

Introduction

"Borne Across the World":
Else Plötz (Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven),
Felix Paul Greve (Frederick Philip Grove),
and the Politics of Cultural Mediation

The word 'translation' comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.

— SALMAN RUSHDIE, *Imaginary Homelands*

◆ Conceptualising Cultural Mediation

DRAWING OUT the etymological roots of the word, Salman Rushdie describes translation as an act of "bearing across" that marks a doubled space of loss and possibility. Nuances are lost, nuances are gained; layers overlap, meanings accrue. In Rushdie's passage, however, the process of translation includes, but goes beyond, the textual register to encompass also a more subjective, cultural process. Just as texts are translated across linguistic and cultural divisions, acquiring different imaginative dimensions in that process, Rushdie suggests that the diasporic individual who is "borne across the world" is equally translated, representing a contact zone between cultures.¹ In these terms, translation involves a movement between cultures and contexts, a movement simultaneously away from and toward an imaginary homeland. Building on this notion of spatial and cultural

movement, *The Politics of Cultural Mediation* foregrounds the cultural contact zones produced by the migrations of two German-born cultural figures: the Dada poet and artist Else Plötz (1874–1927), better known as Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven or, simply, as the Baroness; and the writer and translator, Felix Paul Greve (1879–1948), also known as the Canadian author Frederick Philip Grove.² Both the Baroness and FPG negotiated languages beyond their mother tongue (German); both figures moved between geographic and cultural worlds; both produced cultural works in their adopted countries (the United States and Canada); and, as their dual names make obvious, both ‘translated’ themselves into new contexts.³ However, the Baroness and FPG were also both positioned within overdetermined fields of influences—in Europe and in North America—that nuanced the contexts within which they produced their works and within which those cultural objects and performances were received. Thus, where Rushdie’s concept of translation makes obvious a kind of movement between cultures, *The Politics of Cultural Mediation* focuses also on the dynamics of cultural production within a given social and institutional context to ask how that “thick” perspective might complicate or be complicated by the contact zones of different cultures.⁴

To foreground this complex site of contact, exchange and overdetermined production, we have organised this volume around a central concept of cultural mediation. By titling the Introduction “Borne Across the World,” we seek to convey the sense both that texts and people move from one place to another and that they are moved or repositioned by forces beyond themselves; moreover, following Salman Rushdie, we mean to suggest that the change in geographical, political and social location involves not just a loss but a gain, the reshaping of meanings and lives. Exploring the dynamics of that movement, the contributors in this collection engage the writings and performances of the Baroness and FPG in three key ways: by translating their texts; by examining the Baroness and FPG as ‘cultural migrants’; and by analysing these two artist-producers as the subjects and objects of mediation in shifting social-institutional contexts. The first approach is manifest in Paul Morris’s translation of a much discussed article, *Randarabesken zu Ostar Wilde*, published by Felix Paul Greve in Germany in 1903.⁵ Greve was not only among the first to make Oscar Wilde’s writing available to German readers but used Wilde to mediate his own entry into the literary field of

production. Publishing this work in translation and in its original German text, we attempt to foreground and to invite discussion about issues of textual and cultural mediation. The second mode of analysis understands the Baroness and FPG as cultural migrants and mediators who travelled across oceans and between cultural worlds. Focussing on this movement between cultures, this approach examines the contact zones manifest in the works and performances of the Baroness and FPG. Lastly, contributors also investigate the different ways in which the Baroness and FPG mediated themselves within and were mediated by different social-institutional contexts. This approach examines how the Baroness and FPG worked to produce and legitimise themselves as artists and how their cultural status (and the works they produced in that context) was mediated by a broader social and institutional apparatus. These modes of analysis frequently overlap in contributors’ papers to enable complex interrogations. What effects, contributors ask, did European influences have on the new North American contexts of the Baroness and FPG? How were those European influences reshaped in the face of new cultural and social fields of production? How did the Baroness and FPG practice cultural mediation in Europe and North America? How, in turn, were they mediated? How did their immigrant status position them in North American debates? And how did they position themselves? Exploring these and other questions, the contributors in *The Politics of Cultural Mediation* interrogate the contact zone of cultures and contribute to a more historicised understanding of the influences and innovations of the Baroness and FPG as artist-producers in shifting social-cultural-institutional fields of production.

