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The translaborative case for a translational hermeneutics

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This paper takes the notion of translaboration as a stepping stone for an exploration of some of the recent debates about translational hermeneutics. In doing so, it aims to expand translaboration's focus beyond concrete collaborations between multiple translators, or authors and translators, and to think about, and theorise, translaboration as a possible means of framing textual agents reading and writing each other within texts. The argument presented draws on both Hans-Georg Gadamer's and Paul Ricoeur's conceptions of the individual subject as interpretative agent, and of translation as an object of philosophical enquiry, and adopts the concept of a "hermeneutics of decipherment" (Maitland 2017, 38) as an alternative to dialogic models of understanding and translating. Similarly, the relationship between philosophical and translational hermeneutics is interrogated and recast as a translaborative endeavour rather than as an immediately reciprocal dialogue. Translaboration, this paper argues, thus also actively furthers the move away from what Blumczynski (2016, 29) calls "an arborescent epistemological paradigm" of interdisciplinarity and contributes to animating a transdisciplinarity that is fundamentally "rhizomatic" (ibid.; see Deleuze and Guattari 2004) in nature.

Keywords: translation, understanding, hermeneutics, transdisciplinarity, translaboration

1. Introduction

A central aim behind the ‘blended’ concept (Fauconnier and Turner 1998) of translaboration has been to provide a framework for exploring and articulating connections, comparisons and confluences between translation and collaboration, positing these as inherently allied notions. At its most basic level, translaboration acknowledges “the reality that, for better or worse, translation is frequently collaborative in nature” (Jansen and Wegener 2013, 5). More broadly, however, translaboration also responds to the more fundamental insight that, as Cordingley and Frigau Manning (2017, 23) put it,

we are never alone when translating... conversing – virtually or otherwise – with an always hypothetical author and a necessarily imagined reader, while making translation decisions based on cultural worlds which possess us and are possessed by us. We are ourselves vectors of actions, discourses, influences, which pervade us, and which themselves intersect at ambivalent and moving junctures within the many discourses of the self.

In spite of the multiplicity, multidimensionality and relationality of translation thus conceived and of the web of interpretive agents that activates translation, most of the contributions made to contouring the notion of translaboration to date (see Alfer 2017) have focused on concrete collaborations among human agents in the translation process. Part of the aim of this paper is to redress that imbalance by probing the productive interplay of textual agents, not only in translation but also in interpretative processes more generally, from a translaborative perspective. Specifically, translaboration, viewed as a textual practice in and of itself, here inserts itself into recent debates about translational hermeneutics to explore, on the one hand,

alternatives to dialogic models of understanding and translating, and to argue, on the other, that the relationship between philosophical hermeneutics and translation itself should be viewed as a textual and translational, rather than a dialogic, endeavour.

Hermeneutics has enjoyed increased attention in Translation Studies of late (e.g., Robinson 1991, 2013; Stolze 1992, 2003; Cercel 2009, 2013; Stolze, Stanley, and Cercel 2015; Cercel, Agnetta, and Amido Lozano 2017; Stanley et al. 2018; but also, more broadly, Venuti 2010, 2013, 2019; Blumczynski 2016; Maitland 2017). Much of this attention has focused on, and often grappled with, an application of philosophical hermeneutics to translation so as to appraise translational processes and phenomena in a more holistic rather than empirically atomised fashion (e.g., Blumczynski 2016), and to account, *inter alia*, for the translator's subjectivity in the translation process (Cercel 2015; Maitland 2017; Stolze 2018). Similarly, hermeneutic approaches to translation allow us to situate translational creativity (e.g., Cercel 2013; Cercel, Agnetta, and Amido Lozano 2017) within a perpetually interpretative (inter)textuality that is constitutive of, rather than incidental to, translational action. Creativity is thus posited as both condition and actualisation of productive translational thinking, rather than as an "unconscious" (Aranda 2009, 33) and thus vexingly elusive category, or as a mere problem-solving strategy among others (Mackenzie 1998, 201). Hermeneutic thinking has, likewise, been drawn upon to establish translation itself as "a transdisciplinary paradigm" (Blumczynski 2016, 4). Harnessing Steiner's (1998, chapter 1) dictum of "understanding as translation," Blumczynski (2016, 34) argues that

when translation is reconceptualised in relation to hermeneutics, it acquires a strongly philosophical note and becomes a phenomenon, a field, a mode of being, a way of thinking, a manner of representation, close to its meaning in the phrase 'translation studies'.

Maitland (2017), meanwhile, locates translation in Steiner's (1998, 49) "middle" space of "interpretive decipherment" and constructs her argument for a critical and politically effective conception of 'cultural translation' by "shift[ing] the locus of philosophical hermeneutics to address the deliberate, purposeful acts of interpretation that aim to impact specific audiences in specific ways" (Maitland 2017, 53). For her, translation, "as an interpretive genre," thus "means *transformation*" (159).

