International Gramsci Journal

Volume 3
Issue 4 *Gramsci und Benjamin – Passagen: Gramsci and Benjamin – Bridges / Reviews*

Article 5

2020

The Tasks of Translatability

Peter Thomas

The Tasks of Translatability

Abstract

While Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" has long been considered one of the fundamental texts of translation theory, Gramsci's important remarks on the question of translatability were not noted in the canonical studies of the history of translation theory nor, for a long time, in Gramscian studies themselves. Nevertheless, the notion of translatability plays a crucial role in the general economy of the Prison Notebooks. This paper proposes a dialogical reading 'against the grain' of three constellations of some of Gramsci and Benjamin's key concepts regarding the nature of translation and its philosophical presuppositions and implications. These constellations revolve around the Gramscian notions of hegemony, of translation between ethico-political contexts, and of reciprocal translatability; they are here read through the Benjaminian notions of translation as generative of the 'afterlife' of a literary work, as participating in a 'pure language' that functions as translation's 'horizon', and as constituting an 'echo' of the original text in a new linguistic and historical context. The encounter of Gramsci and Benjamin is not only on their points of clear convergence but also on those points where they might seem to diverge: this forms the basis for translation and transposition between their respective thought-worlds – a translation that at the same time represents an attempt to open their works up to their immanent transformation.

Keywords

Gramsci, Benjamin, Lenin, Derrida, Translatability, Hegemony, Language, Living Philology

The Tasks of Translatability[1]

Peter D. Thomas

1. "Something hasn't been understood".

A man who had spent much of his adult life exiled in foreign lands suddenly found himself confronted with an unexpected incomprehension at home. In a meeting of speakers of his native language and a Babelian gathering from around the world, he realized that he both understood and yet could not understand what had been said. His confusion arose, however, not from the intrusion of an unrecognized voice of the other, but from the uncanny distance of his mother tongue. Speaking during one of his rare appearances at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International on the 13th November 1922, Lenin made the following remarks about the newly minted and much contested politics of the United Front:

> At the Third Congress, in 1921, we adopted a resolution on the organisational structure of the Communist Parties and on the methods and content of their activities. The resolution is an excellent one, but it is almost entirely Russian, that is to say, everything in it is based on Russian conditions. This is its good point, but it is also its failing. It is its failing because I am sure that no foreigner can read it […] it is too Russian […] not because it is written in Russian – it has been excellently translated into all languages – but because […] we have not learnt how to present our Russian experience to foreigners [in such a way that they might be able to] assimilate part of the Russian experience.[2]

The problem that Lenin posed for consideration by the assembled delegates of the self-characterized 'party of world revolution' (unlike in earlier Congresses, now supported by the services of a professional translation bureau) was clearly not the problem of translation in a limited sense, as linguistically accurate

[1] A previous version of this text was presented at the Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften (IFK), Vienna, on 23rd May 2019 as a keynote lecture during the conference 'Passagen: Walter Benjamin and Antonio Gramsci', organized by the Arbeitsgruppe Kulturwissenschaften / Cultural Studies at the University of Vienna. I am grateful to the attendees at the lecture and participants in the conference, particularly Ingo Pohn-Lauggas and Birgit Wagner, for critical remarks and suggestions.

[2] Lenin 1965b, pp. 431-2.

'reproduction'. Rather, it was what has come to be known more recently as the broader problem of 'cultural translation'.[3] For Lenin, the translation of experiences from one cultural context to another could not be successfully undertaken mechanically or passively, with the simple re-presentation of meanings derived from the so-called 'source language' in the 'target language', to use the classic binary opposition structuring so much reflection on translation, even today. In the debate over the United Front in which Lenin was intervening, such a conception of origins and transfers would simply mean the imposition of the policy by the Russian centre on its 'periphery' in the Western European Communist Parties – precisely the position against which Lenin had consistently argued.[4] Rather, the problem Lenin posed was instead one of understanding translation as an active process of dialogue, in which 'meaning' is not univocal or constant, but plural and continually changing in context, retrospectively and prospectively.

As Lenin was well aware, more depended upon the success of this particular translational praxis than is normally the case, when the humble translator merely seeks to avoid censure from pedants, publishers and associated Platonists, and can at most hope to be rewarded with 'invisibility'.[5] Now the stakes were much higher: the success of the revolution, not only in Russia, depended upon finding a way quickly to make comprehensible the slogans, policies and programmes that had been generated in the long history of Russian Social Democracy for a Communist movement that was by now truly global in its linguistic reach.[6] It was not only words that needed to be communicated; even more crucial was the 'assimilation' of the 'experience' of a successful revolution into the habits, perspectives and world-views of the international audience at the Fourth Congress, as prelude to their own practical translation into the revolutionary politics of their own countries.

[3] On the broad notion of cultural translation, see Homi Bhabha 1994; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 2007, pp. 263-76; Budick and Iser (eds), 1996.

[4] 'The Equivalential Fallacy' might be offered as a summary of the errors Lenin detected in those western European far leftists in the early 1920s who had thought they were presenting 'faithful' translations of the militancy of the Russian Revolution while completely misreading its significance. See Lenin 1965a, pp. 17-118.

[5] Lawrence Venuti, 1995.

[6] On the development of the 'relations of translation' and the shifting relations of linguistic prestige in the early years of the Third International, see Sergei Chernov 2016, pp. 135-66.

The translation of the strategic perspective of the United Front had failed, according to Lenin, not because any particular text among the many translations of the resolution from the Third Congress had inadequately conveyed the 'meaning' of 'an original' that they were supposed merely neutrally to 'transpose'. Rather, this translational failure consisted in an inadequacy within the original itself. 'The original' – both the text of the resolution and the experiences in which it in turn had its 'origins' – had not known how to (re)formulate itself in relation to its now unexpectedly intimate other. The original formulation of the United Front, that is, had not known that it would be called upon not simply to speak for itself, but to carry the conditions of its 'translatability' within itself as constitutive of what it was, rather than a later supplement or addition.[7]

2. The Tasks of the Translators

A year before Lenin's sobering assessment of the failures of the nascent international communist movement, a still young German writer was filled with anxiety that his soon to be published foray into the increasingly crowded field of German versions of Baudelaire might itself be judged a translational failure. His response was to write a preface entitled 'The Task of the Translator' [*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*].[8]

Even though Walter Benjamin had at that time read little Marx and even less Lenin, it is remarkable how similar his fundamental orientation to the question of translation was to the Russian revolutionary leader, despite their many obvious differences. For both Lenin and Benjamin, the practice of translation should be understood not as the mere reproduction of the already given, but as the production of something new in a different context. In Benjamin's terms, that stage of the 'continuing life' [*das Stadium ihres Fortlebens*] of a work of art that witnesses the emergence of its 'afterlife' [*das Überleben*] – the moment in which a work's 'translatability' [*Übersetzbarkeit*] is affirmed – is no mere repetition of

[7] The notion of translatability as constitutive of a text in this sense could thus be seen as similar to Derrida's views (extensively thematized in his critique of Searle in particular) regarding the constitutive nature of 'iterability' to writing as such. See Jacques Derrida, 1988 [1977].
[8] Walter Benjamin, 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', 1980 [1923], pp. 9-21; 'The Task of the Translator', 1996, pp. 253-63. On the cultural context in which Benjamin produced his translation and preface, and particularly his rivalry with Stefan George, see Brodersen, 1996, pp. 109-17.

