: Canonization, Oblivion, and the Need for History", *Ibsen Studies*, vol. 11, 2011, 3-20 & "Ibsen, Europa og det moderne gjennombrøtet i nordisk litteratur", *Historiska och litteraturhistoriska studier*, vol. 86, 2011, 35-60.

<sup>10</sup> For Finland, see Risto Alapuro, "De intellektuella, staten och nationen", *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, vol. 72, 1987, 457-479.

The new approaches that have emerged from the attempts to overcome “methodological nationalism” in the humanities and social sciences have been explicitly developed as alternatives not only to the narrowly national perspective, but also to the comparative methodologies and earlier theories of cultural exchange between nation-states. According to a much quoted article by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann there is a risk that the focus on comparisons or transfers merely reinforces national differences, thus cementing “the principle of the Olympic Games”, according to which everyone and everything must represent one, and only one, nation.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, one of the main insights of transnational history and the study of cultural transfers is the emphasis put on active selection and appropriation at the receiving end. The focus should be put on examining the strategies of individual actors who are connected to each other in a complex web of relations cutting across national borders, and who make use of foreign ideas with their own particular concerns in mind. In this sense the discussion points in a similar direction to the contextual methodologies of Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock, for whom intellectual history should be studied by focusing on the moves made by agents in a particular historical context, as well as the *Begriffsgeschichte*-tradition where recently cross-cultural interaction and translation have become increasingly topical.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, the long-standing image of an egalitarian and borderless intellectual republic tends to overshadow any consideration of particular and often highly local concerns. Pierre Bourdieu is certainly correct in pointing out that intellectual life is too often assumed to be somehow spontaneously international.<sup>13</sup> The history of intellectual exchanges across and beyond Europe is not the least a history of misunderstandings and re-appropriations between very different sending and receiving contexts, taking place within a configuration of unevenly distributed symbolic capital. In this perspective, a study of the social and cultural conditions of transnationality, from the viewpoint of the periphery, calls attention to the need to consider not only entanglement, but also its limits. As long as we are concerned with the interaction between major European cultures, such as France, Germany and England, it may well make sense to emphasize reciprocity, mutuality and cross-fertilization.<sup>14</sup> But as the asymmetry between the interacting parties increases, the degree of reciprocity decreases. This point may be rather obvious but it needs to be emphasized in the

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Werner & Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity”, *History & Theory* 45, February 2006, 33-35. See also Paul Forman, “Scientific internationalism and the Weimar Physicists”, *Isis*, vol. 2, 1973. We borrow the Olympic Games simile from Henrik Stenius.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Martin Burke & Melvin Richter, *Why Concepts Matter – Translating Social and Political Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Jörn Leonard, “From European liberalism to the languages of liberalisms – the semantics of liberalism in European comparison”, *Redescriptions*, vol. 8, 17-51; Jani Marjanen, “Undermining methodological nationalism – *Histoire croisée* of concepts as transnational history”, in Albert, Bluhm, Helmig, Leutzsch & Walter (eds) *Transnational political spaces: Agents – Structures – Encounters* (Frankfurt: Campus 2009); Margrit Pernau, “Whither Conceptual History – From National To Entangled Histories”, in *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, vol. 7, 2012, 1-11; Henrik Stenius, “The Finnish citizen – how a translation emasculated the concept”, *Redescriptions*, vol. 8, 2004, 172-188.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Pierre Bourdieu, “Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 145, 2002, 3-8.

<sup>14</sup> Considering the competitive struggle for cultural dominance, and the occasionally antagonistic political relations between these countries, this emphasis is understandable.

light of the recent focus on hybridity in cultural history.<sup>15</sup> In the majority of cultural transfers the degree of reciprocity may in fact be very small.<sup>16</sup> Being locally determined, such transfers are essentially asymmetrical, and the receptiveness or rejection of foreign imports is conditioned by specific local concerns.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, asymmetry does not exclude reciprocity. As shown by numerous studies problematizing the notion of influence, intellectual export is not a matter of one-way transmission.<sup>18</sup> This is certainly also the case when it comes to relations that are more asymmetrical. To put it very simply: A Nordic scholar visiting a German professor does not simply take with him German ideas to Scandinavia, but can also leave a mark on the German milieu. Neiglick is said to have introduced Émile Durkheim to the works of Karl Marx, while they were both working in the laboratory of Wilhelm Wundt in Leipzig in the mid-1880s, and Georg Brandes is known as the man who introduced, not only Scandinavians but also Germans to Nietzsche.<sup>19</sup>

### *Centers and peripheries*

The notions “center” and “periphery” tend to provoke strong emotions of sympathy or antipathy. More often than not, these reactions spring from a conviction that there is no problem involved: center-periphery is either considered an unproblematic analytic model, or an expression of an old fashioned ideology. Curiously, while small country intellectuals are often painfully self-conscious of their position as peripheral actors, the intellectuals of the cores are reluctant to use the term “periphery” as they tend to look upon it as a pejorative label. Much would be won if the center-periphery dichotomy could be used less evaluatively.<sup>20</sup>

Center-periphery models are certainly problematic when they imply that the centers are active and the peripheries passive. Anyone who has been involved in the study of the international circulation of ideas will surely refute the notion of an innovative center spreading modernity to the passively imitating peripheries as a gross misconception. But

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<sup>15</sup> Summarized in Peter Burke, *Cultural hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Itamar Even-Zohar, *Papers in Culture Research* (Tel Aviv: Unit of Culture Research, Tel Aviv University, 2010 (2005)), 58.