The most longstanding advocate of hermeneutical thinking in Translation Studies is, of course, Stolze (1992, 2003, 2011), and the most sustained research initiatives of recent years pushing for a more prominent place of hermeneutics within translational thinking have also come from the German tradition. This is most visibly embodied in the 2011 and 2013 Cologne symposia on 'Translational Hermeneutics', which resulted in two illuminating volumes entitled, respectively, *Translational Hermeneutics: The First Symposium* (Stolze, Stanley, and Cercel 2015) and *Philosophy and Practice in Translational Hermeneutics* (Stanley et al. 2018). The prominence of the German tradition is perhaps not surprising given, on the one hand, the generally accepted genealogy of modern hermeneutics that is commonly assumed to start with Schleiermacher and moves along through Dilthey and Heidegger to Gadamer, and, on the other, the traditional dominance of Linguistics-informed approaches in German Translation Studies, against which this push for a hermeneutic approach is also a *push-back*. The way in which the overarching themes of the two Cologne symposia were framed certainly suggests an acute awareness of the uphill struggle "to gain recognition [for hermeneutics] as a viable theory and methodology" in the face of "a significant level of distrust of hermeneutics in fields dominated by the empirical approach to research... but also in the humanities" (Stanley et al. 2018, 7).

Largely unencumbered by an all too intimate knowledge of the German push for, no less, "this new discipline: Translational Hermeneutics" (Stanley et al. 2018, 8), or indeed by

sustained engagement with other Translation Studies scholars explicitly or implicitly deploying hermeneutic approaches to a wide range of translational questions (among them Robinson 1991, 2012, 2013; Tymoczko 2014; Liu 1995; and many others), Venuti has also long argued for a “hermeneutic model that views translation as an interpretive act, as the inscription of one interpretive possibility among others” (Venuti 2013, 4). Venuti (2019, 6) uses his latest offering, *Contra Instrumentalism: A Translation Polemic*, to consolidate this argument by (a) reiterating that “all translation is... an interpretative act,” and (b) throwing down the gauntlet to what he calls the instrumentalist model of translation. Instrumentalism, Venuti (ibid.) argues, has dominated translational thinking since at least Cicero and Jerome and not only enjoys continued discursive hegemony, but has, in the process, also systematically side-lined the hermeneutic model. Interestingly, Venuti, similar to Stolze, Stanley, and Cercel (2015) and Stanley et al. (2018) frames his call for intensifying attention to a hermeneutical approach to translation in terms of struggle and combat, David and Goliath fashion, with instrumentalism (Venuti 2013, 2019) or empiricism (Stolze, Stanley, and Cercel 2015) cast as the oppressive (of hermeneutics) and repressive (of the inevitably interpretative nature of translation) overlord against which plucky little hermeneutics struggles to gain discursive purchase.

Such rhetoric of struggle and strife probably owes more to academic jostling than to actual and active battles being mounted on either side of this somewhat artificially drawn divide, but let us nevertheless assume, for the moment, that hermeneutics does need a leg-up, and does indeed need defending against “a significant level of distrust” (Stanley et al. 2018, 7) from more empirically-oriented schools of thought. This assumption throws up a number of interesting points. I would, in particular, like to look closely at two specific areas of concern that both have an impact on, and are in turn inflected by, a translaborative contouring of translational hermeneutics. They concern, respectively, the *agents* and the *domains* of, on the

one hand, translation conceived of as a hermeneutic practice and, on the other, the hermeneutic relationship between Translation Studies and Philosophy as such.

2. The trouble with subjective tendencies

If, as Stanley et al. (2018, 7) have it, “hermeneutics has struggled to gain recognition as a viable theory and methodology of interpretation,” this struggle is arguably rooted to no small degree in “the subjective tendencies inherent in hermeneutics” (9; see also Stanley 2012) – tendencies that, according to Stanley et al. (2018, 7) need “counter[ing].” These tendencies are perceived to derive from “the relationship between the individual subject and the hermeneutical approach to understanding” (ibid.); a relationship, that is, which puts the individual subject as interpretive agent at the operative centre of meaning-making. In respect of translation-as-interpretation, Maitland (2017, 160–161) formulates the resulting dilemma as follows: “If every translation is contingent upon the subjectivity of the translator behind it... then no translation can stand as final.” For Maitland, however, the inevitable and illimitable plurality of possible translations that follows presents an opportunity to conceive of translation as a category, as well as a concrete act, of critique and activism that saves us “from the totalism that accompanies our own attempts at understanding” (161; see also Robinson 2015). For scholars like Stolze (2018), meanwhile, the centrality of the individual subject as interpretive agent to the hermeneutic approach to understanding enables us to re-inscribe “translators as persons” (Stanley et al. 2018, 9) into enquiries of translational action, and to account for the role of the (cognitive – existential – individual) translating subject in the translation process. This has not least fostered the emergence of what Hu (2004) diagnoses as an increasingly prominent trend for ‘translator-centredness’ in recent Translation Studies research. All of these are surely welcome developments that have been crucially enabled by the central place afforded to the interpretive

agent by hermeneutic conceptions of understanding. But is a hermeneutic perspective on the translating subject necessarily complicit in perpetuating “subjective tendencies inherent in hermeneutics” (Stanley et al. 2018, 9; see also Stanley 2012)? And do these tendencies necessarily exist in the first place?