To develop the concept of cultural mediation, we reflect on the three modes of cultural mediation outlined—mediation as translation, as migration, and within a social-institutional apparatus—exploring how different authors develop analyses of the Baroness and FPG in each mode. While we have organised the Introduction in this manner to elucidate the theoretical questions that connect the papers, we have grouped the essays themselves to foreground *The Politics of Cultural Mediation*’s important contribution to historicizing FPG and the Baroness in cross-cultural contexts. Exploring collections in Germany, Canada and the United States, contributors bring a vast array of archival documents and historical contexts to their papers, offering readers new ways of thinking about cultural influences on FPG and

the Baroness and about the social contexts within which they moved. To highlight this dimension of the volume and the consequent historical “thickness” it enables, we have grouped papers about the Baroness and FPG into separate parts. Although the relation between these two artists and cultural migrants spanned a decade (1902–1911) and led to their marriage in 1907, they spent most of their creative lives apart and, following their separation in 1911, moved in very different worlds: the Baroness in the avant-garde art circles of Greenwich Village; and FPG in post-war Canadian literary circles. In Part III, the volume presents Paul Morris’s translation—“Oscar Wilde: Marginalia in Arabesque”—of FPG’s important critical study, *Randarabesken zu Oscar Wilde* (1903). This part, including here FPG’s original German text and Morris’s translation of that study, will appeal not only to scholars interested in FPG, but also to scholars interested in translation theories and practices. As editors of this collection, we elaborate a framework within which to think about processes, contexts and effects of cultural mediation. We anticipate, however, that the volume’s juxtaposition of papers will further nuance the overlaps and interplays between modes, hopefully facilitating grounds for future work.

◆ Cultural Mediation: Translation

THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL MEDIATION organises itself around the concept of mediation to facilitate and complicate analyses of cultural contact zones. One manifestation of that concept is represented in Paul Morris’s translation, “Oscar Wilde: Marginalia in Arabesque.” A critical analysis of Wilde’s aesthetics, the article contains important insights into Greve’s artistic development. It marks an early attempt by Greve to articulate his sense of aesthetic value, and it manifests Greve’s self-mediation in the distinguished periodicals and publishing houses of Munich’s literary culture; that is, the 1903 article resonates strongly with Jutta Ernst’s analysis—“‘Il me faut forger une arme de la littérature’: Felix Paul Greve among the Magazines”—of FPG’s efforts to make a name for himself as a translator and critic so as to advance his own status as an artist and influential literary figure in Munich circles. Published during Greve’s German years, the article was a central document in Douglas O. Spettigue’s attempt, in *FPG: The European Years* (1973), to piece together the life of

Greve/Grove and has not lost its fascination for scholars.⁶ Beyond those parameters, the text is an intriguing experiment in voice, evincing E.D. Blodgett’s assertion that “[FPG] could translate himself as well as his authors” (Foreword x); that is, like Greve’s translations of Wilde, *Randarabesken zu Oscar Wilde* marks Greve’s ability to “[insinuate] himself into Wilde so as to imitate the merest gesture, his way of using his eyes, perhaps his turn of phrase. It is evident that Greve had such skills and that his abilities to translate worked in two directions” (Foreword x). Alternately a critical interpretation and a rhapsodic invocation, the article suggests that Wilde was a complex figure for Greve, in personal and in professional registers.

As a critical study of Wilde distributed to a German public, *Randarabesken zu Oscar Wilde* attests to Greve’s own cultural and institutional mediations; as a translation, however, the article makes obvious the mediation of Greve by later academics. In a textual ‘bearing across’, Morris translates Greve’s article into a different language and cultural medium, making it accessible in another register and to another audience. At the same time, *The Politics of Cultural Mediation* also includes the German text of *Randarabesken zu Oscar Wilde* (1903), to represent Greve’s study in its original form. Printed on parallel pages, the two texts invite discussion about the difficulties and possibilities of translation as a site of textual mediation, contact and exchange. Interrogating the grounds on which we engage that site of contact, however, is crucial. Measured against the original, Morris engages in the always impossible task of invoking and approaching a spectral authenticity of meaning at which he can never arrive. The original marks the site of authenticity; the translation can only be a mediated version. Within that framework, however, the translator risks becoming, in Eric Prenowitz’s words, “authoritarian if not authoritative”:

[...] in translation the text itself is presented without being present: it is here and yet there. A translation is irresponsible, unreliable, deceptive. Yet imposing. Authoritarian if not authoritative. It inevitably inflicts an irresistible covenant. Whereas a foreign text in the original leaves the reader free, because the reader is not a reader, the text being foreign and thus legibly illegible for those who have not domesticated the other mother tongue. It does not suppose and impose a *we*, because to begin with it says “*we*” differently, that is, it literally does not say

“we.” Rather, and precisely because translation always remains possible, it inscribes the limits, the singularity or the extra-ordinary common to any *we*. And so a translation does violence at once to the text to which it offers an ambiguous hospitality, both becking and balking, and to the reader: it takes something foreign and makes something familiar, readable at least, and thereby imposes the indubitable community of a homolinguistic, a homonolinguistic *we*. (106)

In the logic of authenticity suggested by Prenowitz, the translation is dislocated from authoritativeness; however, trapped in that structure of desire, the translation becomes “authoritarian” in its transmutation of otherness into the imposed familiarity of a “homonolinguistic *we*.” Articulated against the foreign-ness of the original and repressing the otherness within, translations produce familiarity as a structure of dominance through a type of policing: they write for an imagined “homonolinguistic” community. This act of imagining community marks then the social policing that Prenowitz names “authoritarian.” It is worth noting, however, that translators move between languages and cultures, often occupying the spaces ‘in between’, and that, although they are structured in dominance, communities are not homolinguistic. Translation marks not only a movement from one site to another, but also an overlapping of cultural systems of signification. Raised in Canada but living and working in Germany, for instance, Morris translates from a position between cultures. How, one might ask, does that nuance the “homonolinguistic *we*” for whom he translates the text? Is it an either/or? What kinds of effects might be produced from translating the ‘in between’ space?

In printing the original against the translation, we encourage analyses of mediation on a textual level to suggest that—as a cultural contact zone—translation has multiple effects which register contextually and that the meanings that accrue from the process of ‘bearing across’ attach themselves to the original as well as to the translated text. The desire for authenticity assumes that the translation mimics the original, that the translation registers the effects of cultural movement in its dislocation from authenticity. However, structuring Greve’s original and Morris’s translation in parallel, we imagine that the effects of the cultural contact zone move in both directions. In reprinting the original, we do not, as Prenowitz suggests, think to

“[leave] the reader free.” The very terminology of foreignness already establishes an imagined community’s boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Yet, while marking relationships of linguistic dominance with complex effects and within which different readers are differently situated, translations also bring cultures and communities into contact. Moving away from the discourse of authenticity, we suggest rather that the translation marks an(other) version of the text: a site of lost authenticity but also a site of possibility. Further, while the translation makes obvious a primary dynamic of mediation—that of Morris as the textual translator—the doubled German/English text marks also a broader problematic: a site of seduction wherein one might seek to identify an ‘original’ that is prior to and beyond the mediation at hand. *The Politics of Cultural Mediation* hopes not only to invite responses to the textual mediation of Greve’s text but also to problematize simple notions of authenticity that might construct the original article as an unmediated work. In multiple registers, Greve’s article and Morris’s translation thus ask: what are the politics of translation as a form of mediation? How is Greve being here mediated in English? How did Greve, in turn, mediate Wilde and himself to a German audience? What has been lost and what has been gained through this process? What has been assumed and what has been left out?