an origin, but a retrospective transformation that redefines it.[9] Similarly, for both Lenin and Benjamin, genuine translation is not the simple transfer of what Benjamin calls an 'inessential content' from one place to another, but its transfiguration through temporal dislocation. It is precisely in this sense that Benjamin insists that a translation emerges not out of the life of the original itself, but only from its afterlife [*das Überleben*][10] Lenin's suggestion that overcoming the failed translation of the Russian experiences into western European tongues would involve a transformation of the Russian 'source language' just as much as the occidental 'target languages' recalls Benjamin's insistence that translation never occurs between two fixed entities, but only in the dialectical relation that both differentiates and simultaneously unifies them in what he calls a 'higher and purer atmosphere of language' [*Luftkreis der Sprache*] as such, in 'the pure language' [*die reine Sprache*].[11]

Again, if translation is a 'Form' for Benjamin, a specific form alongside other similarly specific forms of literary production, for Lenin translation is conceived as a particular agitational mode, in terms nevertheless qualitatively continuous with other modes of socio-political communication.[12] Lenin's concern to understand how the political knowledge produced in the unrepeatable events leading up to the Russian Revolution could be 'assimilated' rather than merely derivatively imitated by other communists finds its Benjaminian correlate in the notion of translation as a search for the 'echo of the original'. This echo is not given primordially in the original, however, but can only be constituted by determination in the totality of all languages.[13] Finally, for both Lenin and Benjamin, translation in the fullest sense represents the fulfilment of a promise: the 'pure language' that Benjamin sees as both (retrospectively posited) precondition and consequence of translation rigorously practised realizes the promise inherent in

[9] 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', p. 11; 'The Task of the Translator', p. 254 (translation modified). I have preferred the processual notion of 'continuing' to Zohn's more static 'continued life' to render *das Fortleben* in order to emphasize the developmental and ongoing dimension that I take to inform Benjamin's strategic use of this notion, particularly in its distinction from 'afterlife' [*das Überleben*], as discussed below.

[10] 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', p. 9, p. 10; 'The Task of the Translator', p. 253, p. 254.

[11] 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', p. 14, p. 13; 'The Task of the Translator', p. 257 (translation modified).

[12] 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', p. 9; 'The Task of the Translator', p. 254.

[13] 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', p. 16; 'The Task of the Translator', p. 258.

language as material form of human sociality, as unity of diverse intentions, just as for Lenin the translation of revolutionary experiences should culminate in the promise of no merely national or particular revolution, but of world revolution as such.

'The Task of the Translator', despite its author's initial anxiety, has achieved a phenomenal success. It has been defined by no less an authority than George Steiner as one of the most innovative contributions to translation theory not only in the twentieth century, but in the entire western literary and philosophical tradition.[14] It has stimulated a wide range of reflections from Derrida, de Man and Spivak to contemporary theorists such as Emily Apter and Barbara Cassin. It is an irony that seems both to affirm and to deny some of Benjamin's central propositions in 'The Task of the Translator' that the success and extensive influence of this text has frequently involved heated debates over claimed 'mistranslations' of Benjamin's original 'words' and 'intentions'.[15]

A similar success has not been enjoyed by the theorization of translation developed by another writer who was young in the early 1920s. Present in Moscow as a representative of the Communist Party of Italy, Antonio Gramsci had listened carefully to Lenin's words at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International. They made such a strong impression upon him that he repeatedly recalled them over ten years later in the texts that have become known as the *Prison Notebooks*.[16] Among them were four notebooks

[14] George Steiner, 1998, p. 283. Steiner lists Benjamin as one of the few to have said 'anything fundamental or new about translation' alongside Seneca, Saint Jerome, Luther, Dryden, Hölderlin, Novalis, Schleiermacher, Nietzsche, Ezra Pound, Valéry, MacKenna, Franz Rosenzweig and Quine. The bibliography on the reception of Benjamin's essay in numerous languages is now immense; Susan Ingram (1997, pp. 207-33) provides a survey of the initial anglophone debate in her '"The Task of the Translator": Walter Benjamin's Essay in English, a *Forschungsbericht*', *TTR*.

[15] See, in particular, Steven Rendall (1997, pp. 191-206). The most influential discussion of the significance of different approaches to translating this text was undoubtedly that stimulated by Derrida and de Man's divergent readings; see Derrida, 1985a, pp. 165-207; and de Man (1986), pp. 73-105.

[16] *Q*7§2, p. 854, November 1930 (*PN*, Vol. 3, p. 157). Gramsci again recalls Lenin's remarks at the beginning of section V of *Q*11 (Q11§46, p. 1468; *FSPN*, p. 306), presumably penned in August 1932. As Peter Ives (2004, pp. 100-101) notes, Gramsci confuses the date of Lenin's address to the Fourth Congress in 1922 (which Gramsci himself witnessed) with the Third Congress of 1921, to which Lenin in his remarks refers. References to Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* are given according to Valentino Gerratana's Italian critical edition of the *Quaderni del carcere* (Gramsci 1975), following the internationally established standard of notebook number (*Q*), number of note (§), and page number. (For English-language translations of the quotations, see under Gramsci in the *Bibliography*). Dates of individual notes are given according to

in which Gramsci refined his skills as a translator (particularly from German to Italian), and a series of notes on the theme of translation and translatability that were revisited, revised and transcribed primarily between 1930 and 1932, but in some instances extending also to 1935. These notes eventually assumed a prominent position in one of Gramsci's most organically coherent notebooks, Notebook 11, which aimed to provide a new type of introduction to the study of philosophy. Gramsci's novel reflections on the philosophical, historical and political significance of translation and particularly his distinctive formulation of the notion of translatability, however, are not noted in any of the now canonical studies on the history of translation theory. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, until relatively recently, Gramsci simply didn't exist in the field of translation studies.[17]

The situation was admittedly not radically different even in the field of Gramscian studies for a long period. The theme of translation and translatability did not play a prominent role in the first phase of Gramsci's widespread international reception, in the 1960s and 1970s, when attention to Gramsci's philosophical, political and historical insights tended to push a range of other themes very much into the shade (the neglect of Gramsci's contribution to the philosophy of language in this period is a notable case study).[18] The publication of Valentino Gerratana's critical edition of the *Prison Notebooks* in 1975 did little to change this state of affairs in a positive sense. In an otherwise scrupulous attempt to present the *Prison Notebooks* to contemporary readers just as Gramsci had written them, Gerratana's edition in fact excluded

---

the chronology established in Gianni Francioni (1984) and the revisions contained in the appendix to Cospito, 2011, pp. 896-904.

[17] Gramsci is not discussed in Steiner's classic study (who does however reference Croce and Gentile), just as he is absent from most other influential histories of translation theory; see, for instance, Susan Bassnett-McGuire, 1980; Jean-René Ladmiral, 1994. He is similarly excluded from major anthologies of texts on theories and histories of translation; see, for instance, Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (eds), 1992; and Lawrence Venuti, 2000. Remarkably, Gramsci's theory of translatability is not even mentioned in the otherwise comprehensive and more recent *Dictionary of Untranslatables. A Philosophical Lexicon*, (Cassin [ed.], 2014 [2004].