According to Stolze (2018, 95), the translator’s understanding of a source text is merely triggered (“angestoßen”) by the textual structures of this source, as it is “gar nicht die Textelemente als solche, welche den Sinn konstituieren” (actually not the textual elements as such that constitute meaning). Hence,

der Bezugspunkt der Übersetzung ist nicht die Gestalt des Ausgangstextes, sondern die inhaltliche Formulierungsabsicht des Translators. Wie ein Koautor versucht der Translator die verstandene Textmitteilung zielsprachlich in einer für mögliche oder intendierte Leser verständlichen Weise auszuformulieren, nachdem er sie sich “in Empathie” angeeignet hat.

(the point of reference for a translation is not the *gestalt* of the source text, but rather the translator’s intention of articulation. Like a co-author, the translator tries to formulate the understood message of the source text for a potential or intended readership in an intelligible way, having appropriated it “in empathy”.) (ibid.)

Translation is thus an appropriatively collaborative co-authoring operation performed *on* both source and target text by a translating subject that is conceived as empathetic, “responsible” (85), and ideally in congenial communion (“geistesverwandt”) with both the source text and its author (Cercel 2015, 121). Importantly, however, this translating subject is ultimately conceived as *external* to the text(s). In this scheme of things, “die Persönlichkeit des Übersetzers, seine kognitive und emotionale Beziehung zum übersetzten Text sowie seine

Fähigkeit, sich mit der Mitteilung zu identifizieren” (the translator’s personality, their cognitive and emotional relationship to the text to be translated, and their ability to identify with the message) become decisive factors in the translation process (118). Such emphasis on the translator’s personality and disposition does, however, also raise the double spectre of semantic solipsism and/or radical relativity, and it is this unsettling double spectre that, presumably, lies at the heart of Stanley et al.’s (2018, 9) discomfort with “the subjective tendencies” that are conceived of, on the one hand, as “inherent in hermeneutics” but, on the other, as extrinsic to the text(s) to which the methods of translational hermeneutics are applied.

The key to countering the destabilising effect of these “tendencies,” according to Stanley et al. (2018, 9), lies in “considering frameworks of understanding that go beyond the individual subject [to] what one might call super, or supra-individual frameworks.” Such supra-individual frameworks, and many contributions to the development of a translational hermeneutics more generally (e.g., Stolze 1992, 2003, 2011, 2018; Kohlmayer 2015; O’Keeffe 2015, 2018; Blumczynski 2016), draw heavily on Gadamer’s anti-subjectivism, where the (problematic) subject overcomes itself or is drawn beyond itself and the linguistically conditioned finitude of its capacity for knowing, in the experience of inter-subjectivity. Blumczynski (2016), for example, takes up this theme in his rehabilitation of the notion of *simpatico*, rejected by Venuti (2008, 238) on the grounds of its perpetuation of conventions that read translations “as the transparent expression of authorial psychology,” but recovered by Strowe (2011) where the “perceived affinity between translator and author” (quoted in Blumczynski 2016, 46) is conceived as “a living relationship – not a static configuration – that is perceived, i.e. is phenomenological and not ontological, subjective and not objective, context-bound and not stable” (Blumczynski 2016, 46). Such a “living relationship,” for Blumczynski, leads to an encounter between translator and author that we, as readers, can

vicariously partake in and “that results not in an erasure, but rather in a heightened awareness of self and the Other and the experience of affinity with SOMEONE” (ibid.; emphasis in original).

For Gadamer (2004, 399) himself, “thanks to the verbal nature of all interpretation, every interpretation includes the possibility of a relationship with others. There can be no speaking that does not bind the speaker and the person spoken to.” Accordingly, the process of understanding a text is conceived in parallel to two interlocutors reaching understanding of/on a subject matter (*die Sache*) in dialectic dialogue with one another:

When we try to examine the hermeneutic phenomenon through the model of conversation between two persons, the chief thing that these apparently so different situations – understanding a text and reaching an understanding in a conversation – have in common is that both are concerned with a subject matter that is placed before them. Just as each interlocutor is trying to reach agreement on some subject with his partner, so also the interpreter is trying to understand what the text is saying. (370)

The problematics inherent in defining the object of understanding as “what the text is saying” are, of course, manifold. Venuti (2013, 4), for example, rejects “the German tradition of hermeneutics – notably the work of Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer” on the grounds that their “aim is to disclose an essentialist meaning in the source text.” In Gadamer (2004), at least, such essentialism is, however, not as readily diagnosable as Venuti’s one-line dismissal suggests. Gadamer (2004, 296) himself states that “not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity.” Similarly, Gadamer (2004, 390) cautions that “the meaning of a text is not to be compared with an immovably and obstinately fixed point of view that suggests only one question to the person trying to understand it.” Rather, “the text is

made to speak through interpretation” (398), with interpretation conceived as a perpetually dialectic and thus open-ended dialogue between “der verstehenden Person und de[m] Zu-Verstehenden” (the understanding person and that which is to be understood) (Stolze 2018, 90).