◆ Cultural Mediation: Migration

CONTINUING THIS EXPLORATION of cultural contact zones, the articles by Klaus Martens and Paul Morris in this volume investigate the cultural influences the Baroness and FPG carried with them to North America to examine these artist-producers as cultural migrants and mediators. In “Two Glimpses of the Baroness,” Klaus Martens intervenes into constructions of the Baroness as a “kind of unchaste Athena Parthenos” who sprang “somehow fully made into Dada existence” in two ways: first, by revealing new evidence regarding the Baroness’s early theatrical experiences in Cottbus, Germany; second, by positing the German poet and novelist, Else Lasker-Schüler, as a possible mediator of the Baroness’s later New York persona. Martens attempts to historicise the Baroness’s Dada and to situate it in broader social movements of the period. His discovery of her theatrical training in Cottbus offers another perspective on the historical

picture developed by Irene Gammel in her recent biography of the Baroness. His portrayal of Else Lasker-Schüler asserts the importance of the ‘oriental vogue’ in Germany as a performative phenomenon that may have influenced the Baroness’s later persona in New York. Martens’s paper opens the field for future work examining the ways in which von Freytag-Loringhoven’s Dada poems, performances and *objets d’art* might have contributed to or destabilised hegemonic constructions of the orient. Given the market value of cultural orientalism, for instance, what did it mean for Western European women to mobilise this discourse in the service of gendered transgressions and financial advancement? How did this inflect the Baroness’s Dada performances? And how might it have shaped her reception? Arguing for an orientalist reading of the Baroness’s poetry and performances in New York, Martens’s paper bridges the gap between Else’s Dada in North America and her life in Germany to set up several important extensions, premised on the idea of cultural mediation. As noted, it contributes to a more historicised understanding of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven’s radical Dada. It interrogates the myth of the autonomous artist-genius to reconfigure that narrative in a more socially and historically engaged methodology. And it participates in and resonates with Martens’s wider commitment to mapping the movement and re-configuration of cultural paradigms in different locations. In the preface to *Pioneering North America*, Martens argues that:

[...] much of America’s modernist and post-modernist international cultural and literary impact has its origins, after all, in the diversity of European literatures and cultures. We feel, therefore, that the time has come to rediscover and reexamine those influences, to see what has happened to some European cultural “goods” in their transatlantic transfer and, how, in several instances, they have come back home in different guises. (12)

Challenging the idea that the new world marked a site of rebirth for European artists of the period, Martens insists instead on recognizing the Baroness as a cultural migrant and mediator, who approached a new imaginary ‘homeland’—here manifested in Dada—by translating her earlier life into her new environment.

A similar approach to the idea of cultural mediation informs Paul Morris’s “Of Life and Art: FPG and the Writing of Oscar Wilde into *Settlers of the Marsh*.” Morris’s paper builds on Greve’s critical study of Wilde, *Randarabesken zu Oscar Wilde*, to trace the aesthetic influence of Oscar Wilde on Greve as a writer. Wilde was an important touchstone for Greve, if only because in the early stages of his career as a writer in Germany, Greve produced multiple translations of and critical works on Wilde who, in England, was closely associated with the avant-garde Decadent movement and who, after his trial in 1895, was widely condemned as a degenerate. In the face of this wide public condemnation, FPG’s mediation of Wilde as a critic and translator is itself a fascinating moment, which one might understand as a personal moment of sympathy and identification (given Greve’s own prison time and his struggles to be considered an artist); as a strategic self-positioning in a cultural field (given Wilde’s currency in certain avant-garde circles); or as the manifestation of FPG’s aesthetic response to and engagement with Wilde’s theory of artistic production and value. Concentrating here on Wilde as an aesthetic influence Greve embraced and interrogated, Morris argues that, through his translations of and critical work on Wilde, Greve clarified the vision of artistic value that informs his novel, *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), and his autobiographical works, *A Search for America* (1927) and *In Search of Myself* (1946). In particular, Morris elaborates the distinction between “life” and “art” that underwrites Greve’s critique of Wilde to posit a dialectic that structures Greve’s later works and nuances his commitment to realist writing. Supporting his argument with further reference to *Randarabesken zu Oscar Wilde*, Morris locates a second structuring principle that becomes central to FPG’s writing in Canada: the theory of the artist as *entwurzelt*, an uprooted wanderer who is “no longer at home in either his native or adopted environment.” FPG identifies this “uprooted wanderer” as an artist-figure who has the potential to become many-rooted—and thus more attuned to the life-nerve of humanity—but who also has the potential to become a degenerate criminal. Reading FPG as an example of the uprooted individual who idealises a commitment to art as a universal human expression and locating this aesthetic theory in Greve’s response to Oscar Wilde, Morris explores the aesthetic influences that crossed the ocean with Greve, mediating his later cultural works as Frederick Philip Grove in Canada.