[18] Among the first studies to emphasize the significance of Gramsci's university training in historical linguistics was Franco Lo Piparo (1979). More recent studies, alongside Peter Ives's previously cited book, include Giancarlo Schirru's exhaustive study of Gramsci's Turin years (Schirru 2011, pp. 925-73) and the fundamental work of Alessandro Carlucci (Carlucci, 2013). It is obviously not coincidental that the recovery of Gramsci's linguistic reflections has occurred in the same period in which attention has also turned to his thoughts on translation and translatability.

the vast majority of Gramsci's own translations.[19] Although this omission and its deleterious impact upon our understanding of the context and significance of Gramsci's 'own' notes was forcefully highlighted by Lucia Borghese in 1981, it was only in 2007 that these translations were finally published in full in the new *Edizione nazionale*, in the first volumes of the section dedicated to Gramsci's carceral production under the editorship of Gianni Francioni.[20]

In the intervening period, the revival of Gramscian studies founded upon more rigorous philological and historico-critical principles both in Italy and abroad has redimensioned our understanding of the complexity of the *Prison Notebooks* and particularly the 'rhythm' of thought that traverses them. Thanks to this new season of studies, we can now see that translation is not merely one among the many themes explored in the *Prison Notebooks*. Both the practice and theory of translation instead play a crucial role in the general economy of the overall development of Gramsci's carceral writing project.[21] Above all, the distinctive non-essentialist notion of 'translatability' matures during Gramsci's years in prison into one of the central methodological innovations of his proposed reformulation of Marxism as a 'philosophy of praxis' and as a 'living philology'.

3. Philology and Politics between Gramsci and Benjamin

The relationship of Benjamin and Gramsci's thoughts on translation has already been the subject of a number of significant studies, though admittedly far fewer than those that have explored their more general affinities in terms of the novel forms of their post-

[19] For a discussion of the reasons for this exclusion, see Valentino Gerratana, 'Prefazione', in Gramsci (1975), pp. xxxvii-viii. Giuseppe Cospito (2011) synthesizes and extends the scholarship that demonstrates why Gerratana's assessment of the relation between the translations and the other writings Gramsci composed in prison now needs to be completely revised.

[20] Lucia Borghese (1981, pp. 635-65); Antonio Gramsci (2007a).

[21] André Tosel's work, from the same period as Borghese's, constitutes an important early exception; see Tosel (1981) Significant early contributions on Gramsci's concept of translatability, alongside more recent studies, are collected in Ives and Lacorte (eds), 2010. The most extended studies of Gramsci's theory of translatability are the pathbreaking works by Derek Boothman (2004a, p. 247-66; and 2004b). The relevance of Gramsci to more recent theories of cultural translation has been highlighted by both by Giorgio Baratta (2007) and Birgit Wagner (2012). Fabio Frosini places the distinctive notion of translatability at the centre of the reconstruction of Gramsci's philosophical thought in Frosini (2010), as well as in numerous other texts. More recently, among a burgeoning field, see the important contributions of Martín Cortés (2015); Romain Descendre and Jean-Claude Zancarini (2016); Giuseppe Cospito (2017, pp. 47-65); Giuliano Guzzone (2018); and Stephen Shapiro and Neil Lazarus (2018, pp. 1-36).

humous works, their theories of modernity, their explanations for the rise of fascism, or their criticisms of the emerging Marxist orthodoxies of their day.[22] In this text, I propose a dialogical reading 'against the grain' of three constellations of some of their key concepts. My aim here is both to explore the tensions and transformations that emerge in the development of their respective works – in Gramsci's words, their 'rhythm of thought' – and also to problematize influential understandings of each writer's theory of the nature of translation and of its philosophical presuppositions and implications. These constellations revolve around the Gramscian notions of hegemony, of translation between different ethico-political contexts, and of reciprocal translatability. They are here read through the Benjaminian notions of translation as generative of the 'afterlife' of a literary work, as participating in a 'pure language' that functions as translation's 'horizon', and as constituting an 'echo' of the original text in a new linguistic and historical context.

First, Gramsci's research on the translation of political strategies and techniques from one socio-political formation and historical conjuncture to another – above all, evident in his translation of the Bolshevik notion of *gegemoniya* into what became his signature concept of *egemonia* – is here read in relation to Benjamin's reflections on the 'afterlife' of a text as the affirmation of its constitutive translatability.

Second, the historicist theory of the potential for translation between different national and linguistic cultures developed in the *Prison Notebooks* is viewed through the lens of Benjamin's theory of the 'pure language' towards which translation strives, the horizon of the totality of the relations of all languages that translation alone can produce.

Third, Gramsci's development of a non-essentialist theory of the reciprocal translatability of discourses, conceived not simply as systems of signification but as conflicting or reinforcing forms of socio-political organization and action, is used to rethink

[22] Studies dedicated specifically to a comparison between Gramsci and Benjamin's theorisation of translation include André Tosel (1996, pp. 55-66); Peter Ives (2004, pp. 97-133); and most recently, the important study of Saša Hrnjez (2019, pp. 40-71). I also recall here the IGS-sponsored conference held in Naples in 2003, 'Dialoghi del carcere: Gramsci incontra Benjamin', at which the sadly departed Giorgio Baratta and Domenico Jervolino presented significant papers. The more general comparative study of Gramsci and Benjamin has been explored by a number of authors, though rarely in great textual detail; Daniel Bensaïd's *oeuvre* represents a significant exception, as do the other articles collected in this issue of the *International Gramsci Journal.*

Benjamin's notion of the 'echo' of the original in translation in non-foundational terms.

In each case, it is the encounter of Gramsci and Benjamin not only on their points of clear convergence, but even more signify-cantly, on those points where they might seem to diverge, that forms the basis for translation and transposition between their respective thought-worlds – a translation that at the same time represents an attempt to open their works up to their immanent transformation.

4. The 'Afterlife' of Hegemony

While the early international reception of Gramsci's work, particularly in the anglophone New Left, sometimes erroneously regarded hegemony as a concept of Gramsci's own coinage, more recent studies have focused upon the multiple sources that were synthesized in the *Prison Notebooks* in this now widely influential political word. What has perhaps been less noted are the complex politics of translation that mark the history of hegemony, from its elaboration in a variety of historical, political and philosophical contexts in ancient Greece, its descent into 'untranslatability' for well over a millennia, to its revival in the classical inheritances of early nineteenth century European nationalisms and later transposition and development in early Russian Social Democracy.[23]

Relations of translation are also central to Gramsci's own usage of the word, both before and during imprisonment. Gramsci's precarceral activism as party leader can in large part be regarded as an extended 'translational mediation' on the significance of the debates about hegemony and its relation to the politics of the United Front that he had encountered amongst the Bolshevik leaders during his period in Moscow in 1922-3. That this translation was not simply an imitative transposition of a word from East to West is evident by the significant historical, formal, methodological and conceptual innovations that Gramsci introduced to the concept of hegemony, particularly in the *Prison Notebooks*.