Nevertheless, the privileging of the oral and aural over the written and read implied in “trying to understand what the text is *saying*” (Gadamer 2004, 370; emphasis added) when it is “made to *speak*” (398; emphasis added) – a privileging that is also present in Blumczynski’s (2016, 49) “organic relationship between thinking, speaking, and translating” – points to a problematic in Gadamer’s conception of understanding-through-interpretation that is linked to the conceptual parallelism set up between the interpretation of texts and the conversational path to understanding between two interlocutors. As O’Keeffe (2018, 16) points out, “Texts do not ‘speak’. Interpretation is not a ‘conversation’.” Gadamer’s own qualification of this point readily concedes the limits of the orality metaphor, but retains the conversational figure of thought to gesture towards the supra-individual nature of understanding: “It is true that a text does not speak to us in the same way as does a Thou. We who are attempting to understand must ourselves make it speak” (Gadamer 2004, 370). Nevertheless, “this kind of understanding, ‘making the text speak’, is not an arbitrary procedure that we undertake on our own initiative” (ibid.).

The privileging of the (speaking and hearing) body over the (written and read) text supports, first and foremost, this conversational gesture towards supra-individual understanding, but it also directs us, once again, to a positioning of the interpreting/understanding subject outside of the text to which it applies itself and which we, in turn, “apply... to ourselves” (Gadamer 2004, 399). O’Keeffe (2018, 19) suggests “the idea of an act of reading that takes writing ‘inside’ the body, where it would ‘lose’ its exteriority, lose its page, and become an acoustic phenomenon – meaning to be heard in the intimacy of

the echo chamber of an inner ear.” However, such an echo chamber, I would suggest, only adds to, rather than delivers the argument from, our double spectre of solipsistic subjectivity and semantic relativism that accompanies such exteriority, and ultimately returns us, again, to dialogue as the means of overcoming the limits of individual subjectivities.¹

Dialogicity is, for Gadamer (2004, 102–103), characterised, firstly, by play(fulness), which “fulfils its purpose only if the player loses himself in play.” Thus, “play, as an interpretive experience” (Kirby and Graham 2016, 13) offers a template for inter-subjective engagement with the object of understanding or the subject matter (*die Sache*) to the extent to which it is conceived “as transaction, rather than inter-action” and “takes place not between, but among, its players” (ibid.).

Playfully dialogic understanding, secondly, is both predicated on and engenders a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer 2004, 370) not only between the interlocutors/players or the reader and the text (as interlocutor or *Sache*), but also, crucially, between the interpreting subject and the historicity or traditional embeddedness of the subject(s) themselves, the subject matter, and the language in which all of these encounter one another (305). “Part of real understanding,” Gadamer writes, “is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them” (367). Consequently, “understanding is certainly not concerned with ‘understanding historically’ – in other words,

¹ An alternative to the echo chamber of the individual body as the site of hermeneutic understanding can, of course, be found in Robinson’s somatic theory of translation (Robinson 1991, 2012, 2013), which offers a view of embodied dialogicity that is fundamentally social – and socially constructed – and anchors Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics, against Gadamer (2004), in “the situated phenomenology (*Gefühl* or feeling) of an actual living, breathing, embodied human being in a spoken dialogical encounter with another living, breathing, embodied human being” (Robinson 2013, 12; see also Blumczynski 2016, 43–49).

reconstructing the way the text came into being,” but rather actualises an intention “to understand the text itself,” an operation in which

the interpreter’s own horizon is decisive, yet not as a personal standpoint that he maintains or enforces, but more as an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play and puts at risk, and that helps one truly to make one’s own what the text says. (390)

Thirdly, “*the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language*” (370; emphasis in original). As Foran (2018, 91) points out, for Gadamer, all thought is, in fact, “made possible by the fact of language.” In Gadamer’s scheme, however, this does not amount, as it would for Derrida and others, to a “claim that there is only understanding *in* language, but rather that understanding is what it is and the way it is *because of* language” (ibid., emphasis in original) – or, in Gadamer’s (2004, 441) words, because of the fundamentally “linguistic constitution of the world.” Consequently, “the *kind* of understanding we have, which is the only understanding there is, is always inflected by the fact of language” (Foran 2018, 91; emphasis in original). It is in this sense that, for Gadamer (2004, 370–371), our

understanding of the subject matter must take the form of language. It is not that the understanding is subsequently put into words; rather, the understanding occurs – whether in the case of a text or a dialogue with another person who raises an issue with us – in the coming-into-language of the thing itself.