<sup>17</sup> Blaise Wilfert, »Cosmopolis et l’homme invisible. Les importateurs de littérature étrangère en France, 1885-1914 », *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 144, 2002, 33-46

<sup>18</sup> In the context of transfers among the major cultural fields in Europe, Michel Espagne has demonstrated that intellectual life in France and Germany is intertwined to such a degree that either one cannot be understood without taking into consideration the implicit and explicit references to the other. See Michel Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: PUF, 1999) & *En deçà du Rhin. L’Allemagne des philosophes français au XIXème siècle* (Paris: Cerf 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim. His Life and Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985 (1973)), 246. Brandes competed in introducing Nietzsche in Germany with the Swedish writer Ola Hansson, see Jørgen Knudsen, *Georg Brandes: Symbolet og manden 1883-1895* (København: Gyldendal, 1994); Adrian del Caro, ”Reception and Impact. The First Decade of Nietzsche in Germany”, *Orbis Litterarum*, Vol. 37, March 1982, 32-46.

<sup>20</sup> On this topic, see Elías José Palti, “The Problem of ‘Misplaced Ideas’ Revisited. Beyond the ‘History of Ideas’ in Latin America”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 67, 2006, 149-79.

while recognizing that innovation takes place in centers as well as peripheries, it may well be useful to recall other aspects of the center-periphery dichotomy in order to reflect upon the consequences of cultural hierarchies. Doing so, “periphery” should be understood as a dynamic rather than as a static term, as a gradual and constantly changing predicament in relation to equally fluctuating and numerous centers that vary over time and space.

Studies in this direction have recently been attempted by, for example, dependency theory inspired accounts of “world literature” by Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova, as well as by postcolonial studies. Moretti has called attention to world literature in relation to the grossly uneven capitalist world system, a fundamentally unequal cultural space divided into centers, peripheries, and semi-peripheries, where the international circulation of ideas and literatures is anything but reciprocal.<sup>21</sup> Subaltern and postcolonial studies have emphasized the structural inequality between Western and non-Western societies, and put simple diffusion-models of cultural transfer into question by stressing the relevance of the periphery for the core, and by drawing attention to the problems involved in using western concepts and theory in describing subaltern realities.<sup>22</sup>

Exploring asymmetrical cultural exchange within Europe, it is not difficult to identify similar kinds of asymmetrical center-periphery relations, even if the power relations are less explicit than in the colonial situation. The challenge that peripheral actors were faced with was not so much the center’s dominance, but rather the center’s disinterest or ignorance of the intellectual life of the periphery. Another difference in relation to the postcolonial perspective is that the intra-European peripheries did not necessarily stand in a hierarchical relation to one, and only one, hegemonic center, but to different centers, whose local representatives competed for influence. The intellectual field in late-nineteenth century Finland was, for example, divided into factions oriented towards rivaling “centers”, in simplified terms between predominantly German-oriented, mainstream, national intellectuals and a liberal-cosmopolitan, Swedish-language faction oriented towards Paris.

Even if there clearly is a correlation between cultural, political and economic asymmetry, it is important to recognize, with Gramsci and Bourdieu among others, the relative autonomy of the cultural field. Pascale Casanova refers to Fernand Braudel’s discussion on cultural versus economic centers in the early modern period, with Venice and Amsterdam being at the center of commercial life, when Florence, Rome and Madrid were the leading cities in the sphere of culture.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, each specific field of culture, be it science, literature, art, or whatever subfield of these categories, has its own center-periphery relations. Competing

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<sup>21</sup> Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature” & “More Conjectures” in *New Left Review* vol. 1 (January-February 2000) & vol. 20 (March-April 2003); Pascale Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil 2008 (1999)) & Pascale Casanova (dir.), *Des littératures combatives. L’internationale des nationalismes littéraires* (Paris : Raisons d’agir, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) ; Sugata Bose & Kris Manjappa (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones. South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Casanova 2008 (1999), 29.

philosophical schools may have their specific centers, such as Cambridge for the linguistically oriented analytical philosophers, and Frankfurt for the critical theorists. Center-periphery should therefore be treated as a gradual and multilevel distinction, rather than as a rigid on-off dichotomy.

Indubitably, a center often stands in a peripheral relation to another center, and as a cultural region the Nordic countries, or 'Norden', has had its own internal center-periphery dynamics. In this context, Copenhagen served as a regional center, where European ideas were filtered and disseminated further to the more peripheral parts of the Nordic countries. In 1936 logical positivism was introduced to a larger Nordic academic public through the Second International Congress for the Unity of Science which was arranged in Copenhagen. This congress served as a meeting point between the main international figures of the logical positivist movement and philosophers from all over the Nordic countries.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, it was not a coincidence that the internationally renowned mediators of nineteenth-century Nordic philosophy and literature – Harald Høffding and Georg Brandes – were both from Copenhagen. The city attracted intellectuals from the other Nordic countries, for whom the intellectuals, cultural institutions and networks of Copenhagen functioned as a stepping-stone on the way to the “real” centers of Europe. In a letter from the 1880s Minna Canth, the Finnish translator of the first volume of Brandes's *Main currents in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature* humorously implied that while the translation was a way for her to advance her career, she did have future plans to move beyond Copenhagen: “When I reach higher, to Taine, Renan and Spencer, then I can say goodbye to Brandes.”<sup>25</sup>