[23] On the development of hegemony among the classical Greek historians, see John Wickersham (1994). For the most comprehensive surveys of the conceptual history of hegemony, see Bruno Bongiovanni and Luigi Bonanate (1993, pp. 470-77); Giuseppe Cospito (2016, pp. 49-88); Derek Boothman (2008, pp. 201-15), which analyses the multiple currents that flowed into Gramsci's thinking about hegemony.

Historically, Gramsci extends the range of the concept, from early twentieth century Russia back to eighteenth and nineteenth century Western Europe. Formally, the concept of hegemony had functioned in the debates of Russian social democracy as the advocacy of the emergence of a qualitatively different form of political relationality, outside the institutional structures of an exclusionary absolutism; in Gramsci's translation, it is instead often used to analyse social formations (France, Italy, and so forth) defined by the consolidation of the principle of popular sovereignty and its simultaneous practical neutralization, by means of the passive inclusion of popular political forces in an established bourgeois hegemonic project; 'passive revolution' is the term that Gramsci gradually comes to propose for this translation of hegemony into the context of the bourgeois politics of the modern parliamentary state and its transmogrification under Fascism.[24] Methodologically, Gramsci translates hegemony from the register of the political programme, where hegemony functions both strategically and prefiguratively, to that of historico-political analysis, in which the concept operates as description and critique.

The decisively new addition that Gramsci made to the range of meanings of hegemony, however, consisted in his translation of it into the 'political language' of the Italian debate in the 1920s on the nature of political authority, particularly in terms of the relation between 'force and consent'. It was a debate that occurred on numerous fronts, but which was, in conceptual terms, particularly refracted through the lens of the contemporary discussion of Machiavelli.[25] The theme of a dialectical tension between 'force and consent' constitutes one of the ways (but by no means the only way) in which Gramsci theorizes hegemony in the *Prison Notebooks*. This couplet has no precise counterpart in the Bolshevik discussions from which Gramsci drew his initial inspiration. In the Russian debate, hegemony was primarily used to theorize the specific difficulties of political, social and cultural leadership and mobilization

[24] I have elsewhere analysed the gradual emergence of the notion of 'passive revolution' in the *Prison Notebooks* in relation to the concepts of hegemony and particularly 'the revolution in permanence'. See Peter D. Thomas 2020, pp. 117-46).

[25] The notion of a 'political language' is used here in the sense developed particularly in Pocock (1989). Regarding the debate on force and consent in Italy in the 1920s, particularly in relation to contemporary Machiavelli scholarship and commentary, see Leonardo Paggi (1970, pp. 372 et sqq.); Michele Fiorillo in Giasi (ed. 2008, pp. 839-59); Fabio Frosini (2013, pp. 545-89).

(among allied subaltern classes), while themes of coercion (exercised over non-allied classes) were discussed in terms of the related but distinct notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat.[26] Nevertheless, such has been the success of this particular translation that some later interpreters have taken the couplet of force and consent to constitute a 'hard core' of the notion of hegemony itself, not only in Gramsci or the Russian context, but throughout its entire long journey from ancient Greece to contemporary critical theory.[27]

Gramsci's various translations of hegemony can be understood as a particularly pointed demonstration of Benjamin's notion that the translatability of a text is only confirmed in its 'afterlife' [*das Überleben*]. This afterlife does indeed emerge at a particular moment of a text's 'continuing life' [*das Fortleben*], but is qualitatively distinct from it. A translation for Benjamin may seem to issue 'from the original' (itself never identical to itself, because always transformed by its continuing life even before it is translated); but as he immediately adds, the translation emerges 'not so much from [the original's] life as from its afterlife'.[28] Contra an influential tradition of interpretation that sees Benjamin's argument here as uncertainly caught between a Platonism of origins and a messianism of ends, translation in 'The Task of the Translator' is not depicted as the result of the 'survival' of an originary translatability; it is not merely a 'living on' of what was already there in potential.[29] On the con-

[26] Craig Brandist (2015) provides an exhaustive account of the importance of hegemony in Russian Social Democracy, both before and particularly after the revolution.

[27] Perry Anderson's reconstruction of the history of hegemony in *The H-Word* (Anderson, 2017) is entirely based upon this anachronistic projection of a theme from the 1920s (refracted through a particular reading of the *Prison Notebooks* that was affirmed in the early 1960s, and remains today one of the most influential understandings of the nature of hegemony) back onto periods in which the word hegemony was deployed on the basis of very different coordinates and presuppositions. It leads him to neglect significant variations in hegemony's semantic field in Ancient Greece (particularly in ethical discourses), in pre-Risorgimento Italy (Gioberti is entirely absent from his history) and in post-Revolutionary Russia (particularly in Lenin's last writings on cultural revolution).

[28] 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', p. 10; 'The Task of the Translator', p. 254. For Benjamin's claim of the original's transformation through time, see p. 12; p. 256. Zohn's translation does not maintain the distinction between *fortleben* and *überleben*, sometimes using afterlife to render them both. Compare, for instance, the text of his translation with Benjamin's own words regarding the relation of the original, its continuing life, stage of fame and translation: p. 11; p. 255.

[29] Derrida's emphasis upon the notion of translation as a 'sur-vival' – in effect, collapsing the distinct meanings that I am arguing Benjamin ascribed to *fortleben* and *überleben* – leads him to think translation in terms of 'living on', inheritance, and ultimately a mourning for the loss of origins; as Derrida once revealingly remarked, in translation 'one always has to postulate an original', even if it is only to deny its authenticity (Derrida, 1985b, p. 147). See also, in addition

trary, while for Benjamin a translation occurs during the continuing life of a text and marks a decisive stage of its development (what he refers to as its 'fame' [*Ruhm*]), its 'afterlife', conceived as a distinct mode of its existence in discontinuity with its 'pre-translated' state, is itself only concretely realized in the achieved fact of a translation. It is this achievement that retrospectively redefines a text's origins and determines the very translatability [*Übersetzbarkeit*] of what only now can be seen as 'the original'.[30]

The translatability of hegemony did not derive from some mythical quality that was already 'there' in the 'original' Greek word, and which its subsequent translations have only more or less adequately approximated without ever exactly reproducing. It was rather the history of its reception and interpretation that retrospectively reordered the field of its visibility and determined its capacity to speak differently in different historical epochs. Gramsci's translations of hegemony and their influence on subsequent understandings of its history and meaning provide an almost paradigmatic case study of the fact that a word is not born translatable, but only becomes so. The becoming translatable of a word is ultimately determined not by the force of its origins but by the history of the effects that a word's resonance in different contexts generate as the traces of its always excessive afterlife.

---

to 'Des Tours du Babel' (Derrida 1985a), both 'Living On' and 'Border Lines', in Bloom (1979 [1978]). One of the most penetrating accounts of Derrida's notion of translation is Kathleen Davis (2001); see in particular her discussion of Derrida's reading of Benjamin on pp. 40-46). Derrida's notion of the simultaneously totally translatable and totally untranslatable arises from this (often implicit) postulation, one he shares with many contemporary theorists of the untranslatable. A similar conflation is at work in de Man's reading, which closely associates *Überleben* with the notion of late maturation [*Nachreife*]; see his 'Conclusion: On Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"', p. 85. In the cases of both Derrida and de Man, Benjamin's sometimes organic metaphors lead them to overlook the extent to which the notion of afterlife represents not the 'original' text's temporal continuity (even in a sublated sense), but instead the rupture of its retrospective and dialectical reconfiguration.