◆ Cultural Mediation: Institutional and Social

COMPLEMENTING THE ANALYSIS of cultural migrancy as a type of mediation, other papers in this volume examine the mediation of FPG and Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven by institutional and social factors. For papers such as Jutta Ernst's "Il me faut forger une arme de la littérature": Felix Paul Greve among the Magazines," this last approach to the theme of cultural mediation is usefully informed by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of culture as a field of production in which participants compete for symbolic power. A field with relative autonomy—evidenced in its inverse logic of symbolic as opposed to financial capital—cultural production is considerably bound up with the production and mediation of value. Hence, the mediation of 'artists' by secondary producers—gallery owners, publishers, and critics—importantly determines how cultural producers are legitimised or delegitimised, but always positioned in the field. Demystifying what he calls the "charismatic ideology" of artistic production, the notion of the artist as a genius who composes great, universal works of art in isolation, Bourdieu points instead to an apparatus of production:

The 'charismatic' ideology which is the ultimate basis of belief in the value of a work of art and which is therefore the basis of functioning of the field of production and circulation of cultural commodities, is undoubtedly the main obstacle to a rigorous science of the production of the value of cultural goods. It is this ideology which directs attention to the apparent producer, the painter, writer or composer, in short, the 'author', suppressing the question of what authorizes the author, what creates the authority with which authors authorize. (76)

This focal shift from the charismatic artist to an apparatus of production that distributes legitimacy thus describes another way of conceptualising cultural mediation: as a process of determination within the field in which 'artists' struggle to acquire legitimacy and symbolic capital. This background frame usefully informs Jutta Ernst's article on Felix Paul Greve, charting his frustrated efforts to legitimise himself as an artist among the poets and publishers of Munich's literary elite.

Foregrounding his desire to acquire and exert "influence" through literature, Ernst points to Greve's early attempts to establish himself as a

member of the poet Stefan George's avant-garde circle. His endeavours were designed to land an elite publisher for his own poetry; however, toward that end, Greve mediated his own unrecognised name by translating and publishing critical studies of other recognised artists such as Oscar Wilde and André Gide. With reference to the many sites in which Greve advertised and interpreted his own work, and largely informed by his correspondence with Gide and with various editors, Ernst carefully details Greve's efforts and difficulties. He was compelled to abandon the George circle because he needed to earn money from his cultural work; he successfully landed work with other publishing houses but only by mediating others; translations that he published anonymously were, on more than one occasion, attributed to his rival contemporaries (sometimes under suspicious circumstances); and, repeatedly, he was frustrated in his efforts to legitimise his own literary endeavours. Eventually he abandoned his career as a writer in Germany and relocated in North America. However, as Ernst describes it, he found even greater challenges in this new context. Concentrating primarily on FPG's early publishing in Germany, his concerted efforts and frustrated struggles to produce himself as an artist in his own life, Ernst's paper situates Greve in a broader apparatus of production to explore his mediation by institutional factors and his attempts to mediate himself in that context.

Paul Hjartarson's "'Out of the Wastage of All Other Nations': 'Enemy Aliens' and the 'Canadianization' of Felix Paul Greve" also discusses the mediations of FPG; however, it takes as its focal point Greve's positioning in the context of a developing surveillance state in Canada after World War One. Without erasing the fact that FPG was a cultural migrant who brought European ideas with him into Canada, Hjartarson complicates the picture of the field into which FPG stepped as an immigrant from Germany. That is, Hjartarson argues for a thicker reading of existing social debates in Canada so as to understand the context of surveillance that FPG negotiated as a German immigrant and within which he re-established himself (and was received) as a writer. Charting a broad shift from the opening of the West to its closure, Hjartarson details the effects of a nexus of historical events—including Canada's entry into World War One (1914), the Russian Revolution (1917), and the Winnipeg General Strike (1919)—on debates about immigration and assimilation. The tensions created by these historical