Language, or “the verbal aspect of interpretation” (398), thus both delineates the limits of the interpreting subject’s understanding and animates the dialogue that lifts the subject beyond

these limits to a shared understanding “that is not only mine or my author’s, but common” (390). In both instances, however, the individual subject remains, ultimately, exterior both to *die Sache*, whether that is the subject matter of a conversation or a text to be understood, and to language itself. “Language is the *medium* in which substantive understanding and agreement take place” (Gadamer 2004, 386; emphasis added), but, as Foran (2018, 91; emphasis in original) writes, “the crucial point of language” in Gadamer is that it nevertheless “*precedes* us.” In view of this, and in view of the fact that both language and dialogue can, and often do, fail us, “counter[ing] the subjective tendencies inherent” (Stanley et al. 2018, 9) in a hermeneutics thus conceived does indeed remain a task to be tackled, if not a riddle to be solved.

From a translaborative perspective, subjects as agents both of collaborative processes that result in an understanding “that is not only mine... but common” (Gadamer 2004, 390), and of translation processes that produce meaning rather than “subsequently put” an understanding of it “into words” (370) are, of course, of primary interest. Translaboration is, however, also centrally concerned with the conceptual as well as the practical *confluence* of collaborative and translational processes, and the sites of such confluences – whether in a translaborative “working across disciplines” (Zwischenberger 2017, 390) or in the translator’s “engagement with the multidimensionality of texts, languages and cultures” (Buden et al. 2009, 218) – are, more often than not, texts. To conceive of the agents of translaboration, on the one hand, as preceded by language and, on the other, as exterior to the texts with which they engage and which they produce, however, runs the risk of creating a discursive no-man’s-land that leaves little scope for exploring interpretive agency as a supra-individual act of meaning-making.

A solution, I would argue, is to be found in the proponents of post-structuralist hermeneutics, notably in the work of Paul Ricoeur, whose writings have been explored

considerably less extensively in the context of translational hermeneutics than Gadamer's. At the most fundamental level, Ricoeur argues, as Foran (2018, 98; see also Ricoeur 1976, 1–23) summarises, “that language must always be taken as ‘discourse’” and that a “text is a whole, a totality” (Ricoeur 1973, 106) that not only solely exists but can also only be explained and comprehended *within* “the sphere of signs” (105). Thus, “to understand a text is not to rejoin the author” (105) as it would be for Schleiermacher, nor is it to apprehend and appropriate *die Sache* (what is being written about) in some extratextual sphere of inter-subjective fusion; rather, it is a fundamentally textual operation that casts the interpreting subject as an irreducibly textual entity in itself. Put another way, by thinking about textual subject positions rather than about extra-textual subjectivities brought to bear on texts and their interpretations, the textually constituted subject is integrated into – indeed *inherent* in – the hermeneutic circle of interpretation and re-interpretation as a textual practice in and of itself. Understanding, in this scheme of things, does not flow from or through texts, but is situated squarely within them. It is on this basis also that, taking issue with Dilthey rather than Gadamer in this particular instance, Ricoeur (1973, 104) proposes a “dialectic involved in reading [that] expresses the originality of the relation between reading and writing and its irreducibility to the dialogical situation based on the immediate reciprocity between speaking and hearing.” For a contouring of the notion of translaboration, this allows us to expand the focus beyond concrete collaborations between multiple translators, or authors and translators, and to think about, and theorise, textual agents reading and writing each other within texts. For translational hermeneutics, translaboration thus conceived opens up the possibility not only of illuminating translation processes as text-bound collaborations that suspend “subjective tendencies” into what Maitland (2017, 38) calls a “hermeneutics of decipherment,” but also of moving towards a transdisciplinary relationship between philosophy and translation that does not aim at an immediately reciprocal dialogue so much as at a mutually translational endeavour.

3. The trouble with philosophy

We will return to Ricoeur below, but to do so we need to take a closer look at how the relationship between translation and philosophy, and philosophical hermeneutics in particular, is commonly framed in Translation Studies. For example, many of the arguments presented in the two volumes from the Cologne symposia (Stolze, Stanley, and Cercel 2015; Stanley et al. 2018), themselves prime examples of a productive dialogue between Philosophy and Translation Studies, focus on an application of philosophical hermeneutics to translation as a means of understanding “better, or differently (and in a valuably different way)” how we, as translators, “apprehend and process meaning, how we make use of meaning, and indeed go in search of it” (Stanley et al. 2018, 7). As a theory, or model, or indeed, as with Gadamer (2004), a method of “understand[ing] understanding” (Stanley et al. 2018, 7) through the prism of interpretation, it is easy to see why a dialogue with philosophical hermeneutics does indeed hold out the promise of getting to the bottom of some of the most fundamental processes involved in translation (see also Malmkjær 2010, 202).