It is one of the main characteristics of center-periphery dichotomies that spatial, mental and temporal dimensions tend to become entangled. Spatial terms such as “Europe”, “France”, “Vienna” or “London” become linked to temporal ones such as “world-leading”, “modern” or “progressive”, thus exemplifying what Reinhart Koselleck has conceptualized in terms of “the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous”.<sup>26</sup> This feature is particularly strong in small cultures where intellectuals are predisposed to think that modernity exists elsewhere. The rhetoric of “following”, “catching-up” and “modernizing” can typically be found flourishing among the various avant-gardes of the peripheries, for whom fashioning oneself as a representative of a more advanced modernity in the cultural capitals of Europe was a common strategy. Hjalmar Neiglick, travelling in the 1880s between Helsinki, the Brandesian radicals in Copenhagen, Wilhelm Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig, and the positivists in Paris, conceived of this movement as travel in time as well as space, with French modernity for him being the given standard towards which his native Finland was

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<sup>24</sup> See Jan Faye, “Niels Bohr and the Vienna Circle” and Johan Strang, “*Theoria* and logical empiricism – on the tensions between the national and the international in philosophy”, in Manninen & Stadler (eds.) *The Vienna Circle and the Nordic Countries – Networks and transformations of logical empiricism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Annamari Sarajas, *Viimeiset romantikot. Kirjallisuuden aatteiden vaihtelua 1880-luvun jälkeen* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1962), 8.

<sup>26</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past – on the semantics of historical time* (Columbia University Press 2004), 237-239. The same idea is also present in Marxist philosophy, for example in the writings of Ernst Bloch.

moving. Within this configuration Neiglick envisioned his own role as an accelerator of progress – according to a certain model of development that would enable the Finnish periphery to catch up with the center, or at least, to stay ahead of other competing peripheries.<sup>27</sup>

More often than not, the temporal center-periphery rhetoric is aimed at local rivals who are outmaneuvered as old-fashioned and outdated. Some 30 years after Neiglick, the Finnish logical positivist philosopher Eino Kaila effectively used his international networks to further his own position in Helsinki. According to him, it was only through his connections to the Vienna Circle that Finnish philosophy could stay on a par with the latest achievements in European science.<sup>28</sup> This conflation of temporal progress with spatial centrality was even more apparent when Kaila was asked to referee professorship appointments in the neighboring countries. Both in Sweden and in Norway, Kaila prioritized philosophers interested in logical positivism as “ultra-modern” and “more advanced” than their “backward” and “old-fashioned” rivals.<sup>29</sup>

## Part II: Modernity is elsewhere

### *The primacy of the local*

There is no escaping the fact that intellectual debates in self-conscious peripheries frequently mirror debates in the core. They are often conducted by ambassadors of different “European” intellectual movements, with similar arguments and ideas, either with or without explicit references to the leading intellectuals in France, Germany or the Anglo-American world. In this way, the debate on philosophy and science between Durkheim and Bergson in France during the 1910s and 20s was in Finland mirrored by a debate between the philosophers Rolf Lagerborg and Hans Ruin – seen through the prism of the German-oriented intellectual environment in Finland at the time.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, self-consciously peripheral environments can also be venues for debates between competing interpretations of the same intellectual movement. In such debates those who are the first to introduce a new movement have a competitive advantage, which enables them to colonize the movement for themselves. A contender can then challenge an established

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<sup>27</sup> Stefan Nygård, “Kulturradikal internationalism som nationell strategi”, *Historiska och litteraturhistoriska studier*, vol. 86, 2011, 61-90.

<sup>28</sup> Eino Kaila, “Vastine J E Salomaalle ” (1939) in *Valitut teokset I* (Helsinki: Otava, 1990), 527-545; Eino Kaila, “Suomalainen tiede voi tasavertaisena kilpailla maailman korkeimpien saavutusten kanssa”, *Uusi Suomi* 20/6 1934. See Strang, “Den perifera eklekticismens gränser och potential – den logiska empirismen i Norden 1930-1970”, *Historiska och litteraturhistoriska studier* vol. 86, 2011, 137-158.

<sup>29</sup> See Strang, *History, Transfer, Politics. Five studies on the legacy of Uppsala philosophy* (diss. University of Helsinki 2010, available at <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-10-5160-8>), 61-62.

<sup>30</sup> Stefan Nygård, *Henri Bergson i Finland. Reception, rekontextualisering och politisering* (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2011).



“ambassador” by claiming to have a “more correct” interpretation, perhaps by referring to a more recent encounter with the intellectual authority in question.

Against such a background, the intellectual history of the peripheries has often been conceived of as a history of *reception*. The leading intellectual movements or philosophers in the European core have served as the given model, emulated by local actors whose own intentions have tended to be overlooked. However, the recent emphasis on re-appropriation and cultural transfers in intellectual history has shifted our attention beyond a static conception of dominant centers and receiving peripheries. In drawing attention to the transfer agents and their intentions, deviations are now more often described in terms of re-descriptions of foreign ideas in a new environment.<sup>31</sup> Such appropriations take place within the framework of an international circulation of ideas and cultural products in a network of interrelated local contexts, where the dynamics of each intellectual field at a specific point in time determine the receptiveness or non-receptiveness to particular ideas. At the receiving end, the original context and the debates from which ideas emerge, are left behind, making way for “misunderstandings” and variations in the interpretation of ideas in different contexts.<sup>32</sup>