[30] It is in this sense that I read Benjamin's argument that a translation 'comes later than the original' and that translatability is 'immanent' [*innewohnt*] to the original (p. 10; p. 254, translation modified) not in terms of the temporal priority accorded by the mimetic theoretical tradition to the original (translation as derivative imitation), but in terms of retrospective reconfiguration. In translational praxis, a previously singular instance is redefined by its insertion into a manifestly constructed 'causal' sequence; an 'original' only becomes such at the moment of its supposed repetition in translation, before which it was simply indeterminate even in relation to itself. This is not a question of how translation 'modifies the original', as Derrida suggests (1985b, p. 122), because prior to translation there was no 'original' text at all in this sense. It is rather the problem of how the original text is constituted as an origin only in the process of translation. For an important discussion of the complexity of Benjamin's relation to the mimetic tradition, see Andrew Benjamin (1989).

5. The 'Ursprache' of 'Pure Language'

Gramsci's research regarding an historicist theory of the possibility of translation between different cultures can be regarded as a theoretical generalization of the impulse behind his expansive practical translations of hegemony. Here Gramsci's privileged reference was *The Holy Family*, where Marx, following upon a theme in Kant, Hegel and Heine,[31] argues that the political language of the French revolution (particularly what Gramsci glosses as 'Jacobin phraseology') 'corresponds to' and 'can be translated into' the language of classical German philosophy.[32] In an early version of this argument, Gramsci argues, following Marx, that 'the formulae of French politics of the revolution can be reduced [*si riducono*] to the principles of classical German philosophy', in a relationship of distillation.[33] How could such a translation between two distinct linguistic and cultural registers be possible?

In a significant line of research, particularly in notebooks 4 and 8 but also in notebooks 11 and 15,[34] Gramsci seems to argue that such a translation could occur because different cultural and linguistic expressions are fundamentally only different ways of comprehending similar, if not the same, socio-political and cultural experiences, diversely expressed in different languages and genres due to different national traditions and institutions. In other words, French politics and German philosophy – and, Gramsci soon adds, following Engels and Lenin, English political economy – would be translatable because they represent particular forms of comprehension and expression of a more general if not universal experience, namely, the uneven emergence of political modernity in each of those social formations. For such a perspective, linguistic or cultural diversity seems to be grounded in the commonality or commensurability of a

[31] Gramsci discusses the lineage at length in *Q*8§208, p. 1066-7, (*PN* Vol. 3, pp. 355-6) February-March 1932, adding to the traditional German line of inheritance the Italian Carducci.

[32]The reference to the Jacobins occurs in *Q*1§44, p. 51 (*PN* Vol. 1, p. 148), February-March 1930; the reverberations of the historical experience of Jacobinism, both in France and internationally, remains a constant concern throughout the *Prison Notebooks*. The notion of a 'correspondence' between languages is formulated both in *Q*1§44 and, not for the last time, in *Q*4§42, p. 467 (*PN* Vol. 2, p. 191), October 1930.

[33] *Q*3§48, p. 331 (*PN* Vol. 2, p. 51), June-July 1930.

[34] See in particular *Q*15§64, p. 1828-9 (*FSPN*, pp. 314-5), June-July 1933, in which Gramsci uses the comparison of revolutionary France and philosophical Germany as a model for comprehending the relations between Greece and Rome.

seemingly 'pre-linguistic' experience.[35] Gramsci will even resort, in early 1932, to traditional metaphors of the Marxist tradition, arguing that 'two structures have equivalent and reciprocally translatable superstructures'.[36] He explains this position in more extended terms several months later, in the Summer of 1932. He argues that

> translatability presupposes that a given phase of civilization has a 'fundamentally' identical cultural expression, even if the language is historically different, determined by the particular tradition of each national culture and each philosophical system, by the predominance of an intellectual or practical activity etc. Thus we should see if translatability is possible between expressions of different phases of civilization, insofar as these phases are moments of development from one to the other, and are thus mutually integrated, or if a given expression can be translated with terms of a previous phase of the same civilization, a previous phase, however, which is more comprehensible than the given language etc.[37]

Translatability in this version seems to be determined by the existence of a fundamental identity or even 'universalism' (within certain geopolitical limits) underlying and informing different cultures and languages, which are grasped as merely epiphenomenal, or superstructural elements that comprehend a phenomenal if not noumenal base. Translation in this perspective would thus appear to be premised on a detour via the generic, or a commonality of shared historical experience.

Even more intriguing are the claims that frame and supplement this argument. Gramsci had begun this note by asking 'if the reciprocal translatability of various philosophical and scientific languages is a "critical" element that belongs to every conception of the world, or only to the philosophy of praxis (in an organic way) and only partially able to be appropriated by other philosophies'. He concludes by stating that 'it thus seems that one can say that

[35] Derek Boothman (2004a) explores the complexity of this dimension of Gramsci's theory not only in comparison to dominant theories of translation, but particularly in relation to major 'realist' paradigms of philosophy and history of science in the twentieth century. Fabio Frosini (2010) formulates Gramsci's notion of the linguistic diversity that underwrites the possibility of translation in terms that draw upon similar presuppositions: 'languages say the same thing in different ways; or better, they can say the same thing because they are different. There is thus a difference that not only does not impede, but rather is that which makes identity possible' (p. 31); 'the different national traditions need to be deciphered as different forms of response to historical problems … fundamentally identical' (p. 176).

[36] *Q*8§208, p. 1066-7 (*PN*, Vol. 3, p. 356) , February-March 1932.

[37] *Q*11§47, p. 1468 (*FSPN*, p. 307), August-December 1932.

only in the philosophy of praxis is "translation" organic and profound, while from other points of view it is often a simple game of generic "schematisms"".[38] Read quickly, and in a way contrary to Gramsci's arguments elsewhere, it might seem that with this formulation Gramsci is suggesting that Marxism has a privileged access to a 'grammar' of universal history.[39] It would be on the basis of activating this grammar, almost as a decoding machine, that translation between different particular languages or cultural paradigms would become possible. In other words, Marxism – and, seemingly, particularly Gramsci's version of it as a philosophy of praxis – would be represented as a metanarrative, within which other narratives can be integrated and subsequently deciphered.

With such an emphasis upon a foundational paradigm, there might seem here to be some similarities to Benjamin's conception that translation involves access to a 'pure language' [*reine Sprache*], or as he also puts it in in continuity with other themes in his thought from the early 1920s such as 'true politics', a 'true language' [*wahre Sprache*]. [40] Steiner provides a representative example of this interpretation. For him, Benjamin's 'pure language' should be understood as that which 'precedes and underlies' other languages. He characterizes it as a 'universal language' or 'origin' to which the translation, in its derivative role, seeks to 'return', a 'common source' of all languages. Steiner even goes so far as to characterize Benjamin's 'pure language' explicitly as an '*Ur-sprache*'.[41] It is a reading that is effectively in continuity with some of the previously discussed interpretations of Benjamin's theory of translation that emphasize, with whatever qualifications, the importance of determining an origin for the translational process.