In the opening paper to the first symposium’s proceedings, however, Cercel, Stolze, and Stanley ponder the fact that the application of philosophical hermeneutics to Translation Studies is not an entirely straightforward operation because a

characteristic feature of the philosophical dealing with the problem of translation is that, here, translation is primarily understood in an ontological sense and that the concrete work of translating is considered derivatively, as secondary to this primary concept. (Cerel, Stolze, and Stanley 2015, 22)

In the introduction to the second symposium's proceedings, the same authors, now also joined by O'Keeffe, again consider translation's relationship with philosophical hermeneutics, wondering whether, "if interpretation, and translation, are ultimately practical undertakings, ... the abstractions and conceptual frameworks of philosophical hermeneutics hamper or assist in gaining a better understanding of such practices?" (Stanley et al. 2018, 7). Blumczynski (2016, 49) is similarly concerned that his chapter, "Philosophy: Translation as Understanding, Interpretation, and Hermeneutics", has, fifteen pages in, "reached a high level of abstraction," but then immediately reassures his readers "that reconceptualized insights from hermeneutics may also take us on unexpected trajectories when it comes to less abstract and practical phenomena."

Part of the problem, as Malmkjær (2010, 202) writes, lies in the fact that, for philosophers, "the question of translation is just one question... within the philosophy of language." Consequently,

philosophers are not especially interested in many of the issues that interest translation scholars, so we cannot expect to find in their writing any discussion of implications of their work for our discipline. These, we have to draw out ourselves. (ibid.)

For Malmkjær, much as for Basalamah (2018), the solution lies in the development of a philosophy *of* translation "as a branch of Translation Studies in its own right" (Malmkjær 2010, 202), which could furnish the discipline with "a basic understanding of what translation is... and holds together our various theories of it and of its constituent concepts and descriptive notions" (204). At the applied end of the spectrum, Stolze, Stanley, and Cercel (2015, 24–30) propose – notably in active dialogue with a number of philosophers who do display an interest in the "implications of their work for our discipline" (Malmkjær 2010, 202) – the formulation

of a series of practice-based and translation-specific research questions that take account of six key concepts (subjectivity, historicity, phenomenology, process character, holistic nature of translation, and reflection) around which “to develop a methodology fitting to the hermeneutic approach” (Stolze, Stanley, and Cercel 2015, 30). This includes think-aloud protocols and other introspective methodologies designed to account for knowledge acquisition or to measure decision-making processes, as well as “experiments to check whether a previous input of a specific text will influence the translation later on of another” text (ibid.). These are ultimately rather empirical-looking solutions, however, and the extent to which they are capable of allaying the “significant level of distrust of hermeneutics in fields dominated by the empirical approach to research” (Stanley et al. 2018, 7) is open to debate. I would argue that neither Stolze’s (2012) meticulous mapping of translational competences and ‘orientations’ onto a matrix provided by philosophical hermeneutics, nor, for example, Stefanink and Bălăcescu’s (2017) invocation of the cognitive sciences in support of a hermeneutically inspired investigation of translational creativity ultimately counter the criticism that hermeneutics is an inexact science. Instead, and to account for the transdisciplinary and indeed translaborative continuities between philosophical hermeneutics and translation, both can and should be situated within a shared field of textual and discursive practice animated not merely by interdisciplinary dialogue but by a transdisciplinary “hermeneutics of decipherment” (Maitland 2017, 38).

Nevertheless, Malmkjær (2010) and Stolze, Stanley, and Cercel (2015), among others, are right in stating that when philosophy explicitly references translation, it tends to use translation to frame philosophical questions or problems that are either only marginally or only at a very abstract level related to translational processes and practices, or are based, “in their surface claims” at least (Robinson 2015, 42), on reductive notions of what translation is and entails (see Blumczynski 2016, x–xi).

When Gadamer (2004, 398) writes that “no text and no book speaks if it does not speak a language that reaches the other person. Thus interpretation must find the right language if it really wants to make the text speak,” he conceives of this “right language” as a language that is common to the text and the interpreting subject and which, as we have seen above, both delimits our understanding and enables the dialogue necessary for establishing commonality in understanding. It is thus easy to see why, for Gadamer (2004, 387), translation constitutes – and, significantly in our context, is primarily evoked as – an “extreme case” of the hermeneutic motion of “coming to an understanding” through interpretation. Translation, writes Gadamer, “is like an especially laborious process of understanding” (388) given (a) that “the subject matter can scarcely be separated from the language” in which it was originally expressed (389; see also Foran 2018, 96), and (b) the translator’s “inevitable distance from the original,” a “distance between one’s own opinion and its contrary” that is “ultimately unbridgeable” (Gadamer 2004, 388; see, by contrast, Maitland 2017, 55–81 on the productive potential of active distancing in the Ricoeurian sense). As a result, “every translation that takes its task seriously is at once clearer and flatter than the original” and even the most ingeniously inspired translation solution “can never be more than a compromise” (Gadamer 2004, 388). That said, Gadamer (389) does ponder the possibility that “perhaps... this description of the translator’s activity is too truncated,” presumably because the gloomy view of translation he previously sketched runs the risk of derailing the whole point of his brief excursus on translation in *Truth and Method*, which is to prove that “the situation of the translator and that of the interpreter are fundamentally the same.” Thus, Gadamer eventually settles on the figure of a “truly re-creat[ive]” translator “who brings into language the subject matter that the text points to; but this means finding a language that is not only his but is also proportionate to the original” (ibid.).