It should be emphasized that there is always some element of “interest” involved on the part of the cultural importer, who may be looking for support for his or her position at home by seeking recognition abroad, or by forming an alliance with foreign intellectuals. The main features of this process are clear: being associated with the cultural capitals of Europe or the specific centers of the different subfields of cultural and scientific life, or simply mobilizing internationally circulating ideas, constituted important aspects of local positioning strategies. At times, the culture researcher Itamar Even-Zohar writes, “the desire for change may promote a favorable attitude towards occurrences in another society, with the help of which, if transferred, one can hope to get away from an undesired situation”.<sup>33</sup>

Taking a detour abroad thus provides a means to introduce change at home. As the notion of catching-up entails the idea of a more advanced center as the source of diffusion of social and cultural innovations, individuals and groups have aspired to become associated with the center in different ways. Internationally oriented peripheral avant-gardes, positioning themselves as the representatives of European modernity in the periphery, were in fact prone to accentuate the marginal position of their native countries, and to contrast national heteronomy with international autonomy. In the first volume of his widely read and translated *Main currents in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature* (Danish orig. 1872) Brandes describes the uneven spread of modernity in a well-known train metaphor: Denmark was roughly 40 years behind a more advanced European modernity, yet caught in the same illusion of

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<sup>31</sup> On the notion of “rhetorical re-descriptions” see Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 128-180.

<sup>32</sup> Bourdieu, “Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées”.

<sup>33</sup> Even-Zohar, *Papers in Culture Research*, 60.

movement experienced by passengers in a standing train being overtaken by a fast moving train (of progressive modernity).<sup>34</sup>

Looking for support beyond the national context has been important for the intellectual avant-gardes of different periods, for which being modern has meant being international and even vice versa. To the extent that national recognition was associated with artistic conservatism, the avant-gardes were inclined to present themselves as misunderstood at home and recognized abroad.<sup>35</sup> However, even the most cosmopolitan and internationally successful among Scandinavian late-nineteenth century writers did not break completely with their native intellectual fields. Instead, they remained oriented towards Scandinavian audiences and local problems, illustrating the local dimension of their cosmopolitanism.<sup>36</sup> Throughout his years spent in voluntary exile in Italy and Germany, Ibsen remained an essentially Norwegian writer taking part in a Scandinavian “modern breakthrough”. Strindberg was, as mentioned, taking part in a Swedish debate from Paris. And the Finnish philosopher Rolf Lagerborg, whose dissertation was rejected on moral-political grounds at the University of Helsinki in 1900, was compensated for his troubles at home when he received the highest grade for a French version of the same dissertation at the Sorbonne three years later.<sup>37</sup>

Acknowledging backwardness, being cosmopolitan at home, and seeking recognition abroad, are examples of the way asymmetry has been instrumentalized by contenders in peripheral cultural fields. To the extent that modernity has been perceived to be “elsewhere”, breaking with national narrow-mindedness has been seen as a necessity among liberal progressives, cultural avant-gardes and radical intellectuals, the latter stressing their position as “autonomous” intellectuals by taking part in national debates from a distance. Pilgrimages to European cultural capitals, voluntary exile abroad and positioning oneself as a member of a transnational intellectual republic served the purpose of associating oneself with a more advanced modernity and acquiring a birds-eye perspective on national questions. More often than not, however, all of this was taking place within an essentially national or at least Nordic intellectual space. This space was, after all, primary also for the communities of Nordic writers, artists, and scientists in, for example, turn of the twentieth-century Berlin and Paris.<sup>38</sup>

### *Acting in two fields simultaneously (the local and the international)*

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<sup>34</sup> Georg Brandes, *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature*, vol. I (London: W. Heinemann, 1901), Introduction.

<sup>35</sup> This is true also for the avant-gardes of the center, see Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Nul n'est prophète en son pays? L'internationalisation de la peinture des avant-gardes parisiennes, 1855–1914* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay/Éd. Nicolas Chaudun 2009).

<sup>36</sup> The point has been emphasized by Narve Fulsås, see “Ibsen, Europa og det moderne gjennombrøtet”.

<sup>37</sup> One of the jury members was Émile Durkheim. See Marja Jalava, *Minä ja maailmanhenki. Moderni subjekti kristillis-idealistisessa kansallisajattelussa ja Rolf Lagerborgin kulttuuriradikalismissa n. 1880-1914* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> For the latter, see Sylvain Briens, *Paris. Laboratoire de la littérature scandinave moderne 1880-1905* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010).

There were substantial profits to be gained from recognition in the cultural capitals, but peripheral actors struggled to gain access to these centers. Language was the most obvious among the considerable difficulties that faced writers and intellectuals from minor language regions. Other obstacles were related to the difficulty of translating a position acquired in one intellectual field to another, the fluctuating values and expectations of national cultures, or the hierarchical relations between these cultures.

Peripheral intellectuals had to be creative in dealing with these obstacles. They could become devoted disciples of some internationally renowned intellectual or school of thought, or they could position themselves as sober and skeptical outsiders; they could try to become naturalized themselves and learn how to behave as natives, aiming to participate in the core discussions on equal terms, or they could surrender to the prejudices of the centers, and take on the role of curious foreign specimens, caricature representatives of their homeland.