events registered in a series of Orders in Council (which created new categories of 'enemy aliens' and gradually legislated their surveillance, internment and disenfranchisement); in changes to Canada's immigration and naturalization legislation; and in debates over education and 'Canadianization'. Within this larger framework, Hjartarson situates the production and reception of FPG's first Canadian novel, *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), and he examines the public promotion of Grove as a prototypical 'new Canadian' with reference to a series of lecture tours undertaken by Grove at the behest of Graham Spry, executive secretary of the Association of Canadian Clubs. FPG's positioning in these debates—and particularly his ability to represent himself as a 'new Canadian' as opposed to an 'enemy alien'—mediated not only his access to the speaker's platform but also his reception by the audience. That said, while pointing out FPG's mediation within this social context, Hjartarson simultaneously notes that FPG used his 'new Canadian' lecture platforms to advocate counter-hegemonic ideas of limited cultural pluralism and tolerance. Thus, while FPG's attempts to re-signify himself in Canada have been well-documented, Hjartarson contributes to a thicker description of how—in the social-institutional context of post-World War One debates about immigration and Canadianization—FPG mediated himself to safe-guard his civil liberties within Canada's developing surveillance state and to accrue value and legitimacy as a 'new Canadian' writer.

Similarly examining the social-institutional contexts of mediation but with a specific focus on gender and embodiment, Richard Cavell and Irene Gammel analyse Baroness Elsa's experimental poetry, assemblages and performative practices to explore how 'the body' and gender function as mediated and mediating aspects of the Baroness's Dada. Specifically, Richard Cavell posits the *Jugendstil* movement in Germany—a school that elaborated an empathic theory of artistic production and reception—as a possible informing context for Elsa's performative Dada in New York. As with other papers in *The Politics of Cultural Mediation*, Cavell attempts to historicise the Baroness's later art practices in America with reference to the aesthetic influences that she might have brought with her across the Atlantic, understanding the Baroness as a cultural migrant and mediator. However, his paper goes beyond that initial concept of mediation to examine also how the empathic theories that he explores as German influences on the Baroness themselves effected an interrogation of visual art as a mediated practice.

These theories of empathic production and reception challenged traditional art with an "anti-retinalist" focus that made the body and processes of embodiment central to artistic practice. Hypothesizing that the body projected and objectified itself in spatial forms, empathic theorists such as Robert Vischer enabled art practices that decentred the site and the subject of traditional art. Cavell thus quotes Vischer's editors: "[t]he phenomena that we encounter in the world ... become analogies for one's own bodily structure." Empathic theory shifted visual art's traditional focus on the eye to a production and response mechanism grounded in the body and its practices. In turn, this shift facilitated a move outside the gallery, informing the Baroness's Dada as an engagement with the phenomena and practices of daily life.

Informed by his work on Marshall McLuhan and the production of cultural space, Cavell's article works with densely overlapping concepts of mediation:⁷ he understands the Baroness as a migrant who mediates between cultural worlds; conversely, he explores the challenges posed by empathic theories to the retinalist focus of traditional visual art to examine the production of culturally mediated spaces and practices. What remains implicit in Cavell's article, but which is explicit in his work on McLuhan, is the way in which "space" is a social and historical construct produced, in part, by an institutional and material apparatus. In his broader work, Cavell builds on McLuhan's argument that media function as extensions of the body—for example, extending the capacity to see and to hear—and that within these visual and acoustic spaces, communication happens. The production and mediation of space as a cultural construct is thus importantly connected to communication as a mediated practice, a complex mode of production and reception that occurs within social and institutional frameworks. The material and social apparatus that mediates communication in a given context stands as the background against which Cavell weighs the Baroness's Dada interventions. In these terms, Cavell examines empathic theories of embodiment as a latent element of the Baroness's performative Dada that disrupts spaces traditionally designated for the cultural exchange of visual art (the gallery), and modes of cultural production and reception that privilege the visual. The body, for Cavell, is thus not a site of unmediated experience. Rather, empathic theory becomes a point of disruption making obvious the mediation and production of the body in

social spaces and practices. Informed by theories of empathic embodiment, the Baroness practiced a highly sexualized performative art—flaunted on the street and in public spaces—in which her body became her canvas. It is in these terms, Cavell suggests, that she emerges as a central figure in New York Dada, which rejected traditional art in favour of nonsense, non-art and the ready-made object.