Ricoeur similarly talks relatively sparsely about translation in his wide body of philosophical writings, and explicitly so only towards the end of his long career and life, notably in *On Translation* (2006), his slim and posthumously published volume of three essays on the subject, a perusal of which, in isolation, seems to confirm Stanley et al.'s (2018, 7) misgivings about the limited applicability of philosophical hermeneutics to translation studies. In *On Translation*, Ricoeur (2006, 14) first uses translation – “a risky practice always in search of its theory” – as a paradigmatic case of “language’s reflection on itself, which made Steiner say that ‘to understand is to translate’” (28). Ricoeur’s is ultimately a plea for actively embracing the irreducible plurality – or “infinite,” as Kharmandar (2015, 79) terms it – of language conceived as discourse, and for acknowledging in positive terms our ability to understand linguistically in spite of “identical meaning” (Ricoeur 2006, 22) being perpetually and, by necessity, elusive in discursive practice even within the same language. More importantly, however, translation as a paradigm for “language’s work on itself” (24) is, in a second step, developed into “a paradigm for ethical encounters between people and cultures” (Foran 2018, 100). Here, the notion of “linguistic hospitality... where the pleasure of dwelling in the other’s language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home” (Ricoeur 2006, 10) becomes the central metaphor for both the relationship between same and other as dimensions of the self, and for European integration *qua* the work of remembrance and mourning. Foran (2018, 102), who gives a much fuller and eminently useful account of Ricoeur’s arguments in *On Translation* and attendant writings, is thus able to summarise that translation

for Ricoeur reveals something fundamental about the human condition; not just that we speak languages and learn others but, more fundamentally, that our experience unfolds between the universal and the particular. Balancing these two modalities requires an

ethical engagement and openness to what is other. The fact of translation reveals that balancing the concerns of the one and the other is always possible, even if it remains an infinite task that can always take place in a different way.

In Ricoeur (2006), as in Gadamer (2004), translation is primarily invoked in the service of arguments concerned with something other than translation, though that in itself is no reason to dismiss or doubt the importance of these arguments to translation. Indeed, they can, and do, reverberate on translation in ways that undoubtedly enrich, and have enriched, our thinking about translation's processes and practices as these intersect with questions about the nature of language, of meaning, of linguistic understanding, of interpretation and of translational ethics. However, from a translaborative perspective, and in the spirit of Blumczynski's (2016, 29) argument in favour of a move away from "an arborescent epistemological paradigm" of interdisciplinarity and towards a "rhizomatic transdisciplinarity" (28), we need to pay attention not only to what philosophy says about translation, but also to what philosophy says when it is not explicitly talking about translation.

In what I would see as a correlative move, Ricoeur (2007, 23), while avowedly considering translation "not... from the point of view of translation studies," nevertheless displays a keen and genuine interest in how translators actually, practically "do it" (26) and argues that translation's "struggle with plurality, its failures and successes, continues in spheres more and more distant from that of work... applied to language and languages" (29). For Ricoeur, "both the theoretical problem of translatability and the practical problem of the activity of translating" (26), taken together, reveal translation's "paradigmatic character" (27), since translation's "twofold problem: translation from one language to another and translation internal to some spoken language" (23) provides a textual matrix for deciphering a similarly twofold problem within philosophy (and, according to Brennan (2008), within hermeneutic

phenomenology in particular): “one that involves the encounter with the foreign and another that is about knowing how to say the same thing in a different way” (Brennan 2008). It is for this reason that Ricoeur (2007, 23) is able to state that “what is at stake for philosophy is how to model what is at work in the act of translating,” and it may well also be here that we find an entry point into the shared field of textual and discursive practice between Philosophy and Translation Studies that I posited earlier and that can be rendered productive, not so much by mere dialogue but by a mutual “hermeneutics of decipherment” (Maitland 2017, 38).

4. Transdisciplinary transfigurations

Relatively few translation scholars have so far engaged with Ricoeur’s post-structuralist hermeneutics beyond commenting on *On Translation* (2006). The most notable exception is Maitland, whose monograph *What is Cultural Translation?* (2017) builds on Ricoeur’s *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (1976) to arrive at a conceptualisation of translation as an act of interpretation that precedes rather than antecedes how we act in the world, and as an inherently emancipatory social practice directed “towards meaningful action and the transformation of the interpreting self” (Maitland 2017, 10). Maitland’s argument draws, at its base, on the double nature of symbolic meaning, “where the literal signification points to a second meaning that can be understood only by considering the reference of the first to the second” (37; see also Brennan 2008) – a typically Ricoeurian figure of thought that recurs across several of his major works, notably *The Rule of Metaphor* (1978) and *Time and Narrative* (1984–1988), and results in a rehabilitation of referentiality that has important implications for translation. Ricoeur’s argument essentially rests on the uncovering of a complex series of parallels between metaphor and narrative mimesis as both objects and conditions of textual (and textualised) understanding (see Taylor 2011) that render