Access to the core included adjusting to the agendas of the cultural mediators, or the demand for exoticism in the centers. Christophe Charle has thus situated the success of the Russian novel in Paris in the 1880s at the intersection of stereotypical representations of Russia in France, and the ideological use of Russian literature against the dominant naturalism of Zola.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, access to the core required adapting to commercial interests: for Ibsen this meant being forced to re-write an alternative “happy ending” for *The Doll’s House* (1879) for the first productions of *Nora oder Ein Puppenheim* in Germany.<sup>40</sup>

The reward for writers and intellectuals from small countries, in the form of symbolic capital associated with a center, is related to a formula proposed by the cultural anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, writing on the local dimensions of cosmopolitan trajectories: surrender abroad is mastery at home.<sup>41</sup> The example of Strindberg in Paris is illuminating. After having caused various scandals back home Strindberg began a period of exile in the 1880s, during which he was determined to become recognized in Paris. He did this by trying to give a French aspect to his work, by making significant adjustments to his texts in appropriating them for a French audience, including material considerations such as choosing the arrangement of type, the layout and the paper used according to what he considered to be typically French.<sup>42</sup> It was probably important for him to succeed as a “French writer”, both in order to penetrate the increasingly xenophobic cultural scene in Paris at the time,<sup>43</sup> and in order to gain valuable symbolic capital that he could mobilize in the Swedish context. Similarly, Brandes, during his stays in Berlin, made sure none of the publicity he received in Germany

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<sup>39</sup> Christophe Charle, *Paris fin de siècle, culture et politique* (Paris: Seuil 1998), 177-199.

<sup>40</sup> Vigdis Ystad, ”Innledning til Et dukkehjem”, *Henrik Ibsens Skrifter*, [www.ibsen.uio.no](http://www.ibsen.uio.no).

<sup>41</sup> Ulf Hannerz, “Cosmopolitans and Locals in World culture”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 7, 1990.

<sup>42</sup> The latter concerns Strindberg’s self-translation of *Fadren / Le Père*. See Giuliano D’Amico, ”The Father in Strindberg’s French self-translation”, *Edda*, vol. 97, 2010; Ahlström 1956.

<sup>43</sup> See e.g. Wilfert 2002.

went unnoticed in the Danish press, where his journalist cum politician brother Edvard Brandes acted as his local agent.<sup>44</sup>

From their self-consciously peripheral viewpoint, cosmopolitan Nordic intellectuals both struggled with, and made use of, the limits and possibilities of international intellectual life at the turn of the twentieth century. In the same way as intellectuals in other periods, they saw themselves as a genuinely transnational category, and drew on the symbolic value associated with a transnational republic of letters in the local debates in their respective Nordic peripheries. In international arenas they were, instead, confronted with a tendency to identify each participant, cosmopolitan or not, as a representative of his or her nation. Hjalmar Neiglick, who at home in Helsinki repeatedly emphasized the poor state of intellectual life in his native country, gladly acted as a cultural ambassador abroad when representing Finland at an international student meeting in Paris in the late 1880s.<sup>45</sup> Individual actors thus moved between different, even contrary, roles nationally and internationally. There simply was no space beyond nationality, as was evident already in Goethe's famous vision of a "world literature", understood as a conversation between nations.<sup>46</sup> A literature written directly for the world, Brandes in turn claimed in an essay on world literature (1899), has little artistic value; good literature must be locally anchored. In this essay Brandes also highlights the importance of language and the dominant position of powerful languages and cultural regions, which, according to him, meant that mediocre writers from these linguistic spheres have a much higher chance of international success than first-rate writers from second-rate linguistic regions.<sup>47</sup>

The intellectuals of small country peripheries thus operated within double frames. Searching for a balance between their commitments in the national field, and their allegiance to a cosmopolitan community, they were under no illusion that the relationship between larger and smaller, or more and less, central units in this community was symmetrical. But they could mobilize recognition abroad, as well as the interplay between mutually constitutive national and international spaces, in local debates and meritocratic struggles.

### **PART III: The provincialism of the province and the provincialism of the core**

#### ***The (dis-)advantages of backwardness***

It is sometimes assumed that scientific or intellectual specialization and progress is only possible in an environment where the critical mass, i.e. the number of intellectuals working

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<sup>44</sup> Knudsen, *GB: en Georg Brandes-biografi*.

<sup>45</sup> Werner Söderhjelm, *Karl August Tavaststjerna. En levnadsteckning. Senare delen* (Helsingfors: Schildts, 1924), 161; Mustelin 1966, 235-239.

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Prendergast, "The World Republic of Letters", *Debating World Literature* (London: Verso, 2004), 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> Reprinted in Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature. International Canonization and Transnational Literatures* (London & New York : Continuum 2008).

in a particular field, is large enough. "It is only here," Rolf Lagerborg writes from Paris in 1895, "that I in my own discipline can find a trench to plough that is mine and only mine." According to him, the predicament, as a small country, of his native Finland was that every field of culture was subjected to the national imperative, which dominated scientific discussions to excess.<sup>48</sup>