What such a reading neglects is the 'regulative' rather the founding force of pure language for Benjamin. The pure language does not subsist in the 'life' or even 'continuing life' of a text, but always by definition exceeds it. A glimpse of such a pure language –

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] 'Contrary to his insights elsewhere', because Gramsci was a consistently fierce critic of the type of abstract universalism embodied in the enthusiasm for Esperanto in his time, including in the socialist movement. See *Q*3§76, p. 353 (*PN* Vol. 2, p. 73), August 1930; *Q*11§45, p. 1467 (*FSPN*, p. 304), August-December 1932; *Q*23§39, p. 2235 (*SCW*, p. 268), from July-August 1934.

[40] Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', p. 13; 'The Task of the Translator', p. 257. On the Kantian dimensions of the notion of 'true politics', see Massimiliano Tomba (2006).

[41] Steiner, *After Babel*, p. 66-7.

and only a glimpse – is given by a text's 'afterlife', or in other words, from that – fleeting and unrepeatable – moment when its translatability is affirmed in the concrete praxis of translation. The afterlife of a text cannot be predetermined, or even predicted, before this moment; it does not organically emerge from the continuing life of the text, but represents a radical rupture of such a teleological temporal continuum. In a similar way, the pure language that Benjamin posits in relation to translatability can only ever be determined retrospectively in the achieved unity of the relations of languages that are constructed actively in the various 'forms' of translation inherent in and constitutive of all modes of intentional communication, but particularly intensely in the specific 'form' of literary (especially poetic) translation.[42] Rather than a return to origins, what Benjamin's pure language instead offers in my view is an ultimately 'regulative' instance (in a Kantian sense) that constitutively could not be confirmed empirically in past or future. It represents an unreachable limit that orients the endless differentiation of translation rather than an end state in which identity is finally affirmed. It is, to modify one of Derrida's formulations inspired in part by Benjamin, a type of 'weak messianic power' without messianism, which refers not to origins or ends, but to the non-teleological purposiveness implicit in all forms of historical practice.[43]

In a structurally similar way, the relations of 'correspondence' between Jacobinism and classical German idealism may have later appeared to the critical tradition that Gramsci inherited and extended to be premised upon a "'fundamentally" identical cultural expression'. But this was not an equivalence simply given in a civilizational structure, waiting to be comprehended by more or less adequate interpreters. Rather, it was the active equation of these two significant ethico-political movements operated by this critical tradition itself that had enabled those distinct historical experiences

[42] Benjamin defines this 'pure language' as 'the totality of [all individual languages'] intentions supplementing one another', and further, as 'the harmony of all the various ways of thinking' [*die Harmonie all jener Arten des Meinens*]. 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', p. 14; 'The Task of the Translator', p. 257 (translation modified). While Zohn's rendition of 'all the various ways of meaning' in this context has the advantage of preserving Benjamin's juxtaposition between *meinen* and 'what is meant' [*das Gemeinte*] (elsewhere Zohn uses the vocabulary of intentionality), I have preferred to render it with the more generic 'way of thinking' in order to emphasize the processual nature of Benjamin's argument, and to avoid the confusion of this generic process with any particular content or significance (for Benjamin, *Sinn*, which Zohn also sometimes renders in English as 'meaning').

[43] An important immanent critique of Derrida's notion can be found in Sami Khatib (2013).

'to correspond' in retrospect, that is, in the communicational rather than identitarian sense of correspondence. The conditions for the affirmation of their reciprocal translatability were, in other words, not given in their origins; they were instead constructed politically in the ongoing translational process that is the history of the relations between them.

6. The 'Echo' of Origins

Gramsci's development of a distinctive notion of what he comes to call *reciprocal* translatability can be regarded as an attempt to explain, without falling into a 'schematism' of origins, primacy or goals, why it is only within the philosophy of praxis that translation can be 'organic and profound'. The notion of a reciprocity of translatability had already been introduced as a problematizing qualification in Gramsci's earliest notes in which translation was formulated in terms of "'reduction'" (tellingly, itself problematized by Gramsci's habit of the critical use of quotation marks).[44] The theme of reciprocity increases in importance throughout the *Prison Notebooks*, assuming a central role of conceptual clarification in Gramsci's late revisions to some of his earliest notes. In one of his final notebooks, for instance, the metaphor of a 'reduction' between France and Germany is abandoned, and he speaks instead, following Hegel, of the 'parallel and reciprocally translatable juridical-political language of the Jacobins and the concepts of classical German philosophy'.[45] Rather the conceiving translation in terms of foundational and secondary moments, this model instead explores translatability in terms of the primacy of the relation over the related terms, or in other words, in terms of a non-essentialist and post-foundationalist dialectical relationship.[46]

As so often in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci's engagement with Croce was decisive for these conceptual developments. Croce had famously theorized the impossibility of translation, of literary works and poetry in particular, because it 'diminishes' or 'despoils' the

[44] On Gramsci distinctive 'philology of the quotation mark', see Dario Ragazzini's important study (Ragazzini 2002 p. 17). The use of this critical technique is notable in *Q*3§48, p. 331 (*PN* Vol. 2, p. 51), June-July 1930, where Gramsci initially spoke of a 'reciprocal "reduction", so to speak', in a type of double problematization (graphically and idiomatically).

[45] *Q*19§24, p. 2028 (SPN, p.78), July-August 1934-February 1935. *Q*19§24 is a revision of the previously cited *Q*1§44.

[46] The relation of Gramsci's notions of translation and translatability to the dialectical tradition is creatively explored in Hrnjez's, 'Traducibilità, Dialettica, Contraddizione' (Hrnjez 2019).

original. [47] Croce's is a familiar Platonic gesture that depicts translation as yet another mimetic failure to transport the veracity and intensity of an origin into what are assumed to be its merely derivative copies. Translation for Croce must always fail (at least as far as aesthetic works are concerned) because the original work is posited to be, in its essence, a singular and unrepeatable fusion of intuition and expression; an exact replication of any such moment is by definition impossible. As Croce's former comrade in arms and later antagonist, Giovanni Gentile, had noted, this position at its limit makes the unity of the historical process inconceivable, for it negates the possibility of 'translation', or coherent transition, even from one historical moment to the next.[48]

Gramsci's quite different response to the presuppositions of Croce's line of reasoning is as brief as it is brutal: conceived in these identitarian terms, a 'perfect' translation may not be possible, he admits, before asking: but 'what language is exactly translatable into another language? What single word is exactly translatable into another language?'.[49] As Gramsci recognized, Croce's notion of the impossibility of translation is based upon at least two dubious presuppositions. First, it presupposes that translation, strictly conceived, should involve the mimetic reproduction of a pure original, or in other words, that translation should involve the (re)production of identity. It is as if translation ideally should involve a complete and total transfer of both content and form, almost as if it would empty out the original but only in order for the original to 're-present' itself in the 'copy' as its immutable self, in a journey that changes nothing. Second, the thesis of the impossibility of translation, despite its claims, in fact presupposes the theoretical possibility of such identity or equivalence, in order then to deny that this theoretical possibility is ever realized in any particular act of translation. Each empirical, particular act of translation is thereby measured against an absent universal possibility and found wanting. In other words, although there may regularly occur more or less successful acts of

[47] Benedetto Croce (1992 [1902], p. 76.).
[48] On the nexus of intuition-expression, see Benedetto Croce (1921, pp. 53-72, particularly p. 66). Gentile's attempt to think translation as a metaphor for the way in which the unity of spirit is secured against the Heraclitan flux of historical change can be found in Giovanni Gentile (1920, particularly pp. 372-3). On the debate between Croce and Gentile, considered in relation to Gramsci's notion of translatability, see the important contribution of Domenico Jervolino, 'Croce, Gentile and Gramsci on Translation' (Jervolino, 2010, pp. 29-38).
[49] *Q*11§48, p. 1470 (*FSPN*, p. 309), August-December 1932.

translation – success being determined differently in each case – translation as such, in its supposedly 'pure' form, never happens.