Describing the Baroness's performative Dada as acts of 'everyday modernity,' Irene Gammel complements Cavell's analysis of embodied performance with an examination of gender as performative social practice. In this frame, Gammel reads the Baroness's performative Dada as interventions into gender practice. While disrupting the gallery as a privileged site, these performances, suggest Gammel, also disrupted the everyday, ordinary practices and performances of gender that defined femininity and masculinity in this moment. Shaving her head and painting it vermilion, costuming her body with tea-balls and tomato cans, decorating her apparel with gilded vegetables, dangling bird cages containing live birds from her neck as jewellery, the Baroness appropriated objects of everyday life and divested them of their utilitarian functions. However, where early commentators were frequently bemused, confused or even revolted by the Baroness, Gammel argues that Elsa appropriated these objects and harnessed them to her performances so as to re-signify them as objects and to re-signify herself through them. Referencing a wide swath of contemporary commentators as well as representations of the Baroness by later critics, Gammel's article offers a wealth of research. It contextualises and theorises visual poems, assemblages of objects and little-known *objets d'art* created and worn by the Baroness (figures 1–3), and it explores how the Baroness has been legitimised and delegitimised by others. Lauded as an avant-garde radical or described as a curious oddity, Freytag-Loringhoven was alternately celebrated and disavowed by contemporaries such as Jane Heap, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and Mary Butts; in the wider context of modernist studies, she was denied the recognition granted to male Dada artists such as Marcel Duchamp until feminist critics began to examine women's contributions to and representation within modernism. The theme of mediation thus informs a number of compressed issues in Gammel's paper. Reframing the Baroness's performances and self-productions as interventions into highly mediated gender practices, Gammel's paper participates in a femi-

nist interrogation and recovery project. Simultaneously, however, she gestures toward a broader methodological problematic: if performance art is by nature ephemeral and situational, how are we to understand it from a later historical moment? What does it mean for our understanding of the Baroness's performances to be so highly mediated through contemporary commentary? Can the material traces of those performances—that is, the objects with which she adorned herself—themselves illuminate our interpretation of her cultural interventions? Rather than commenting on the Baroness's mediation from an external perspective, Gammel implicitly signals her own participation and implication in that social-institutional complexity.

◆ Towards a Thick Description: Scholarly Mediations

OFFERING DIFFERENT ENGAGEMENTS with the theme of cultural mediation in relation to Baroness Elsa and FPG, the papers in *The Politics of Cultural Mediation* complement one another on multiple levels. Examining their lives in Germany and in North America, their productions as authors, translators, critics and avant-garde artists, this volume explores the similarities and differences of the Baroness and FPG's parallel trajectory. To highlight the theme of cultural mediation, we have drawn out three broad, thematic categories of analysis: mediation as an aspect of translation; mediation as cultural migrancy; and mediation as a site of determination and negotiation in a given social-institutional context. *The Politics of Cultural Mediation*, however, organises itself in three different parts. Clustering papers about Baroness Elsa and about FPG and including a translation part, we hope to thicken the reader's engagement with these two artist-producers and to heighten the overlaps among the three thematic approaches outlined above. That is, this volume nuances mediation as a site of determination and production, of intervention and agency. It explores cultural contact zones—in which overlapping 'structures of signification' made meaningful the Baroness's and FPG's cultural productions—and it contextualises those sites in broader debates, processes and practices. For scholars interested in the works of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, this volume includes images of her assemblages, visual poems and performative apparel. It explores how European art-movements and discourses conditioned her

North American Dada, and it thickens that analysis with socio-historical perspectives. Similarly, readers interested in the writings of FPG will find new European and North American contexts in which to appreciate and understand his attempts to produce himself as an artist within existing socio-cultural fields. Moreover, as a cultural contact zone itself, representing an international array of voices, *The Politics of Cultural Mediation* attempts to articulate a model of intellectual engagement capable of and committed to thinking across borders. Recognizing that criticism—like translation—is a political act, this issue holds to Rushdie's insistent idea “that something can also be gained” in that work of bearing across.