Cultural nationalism included an element of catching-up in terms of accumulating symbolic capital from abroad. In small nations this process resulted, as noted in the early years of the twentieth century by the writer Eino Leino in Helsinki as well as by Franz Kafka in Prague, a rather bland form of eclecticism. While making room "for the Gods of all people and all times" (Leino) was a way to compensate for the lack of strong national models, these minor literatures (Kafka) risked being too heavily influenced by the fashionable writers of the moment, introducing the works of foreign literatures or imitating the foreign literature that has already been introduced.<sup>49</sup> For similar reasons Gramsci later lamented the fact that there was no audience for the avant-garde in Italy, where literature was too dependent on other literatures: only through the mediation of Paris and Joyce did the Italian journals discover Italo Svevo.<sup>50</sup> Yet another reflection on the predicament of peripheral intellectual life is provided by Roberto Schwartz in his work on Brazilian culture, seen from a center-periphery perspective, and dealing with the relationship between imitation and innovation. Writing about the eagerness of Brazilian academic intellectuals to adopt new schools of thought from Europe or America, Schwartz notes that "[t]he thirst for terminological and doctrinal novelty prevails over the labor of extending knowledge and is another illustration of the imitative nature of our cultural life"<sup>51</sup>

But the inclination to look abroad does not mean that the peripheries are un-innovative places. To the contrary, many have called attention to the more positive implications of the dynamic reflexivity of the peripheries. Trotsky, commenting on the unevenness of historical processes, noted the peculiar combination of different historical layers in backward nations, which were paradoxically privileged in having the opportunity of fastforwarding to modernity by skipping intermediate stages. Similarly, in his *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution* (1915), Thorstein Veblen called attention to the relative ease by which latecomers, such as Germany and Japan, approached the frontiers of development, in comparison with the pioneer countries of the industrial revolution.<sup>52</sup> In *Economic*

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<sup>48</sup> Lagerborg 1942, 192.

<sup>49</sup> Eino Leino, *Euterpe*, 8/1904; Stanley Corngold, "Kafka and the dialect of minor literature" in *Debating World Literature*, 282-283; Pascale Casanova, "La Guerre de l'ancienneté", *Des littératures combatives*, 28-29.

<sup>50</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, Q 23 § 45, La "scoperta" di Italo Svevo, [www.gramscisource.org](http://www.gramscisource.org).

<sup>51</sup> Roberto Schwartz, "Brazilian culture: nationalism by elimination", *New Left Review* January-February 1988", 82; Elías José Palit, "The Problem of 'Misplaced Ideas' Revisited. Beyond the 'History of Ideas' in Latin America, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Jan. 2006), p. 164-165.

<sup>52</sup> Either from a technological or socio-cultural point of view: the latecomers could adopt the latest technologies, whereas the pioneers were stuck with obsolete technology (e.g. narrow- vs. broad-gauge rails in England and Germany), and the flexible production of Japan could avoid some of the dehumanizing aspects of Taylorism/Fordism. See Terutomo Ozawa, "Veblen's Theories of 'Latecomer Advantage' and 'The Machine

*backwardness in historical perspective* (1962) the economic historian Alexander Gerschenkron, referring to differences in the speed and character of industrialization between pioneers and latecomers, makes a similar point about the “advantages of backwardness”. By way of analogy the same point can be extended to the intellectual sphere, where it seems that the more consciously peripheral a cultural field is, the easier it is for its members to adapt to changing sets of rules and norms. Adaptability and flexibility is a necessity in a culture that constantly looks abroad, and Nordic intellectuals were certainly quick to learn the languages and rules of France and Germany in the long nineteenth century. Equally smoothly they adapted to the dominance of the Anglo-American cultural sphere in the period between 1930 and 1950.

Historical reflexivity and the “advantages of backwardness” can thus be understood as the practice of, and willingness to, learn from the mistakes of regions that are conceived of as being more advanced, and in this way anticipate social and intellectual developments.<sup>53</sup> Whereas Finnish nineteenth century legislators could propose measures for dealing with, for example, unwanted effects of industrialization before these were real problems in Finland, in the politico-intellectual context the analogous move could be to disarm and neutralize unwanted or potentially dangerous concepts and movements before they are introduced to the periphery. In the context of early-twentieth century philosophical debate, when Eino Kaila introduced logical empiricism to the conservative academic and intellectual elite in Finland in the 1930s, he stripped it of its radical leftist political message.<sup>54</sup>

### *Double consciousness and the innovative potential of eclecticism*

In countries like Finland and Norway, where the national principle and the notion that everything good comes from abroad often exist side by side, it could be seen as a merit to be the pupil of a great European intellectual. In more universal cultures such as the English, or even the Swedish, this kind of dependence has been met with greater suspicion. When logical positivism was introduced to Finland and Norway in the 1930s it was celebrated as a foreign innovation by Eino Kaila and Arne Næss respectively. But when the same philosophy was introduced in England and Sweden it was instead re-described as continuations of, or parallels to, local movements. Whereas A. J. Ayer, on the very first page

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Process”, *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol. 38, 2004, 379-388. For Trotsky’s theory of uneven and combined development, see Chapter I in *The History of the Russian Revolution* (1930).

<sup>53</sup> Pauli Kettunen, *Globalisaatio ja kansallinen me – kansallisen katseen historiallinen kritiikki* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2008). See also Pauli Kettunen, “The power of international comparison – a perspective on the making and challenging of the Nordic Welfare State”, in Finn Christiansen et al, *The Nordic Model of Welfare – a historical reappraisal* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006). For a comparative perspective on triumphalist versions of backwardness in early-twentieth century Brazilian culture, see Roberto Schwartz, “Brazilian culture”.