It is precisely such a 'pure' conception of translation, however, that Gramsci's development of the notion of reciprocal translatability puts in question. In its concrete historical reality, the practice of translation is never a pure transmission of an origin; were it pure in this sense, in a relation of identical, immediate and exhaustive re-presentation, there would be no need for translation in any sense at all, because it would always already have occurred in the origin's identity with itself. Translation always and necessarily begins *in media res*, overdetermined by broader existing relations of force between cultures, languages, genres, and so forth. It is the constitutive unevenness of these relations of force which establish the possibility or – what is the same thing – the need to translate in the first place. The notion of parallel and reciprocal translatability emphasizes the multi-directionality of this relation, as both so-called 'source language' and purported 'target language' are translated and retranslated into each other, without the privileging of any foundational instance.[50]

Reciprocal translation can be 'organic and profound' in the philosophy of praxis alone not because it represents a metanarrative of human history, or the type of *Ursprache* to which Benjamin's 'pure language' has often wrongly been reduced. Rather, the organic and profound translations effected by the philosophy of praxis are based upon the fact that its emphasis upon the practical constitution even and especially of thought annuls the metaphysical claim to a qualitative distinction between supposedly universal and purportedly particular discourses. It historically situates each of them as decisive elements in the organization of the socio-political realities that do not precede them, and which they therefore do not merely express after the fact, but which they literally constitute through their relations.[51] The relationship between theory and practice in this perspective is not to be conceived as application of the

[50] The notion of reciprocal translatability in this sense represents a concretization of Gramsci's allusive metaphor of an 'homogenous circle' in relations between discourses. See, for instance, *Q*4§46, p. 472 (*PN* Vol. 2, p. 196), October-November 1930, later revised in *Q*11§65, p. 1492 (*SPN*, p. 403), August-December 1932. For a careful analysis of the significance of this line of research, see Derek Boothman (2004b, p. 74 et sqq.).

[51] I have explored this dimension of the philosophy of praxis, particularly in Gramsci's critique of the metaphysical limits of Croce's idealist historicism, in Peter D. Thomas (2009, Chapter Seven).

former to the latter, but as the mutual and on-going translatability between discourses that depend upon each other to be that which they are, in a differential rather than identitarian relation. Translation becomes here not the successful or deficient imitation of an origin, but instead a mode of intervention into the practical reality of the relations of translatability between discourses that already constitute the possibility and reality of each and any discourse.

I would suggest that Benjamin's notion of the transformative 'echo' of the original in the translation should be read in such a dialectical optic, even as his metaphors in this text may seem to struggle to overcome the reliance of much translation theory in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries upon an ultimately Platonic rhetoric of origins. Just as 'pure language' for Benjamin neither precedes any particular language or text but emerges only as a horizon, fleetingly, in the practice of translation, so this 'echo' is not a repetition of something that was there in 'the original' itself. This echo is neither a return to a plenitude of origins, nor revelation of its destitution.[52] It is produced only in the relation between texts, a relation that does not and cannot pre-exist the practice of translation, as the concrete mode of their relating. Thus, when Benjamin writes that the task of the translator 'consists in finding that specific intention toward the language into which one is translating that awakens in that language the echo of the original', the notion of an echo functions to indicate the difference that translation retrospectively inserts into the original itself, which now cannot be thought except via its 'reverberation' in translation.[53] This echo does not re-present the meaning [*Sinn*] of the original, but re-activates and extends its 'way of thinking' [*Art des Meinens*] in

[52] Romain Descendre and Jean-Claude Zancarini, 'De la traduction à la traductibilité' (Descendre and Zancarini 2016), see Benjamin's notion of an echo as a return to origins in a foundational-temporal sense, while De Man effectively understands it a revelation of the essentially disarticulated nature of the original itself (the pure form of language as such, bereft of the 'illusion of meaning'). See 'Conclusion: On Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"' (de Man, 1984, p. 84).

[53] 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', p. 16; 'The Task of the Translator', p. 258. Benjamin's notion of an echo comprehended in this sense bears comparison to T. S. Eliot's almost contemporaneous formulation of the notion of an 'objective correlative' as a 'formula' or 'a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events' that is capable of 're-evoking' a particular emotion in poetry, or more precisely, of 're-evoking' 'normal', non-poetic emotion in the type of emo-tional response distinctive to poetic sensibility. As with Benjamin's echo, this re-evocation in fact constitutes an entirely new experience – an experience proper to the poetic – that is not a reproduction of its supposed forerunner, but which reacts back upon it, redefining its immediacy in relation to the mediation of the poetic. See T. S. Eliot (1921, p. 92).

an entirely different context.[54] It thereby reorders the possibility of meaning and thinking in both 'source' and 'target' languages, in a dialectic of reciprocal transformation.

7. Living Philology

It is in the combination of perspectives from these three constellations – retrospective reconfiguration, politically constructed correspondence, and reciprocal translatability – that there emerges the distinctive features of Gramsci's reformulation of the Marxist tradition: the study of 'definite and precise "individualities"',[55] undertaken not speculatively, but by means of "'active and conscious co-participation'" and "'compassionality'", 'through a system that one could call "living philology"'.[56] It is this focus on the 'experience of immediate particulars', and the non-hierarchical relations of reciprocal translatability that they can establish between themselves without subsumption to a universal instance, Gramsci argues, that represents the fundamental methodological innovation introduced by the philosophy of praxis.

A similar orientation towards the relations of singular experiences traverses Benjamin's work in its various phases and significant internal differences. It finds one of its most eloquent formulations in a letter to Adorno from the late 1930s, in terms remarkably similar to those of Gramsci's notion of a 'living philology' as not only an historical method, but also as a political intervention. Benjamin here seems to expand the task that he had assigned to the translator in the early 1920s – of liberating a text from the weight of the past embodied in its 'continuing life' by endowing it with a qualitatively new afterlife oriented to the horizon of the pure language – into a general historical-materialist method for 'redeeming' [ambivalently positioned between *erlösen* and *einlösen*] the past from its imprisonment by and within the present.[57] 'The appearance of self-contained facticity that emanates from philological study and casts its spell on the scholar is dispelled according to the degree to which the object is constructed in

[54] 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', p. 18; 'The Task of the Translator', p. 260 (translation modified).
[55] *Q*7§6, p. 856 (*PN* Vol. 3, p. 159), November 1930.
[56] *Q*11§25, p. 1429 (*SPN* p. 429), July-August 1932.
[57] For an attempt to read (particularly the late) Benjamin's theologically inflected *Erlöung* in the profane terms of *Einlösung*, promise and possibility, see W. Hamacher (2005, pp. 38-68).

historical perspective. The lines of perspective in this conclusion, receding to the vanishing point, converge in our own historical experience. In this way, the object is constituted as a monad. In the monad, the textual detail which was frozen in a mythical rigidity comes alive'.[58]

Bibliography

Adorno T. W. / Benjamin, W. 1994, *Briefwechsel 1928-1940*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Anderson, P. 2017, *The H-Word. The Peripeteia of Hegemony*, London: Verso.