NOTES

- 1 The idea of the “contact zone” has been theorised by Mary Louise Pratt to mark colonial sites of encounter, interaction and improvisation occurring within “radically asymmetrical relations of power” (7). Here, the term is invoked in a looser sense to examine the movement of Plötz/Freytag-Loringhoven and Greve/Grove between worlds and their production of cultural objects and performances from those sites of encounter, but also to suggest a dynamic process wherein texts are re-signified in new contexts, marking a site of cultural contact. In both instances, Pratt's term, borrowed from its postcolonial context, helps to foreground “asymmetrical relations of power” that determine and nuance those exchanges, even while allowing for the possibility of “improvisation.” See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*.
- 2 Two recently published biographies are available for readers unfamiliar with the lives of these cultural migrants: for an account of Baroness Elsa's life, see Irene Gammel's *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity: A Cultural Biography* (2002); for a biography of FPG, see Klaus Martens's *F.P. Grove in Europe and Canada: Translated Lives* (2001).
- 3 Scholars of Plötz/Freytag-Loringhoven and Greve/Grove invariably confront the problem of how to name these two individuals, especially when speaking of their entire life and work: on the one hand, Plötz/Freytag-Loringhoven and Greve/Grove are awkward formulations; on the other, it can be misleading to refer to them under simply one name. Greve/Grove, for instance, published under “Greve” in Germany and “Grove” in Canada; identifying him exclusively as “Greve” or “Grove” can cause confusion. That said, Greve/Grove is actually the easier of the problems to solve: since in transforming himself from “Felix Paul Greve” into “Frederick Philip Grove,” Greve retained the initials FPG, scholars tend to follow Douglas O.

Spettigue's example and refer simply to “FPG.” Regarding Plötz/Freytag-Loringhoven, the problem is more complex. First, there is the gender issue: Else Plötz became Else Endell, then Else Greve, and finally Baroness Else von Freytag-Loringhoven. Second, as an artist she is known predominantly for her Dada in New York, produced under the name of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Finally, there is the issue of the Baroness's first name: German scholars refer to her as “Else” while North American scholars (following the Baroness's American contemporaries) tend to use “Elsa.” Richard Cavell refers to Plötz/Freytag-Loringhoven as “Else” when speaking of her in the German context and “Elsa” when speaking of the North American context. Klaus Martens, in “Two Glimpses of the Baroness,” develops another perspective on this split, linking the Else/Elsa shift to the Baroness's adoption of a theatrical stage name. Since this issue of naming marks one index of what is lost and gained in the cultural contact zones produced by migration, the editors of this volume have attempted to foreground the problem rather than standardising usage between papers. In the Introduction, however, we refer to Plötz/Freytag-Loringhoven and Greve/Grove most commonly as “the Baroness” and “FPG.”

- 4 We build here on Clifford Geertz's idea of anthropological “thick description.” Through the term, Geertz advocates a methodology that recognises within cultural exchanges a “multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which [the ethnographer] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render” (10). We adapt this concept to signal multiple, contextual, overlapping structures of signification that made meaningful the texts, objects, and performances of the Baroness and FPG. For those who, like the Baroness and FPG, are “borne across the world,” these structures and processes are particularly complicated and rewarding to analyse. At the same time, we highlight Geertz's representation of the anthropologist as an “ethnographer” to indicate problems within his interpretive method; that is, Geertz does not acknowledge his own implication in a nexus of power/knowledge that constructs the object of which it speaks. We say this not to foreclose the possibility of “bearing across” cultural divides; rather, we suggest that such acts are politically charged and also require interrogation. See Geertz's chapter “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*.
- 5 For the provenance of *Randarabesken zu Oscar Wilde* see Paul Morris's Introductory Note to the essay included in this volume.
- 6 Concerning *Randarabesken zu Oscar Wilde*, Spettigue writes in *FPG: The European Years* (1973): “It is precisely because Felix models himself so closely on Wilde, and then draws on his own experiences and emotions to elucidate Wilde, that we come closer to him in this pamphlet than in any other of his European writings” (117).
- 7 See Richard Cavell, *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* (2002).