<sup>54</sup> Malte Gasche and Johan Strang, “Der Krieginssatz des finnischen Philosophen Eino Kaila”, in Bernd Wegner, Oliver von Wrochem, Daniel Schümmer (Hrsg.), *Finnland Und Deutschland – Studien zur Geschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac), 90-91. See also Henrik Stenius, “Nordic associational life in a European and Inter-Nordic perspective”, in Risto Alapuro and Henrik Stenius (eds.), *Nordic Associations in a European perspective* (Baden-Baden: Nomos 2010), 35.

of his epochal *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), described logical positivism as “the logical outcome” of British empiricism,<sup>55</sup> the Swedish philosopher Ingemar Hedenius used a series of rhetorical moves to tie it to the domestic philosophical tradition after Axel Hägerström.<sup>56</sup> Transfers to more universalist cultures often demand a rather elaborate and creative re-description of the transferred ideas.

Another indication of a certain provincial universalism of the core is the reluctance to distinguish between national and international discussions.<sup>57</sup> In the Nordic countries it was possible, until the 1950s or 60s, to publish ambitious philosophical texts in the national languages in Sweden, but not in Finland or Norway. Instead, Finnish and Norwegian philosophers tended to make a clear distinction between their professional philosophical articles and books, which were published in German, French or English, and their more popular writings that were published in Finnish, Swedish or Norwegian. Discussing the establishment of a Nordic philosophical journal with a Swedish colleague, Kaila strongly argued that there was no point whatsoever to a proper scientific journal in languages other than German, English or French.<sup>58</sup>

The peripheral position offers the intellectual a comparative perspective that makes a universalistic view almost impossible. From a postcolonial perspective, Walter Dignolo has drawn attention to the innovative nature of “border thinking”, that is, the knowledge attained from the exterior borders of the modern world system. And Benedict Anderson has, in exploring the comparative nature of nationalism, emphasized the multiple vision and double-consciousness resulting from moving back and forth; the hero in José Rizal’s *Noli me tangere* (1887), having returned to Manila from Europe, sees simultaneously from close up and from afar.<sup>59</sup> For Anderson nationalism depends on such comparisons, and intellectuals in exile are often the ones making them.<sup>60</sup> Such a double vision was at the heart of Georg Brandes’s comparative project on European literatures, stated in the opening pages of the book series begun in 1872: “The comparative view possesses the double advantage of bringing foreign literature so near to us that we can assimilate it, and of removing our own until we are enabled to see it in its true perspective.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936), 31.

<sup>56</sup> Strang, *History, Transfer, Politics*.

<sup>57</sup> See e.g. Veronica Stolte-Heiskanen, *Science policy studies from a small country perspective* (Helsinki: Suomen Akatemia, 1987), 190

<sup>58</sup> Johan Strang, “*Theoria* and logical empiricism – on the tensions between the national and the international in philosophy”, in Juha Manninen & Friedrich Stadler (eds), *The Vienna Circle and the Nordic countries*, 72. Often, however, this division coincided with a division between different types of philosophy. In their mother tongues Kaila, Næss and von Wright were able to write about topics like ethics, politics and philosophy of life, which they arguably did not consider to be “proper” philosophy.

<sup>59</sup> Casanova 2008 (1999); Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons* (London: Verso 1998); Dignolo 2000.

<sup>60</sup> The perspective is also important for postcolonial studies. “Yet when I say ‘exile’ I do not mean something sad or deprived. On the contrary belonging, as it were, to both sides of the imperial divide, enables you to understand them more easily”, writes Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf 1993), xxx.

<sup>61</sup> Georg Brandes, *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature*, vol. I (London: W. Heinemann, 1901), vii.

There is arguably also an innovative potential in the double vision or the eclecticism of the periphery. In her discussion of world literature, Pascale Casanova argues that a “reflexive consciousness” follows from the peripheral position. Those peripheral authors that have gained access to the centers are, according to her, in some ways better prepared to act in the centers, because they have had to learn the rules and hierarchies of these fields from the outside. Similarly, Henrik Stenius has stressed the point that the peripheries can be understood as “translation cultures”.<sup>62</sup> Constantly following foreign discussions and relating them to domestic developments, small country intellectuals are wedged in a continuous process of translation and appropriation. This activity, Stenius argues, makes them less prone to fall into universalistic modes of thinking, believing that concepts, ideas and theories have a universal meaning. Indeed, in a periphery it is arguably easier to recognize the fact that there are different centers and different universalisms. While it is possible to ignore Frankfurt in Cambridge and Cambridge in Frankfurt, both centers, both discourses, are readily present in Helsinki.

The formation of a Finnish political culture, by creatively appropriating key political concepts from other languages, from the mid-nineteenth century when Finnish became an administrative language alongside Swedish and Russian, demonstrates the notion of the peripheries as “translation cultures”, and the peculiar form of interplay between the internal and the external. In these discussions positions were established and defended on the basis that the positions represented merely one among a number of alternatives, and the political culture was formed by weighing different alternatives against each other in the interest of finding a solution that harmonized with the local culture and the specific agendas of the actors involved.<sup>63</sup> Not being forced into a particular language, discourse or school, intellectuals freely borrowed from different strands of international discussions, thus making peripheries a fruitful soil for thinking beyond conventional boundaries.