referentiality productive, rather than merely reproductive, of meaning. Ricoeur conceives of metaphor as an essentially discursive practice that can, and indeed should, be viewed as a *model* of discourse. Rather than being “confined to a role of accompaniment, of illustration,” metaphor “participates in the *invention* of meaning” (Ricoeur 1991, 123) at the level of the text as a whole by bringing

to language aspects, qualities, and values of reality that lack access to language that is directly descriptive and that can be spoken only by means of the complex interplay between the metaphorical utterance and the rule-governed transgression of the usual meanings of our words. (Ricoeur 1984, 1:xi)

Mimesis, meanwhile, is, as Kharmandar (2015, 2018) explores from a vantage point similar to mine here, seen as the narrative correlative to metaphor in the realm of textual meaning-making. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur distinguishes between three stages or aspects of mimesis: *Mimesis*₁ marks the point at which motives, goals and ethic qualities of human action become the immediate subject of narrative understanding. This first aspect of mimesis thus describes a state of *prefiguration* – what Valdés (1991, 28) calls the “pre-condition for textuality.” *Mimesis*₂ denotes “the entry into the realm of the poetic composition,” a stage Ricoeur (1984, 1:xi) calls *configuration*. What finally emerges in *mimesis*₃ is a *new* configuration by means of the mimetic *refiguration* of “the pre-understood order of action” (*mimesis*₁) (ibid.). It is here that “the mimetic function of the plot rejoins metaphorical reference” (ibid.), and both operations partake in what Ricoeur calls “the paradox of productive reference” (Ricoeur 1991, 129) – the paradox, that is, of reference *through* redescription. Both metaphor and narrative mimesis thus *produce* meaning and “transform or transfigure reality” (ibid.) by creating their referents in the first place, along a seamless hermeneutic circle of

linguistic activity that perpetually pre-figures, configures and refigures – or, in Maitland’s (2017) scheme, distanciates, incorporates and transforms – motives, goals and ethical qualities of human action as the immediate subject of discursive understanding.

This amounts, among other things, to a very effective counter-narrative to various critiques of representationalism and, as such, also has potentially profound implications for thinking about translation as something other than a derivative or in some way deviant textual practice, namely as work performed not *on* but *within* both source and target texts. As Taylor (2011, 112) writes, “in contrast to Gadamer, understanding [for Ricoeur] is not a product of commonality, whether presupposed or supposedly created dialogically” as we “do not finally hold in common language, meaning, history, tradition, or horizon.” Rather, for Ricoeur (2006, 25), “there is something foreign in every other” and the human condition is one of “multiplicity at all the levels of existence” (33). Understanding, thus requires translation and, crucially, “the arbitration of retranslating” (Ricoeur 2007, 29), making translation “a task... not in the sense of a restricting obligation, but in the sense of *the thing to be done* so that human action can simply continue” (Ricoeur 2006, 19; emphasis in original).

It is here that translaboration comes back into focus, and where the “hermeneutics of decipherment” (Maitland 2017, 38) is finally animated through the “paradox of productive reference” between philosophy and translation. The notion of translaboration allows us to understand the hermeneutic task of mutually productive decipherment between these two discursive fields not only as a *collaborative* endeavour of redescription among a network of interpretative agents, but also, and more fundamentally, as textual labour. In “The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality,” Ricoeur (1991, 129; emphases added) writes that “fiction reveals its ability to transform and transfigure reality only when it is inserted into something as a *labour*, in short, when it is a *work*.” The same can be, and effectively is, said for translation (Ricoeur 2006, 22). Translation is, of course, an inherently productive practice: productive of

textual commodities which in themselves function as tokens of commercial, cultural, disciplinary, social or political exchange and productivity, as well as productive, rather than merely reproductive, of meaning. For Ricoeur, however, the work of translation is also allied to the psychoanalytic category of ‘working through’ as a process of repeating, elaborating and amplifying interpretations (Ricoeur 2006, 22; see Ricoeur 2007, 24). Such mimetic work of translation produces – between texts as well as between disciplines – “equivalence without identity” (Ricoeur 2006, 22) much as “only the image which does not already have its referent in reality is able to display a world” (Ricoeur 1991, 129). It is the site of a perpetual articulation of textual, discursive, and thus also disciplinary polysemy – an articulation, however, that is not the result of any immediately reciprocal dialogue, but of a mutually translaborative endeavour in which, to quote Ricoeur slightly out of context, “great textual ensembles meet and meet again in my reading, giving rise, through a mutual interpretation, to attempts at translating one ensemble into the other” (Ricoeur 2007, 30).

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