In the history of the Nordic countries we can easily find examples of such “innovative eclectics”. Brandes and his co-national Harald Høffding, who made careers as popularizers and networkers of late-nineteenth century European philosophy and literature, remind us of the instrumental role played by small country intellectuals – especially those from “semi-peripheral” regions – as mediators in the European cultural space. Bringing together philosophical currents, each ignorant of the other, in the European centers was a deliberate strategy for Brandes. In his memoirs he mentions that he was very surprised to find out that J. S. Mill, who he admired greatly, had not read a line of Hegel, either in the original or in translation, and regarded Hegelian philosophy as sterile and empty sophistry. “I mentally confronted this with the opinion of the man at the Copenhagen University who knew the history of philosophy best, my teacher, Hans Brochner, who knew, so to speak, nothing of contemporary English and French philosophy, and did not think them worth studying. I

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<sup>62</sup> Henrik Stenius, “The Finnish citizen – how a translation emasculated the concept”, 176.

<sup>63</sup> Matti Hyvärinen et al (eds), *Käsitteet liikkeessä. Suomen poliittisen kulttuurin käsitehistoria* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2003).



came to the conclusion that here was a task for one who understood the thinkers of the two directions, who did not mutually understand one another.”<sup>64</sup>

In the same way, during the latter half of the twentieth century, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss and the Finnish philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright made widely recognized attempts to bridge the gulf between the analytic and continental in philosophy, which played a fundamental role in the political geography of western philosophy. Already in the mid-1960s Næss wrote a popular book in which he analyzed and compared Rudolf Carnap and Ludwig Wittgenstein, the main icons of the analytic movement, with Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in 1971, von Wright gained international repute for his combination of philosophical analysis and hermeneutics in his book *Explanation and understanding*.<sup>66</sup> Both von Wright and Næss succeeded in establishing a culture of eclecticism in Helsinki and Oslo, and many of their pupils (Hintikka, Føllesdal) continued breaking the conventional borders between analytic and “continental” philosophy.

Yet, it is probably important to recognize that both Næss and von Wright made these eclectic innovations at a point in time when they had already established themselves internationally, by positioning themselves, from the late 1930s, as rather doctrinarian logical positivists and analytic philosophers. In this respect Casanova undoubtedly has a point when she claims that intellectual innovations from the periphery have to be consecrated in a center before they can be recognized internationally.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion

By exploring the strategies and actions of intellectuals from the Northern periphery of Europe in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the aim of this article has been to make a case for recognizing asymmetries and hierarchies in transnational intellectual history. Our central claim is that the emphasis on hybridity, entanglement and reciprocity, which has dominated the recent discussion on transnational history, should be complemented with an acknowledgment of center-periphery tensions and the asymmetrical nature of transnational cultural interaction. Neiglick, our example at the beginning of this article, was not primarily engaged in a reciprocal exchange of ideas between Finland and the scientific and cultural centers of Europe, and neither were any of the other Nordic intellectuals we have mentioned. Instead, their explicit aim was to transfer innovations between what they perceived to be the core and their native periphery.

Acknowledging asymmetries does not, however, imply the notion that the peripheries are passive. On the contrary, it is only by recognizing the existence of hierarchies that we give

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<sup>64</sup> Georg Brandes, *Reminiscences of my childhood and youth* (New York: Duffield, 1906), 276-77.

<sup>65</sup> Arne Næss, *Moderne filosoffer – Carnap, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Sartre* (København: Vintens forlag, 1965).

<sup>66</sup> Georg Henrik von Wright, *Explanation and understanding* (Routledge: Kegan Paul, 1971).

<sup>67</sup> Casanova 2008 (1999), 47-61.

justice to the peripheral intellectuals, the predicament of their marginal position, and, not least, to their original contribution to the international, European, or global, intellectual discussion. The point has neither been to argue for a rigid center-periphery perspective on intellectual exchange, nor to celebrate the paradoxical advantages of peripheral underdevelopment, but rather to encourage further reflection upon center-periphery dynamics in intellectual life. Staying true to the model has never been the main concern, not even in the peripheries. Instead, cultural interaction is about seeing what works in a specific context and, from the point of view of individual intellectuals, establishing positions by taking shortcuts to modernity and making the notion that the peripheries lag behind the centers in temporal development part of their individual “strategies”.

Acknowledging asymmetries involves paying attention to the instrumental use that peripheral intellectuals make of the center-periphery dichotomy when they seek to advance their own position nationally. But it also involves recognition of the obstacles that intellectuals from the margins had to deal with when approaching the centers. Aside from Ibsen, Brandes, Strindberg, Høffding, Neiglick and more recently Arne Næss and Georg Henrik von Wright, not many achieved international recognition. Those who did, succeeded partly as a result of their function as networkers (Brandes, Høffding), mediators between different intellectual traditions (Næss, von Wright) or, in the case of writers, by finding the right balance between national topics and modern form to appeal to audiences abroad (Ibsen, Strindberg). What unites them is that they succeeded in playing the international card in the national context, and in taking advantage of the peripheral point of view on the international scene, some by accepting the rules of the center, others by acting as bridge-builders between different schools in the center, highlighting the “provincial universalism of the core”. They all exemplify the asymmetries involved in cultural transfers and the ways in which nationality and internationality are entangled.

Small country intellectuals like Neiglick were painfully conscious of the role played by transfer, translation and appropriation in their respective intellectual fields, as well as of the hierarchies involved in these processes. The study of the predicaments of intellectual life at the European peripheries can therefore be of crucial significance to the way we think of entanglement in transnational history. While it is self-evident that all cultures are hybrid, intellectual historians need to look more closely at the ways in which they are hybrid, at variations in the logic that determines how local realities interact with universalizing discourses.