Baratta, G. 2007, *Antonio Gramsci in contrappunto. Dialoghi col presente*, Rome: Carocci.

Bassnett-McGuire, S. 1980, *Translation Studies*, London and New York: Methuen.

Benjamin, A. 1989, *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy. A New Theory of Words*, London: Routledge.

Benjamin, W. 1980 [1923], *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, *Gesammelte Schriften Vol. IV*, ed. R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, pp. 9-21; in English *The Task of the Translator*, 1996, in *Selected Writings Vol. I, 1913-1926*, trans. H. Zohn, ed. M. Bullock and M. W. Jennings, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

_____, 2003, *Selected Writings Vol. 4*, translated by E. Jephcott and M. Jennings, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Bhabha, H. 1994, *The Location of Culture*, London / New York: Routledge.

Bloom, H. (ed.) 1979 [1978], *Deconstruction and Criticism*, New York: Continuum.

Bongiovanni, B. and L. Bonanate, 1993, *Egemonia* in *Enciclopedia delle Scienze Sociali* vol. III, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana.

Boothman, D. 2004a. *Traduzione e traducibilità*, in *Le parole di Gramsci. Per un lessico dei "Quaderni del carcere"*, ed. F. Frosini and G. Liguori, Rome: Carocci, 2004.

_____2004b. *Traducibilità. Un caso: A. Gramsci linguista*, Guerra edizioni: Perugia.

[58] Letter to Adorno, December 9, 1938, in Walter Benjamin (2003), *Selected Writings Vol. 4*, p. 108; T. W. Adorno / Walter Benjamin (1994), *Briefwechsel 1928-1940*, p. 383.

_____, 2008, *The Sources for Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony* in *Rethinking Marxism* 20 (2).

Borghese, L. 1981, *Tia Alene in bicicletta. Gramsci traduttore dal tedesco e teorico della traduzione* in "Belfagor" XXXVI.

Brandist, C. 2015, *The Dimensions of Hegemony: Language, Culture and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*, Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Brodersen, M. 1996. *Walter Benjamin. A Biography*, trans. M. R. Green and I. Ligers, ed. M. Dervis, London: Verso, 1996.

Budick, S. and W. Iser (eds). 1996, *The Translatability of Cultures. Figurations of the Space Between*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Carlucci, A. 2013, *Gramsci and Languages: Unification, Diversity, Hegemony*, Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Cassin, B. (ed.). 2014 [2004], *Dictionary of Untranslatables. A Philosophical Lexicon*, translations edited by E. Apter, J. Lezra and M. Wood, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chakravorty Spivak, G. 2007, *Translation as Culture* in *Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, ed. P. St Pierre and Prafulla C. Kar, Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Chernov, S. 2016, *At the Dawn of Simultaneous Interpreting in the USSR: Filling Some Gaps in History* in *New Insights in the History of Interpreting*, ed. K. Tajeda and J. Baigorri-Jalón, Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Cortés, M. 2015, *Un nuevo marxismo para américa Latina. José Aricó: traductor, editor, intelectual.* Mexico City / Buenos Aires, Siglo Veintiuno.

Cospito, G. 2011, *Verso l'edizione critica e integrale dei «Quaderni del carcere»*', "Studi storici", LII: 4.

_____, 2016, *Egemonia/egemonico nei "Quaderni del carcere" (e prima)*, in "International Gramsci Journal" 2:1.

_____, 2017, *Traducibilità dei linguaggi scientifici e filosofia della praxis* in "Filosofia italiana" 2.

Croce, B. 1921, *La poesia di Dante*, Bari: Laterza.

_____ 1992 [1902], *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*, trans. Colin Lyas, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davis, K. 2001, *Deconstruction and Translation*, Manchester: St Jerome Publishing.

de Man, P. 1986, *Conclusion: On Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"'* in *Resistance to Theory*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Derrida, J. 1979 [1978], *Living On* and *Border Lines*, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. H. Bloom, New York: Continuum.

_____, 1985a, *Des Tours de Babel* in *Difference in Translation*, trans. and ed. J. F. Graham, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

_____, 1985b, *Reply to Roundtable* in *Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, trans. P. Kamuf, ed. C. McDonald, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

_____, 1988 [1977], *Limited Inc*, trans. S. Weber, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Descendre, R. and J.-C. Zancarini, 2016, *De la traduction à la traductibilité: un outil d'émancipation théorique*, "Laboratoire italien Politique et société", 18.

Eliot, T. S. 1921, *Hamlet and His Problems* in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Fiorillo, M. 2008, *Dalla machiavellistica "elitista" al moderno Principe "democratico"*, in *Gramsci nel suo tempo*, ed. F. Giasi, Rome: Carocci.

Francioni, G. 1984, *L'officina gramsciana. Ipotesi sulla struttura dei 'Quaderni del carcere'*, Naples: Bibliopolis.

Frosini, F. 2010, *La religione dell'uomo moderno. Politica e verità nei "Quaderni del carcere" di Antonio Gramsci*, Rome, Carocci.

_____, 2013, *Luigi Russo e Georges Sorel: sulla genesi del "moderno Principe" nei Quaderni del carcere di Antonio Gramsci*, *Studi storici* LIV: 3.

Gentile, G. 1920, *Torto e diritto delle traduzioni* in *Frammenti di estetica e di letteratura*, Lanciano: Carabba editore.

Giasi, F. (ed.) 2008, *Gramsci nel suo tempo* (2 vols), Rome: Carocci.

Gramsci, A. 1971, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

_____, 1975, *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. V. Gerratana, Turin: Einaudi.

_____, 1985, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, ed. D. Forgacs and G. Nowell-Smith, trans. W. Q. Boelhower, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

_____, 1992, 1996 and 2007b for *Prison Notebooks* Vols. 1, 2 and 3 respectively, ed. and trans,. J. A. Buttigieg, New York: Columbia University Press.

_____, 1995 *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. D. Boothman, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

_____, 2007a, *Edizione nazionale degli scritti di Antonio Gramsci. Quaderni del carcere*, *Quaderni di traduzioni (1919-1932)*, 2 vols, ed. G. Cospito and G. Francioni, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana.

Guzzone, G. 2018, *Gramsci e la critica dell'economia politica: dal dibattito sul liberismo al paradigma della 'traducibilità'*, Rome: Viella.

Hamacher, W. 2005, *"Now": Walter Benjamin on Historical Time*, trans. N. Rosenthal, Chapter 3 of *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, New York: Continuum, 2005.

Hrnjez, S. 2019. *Traducibilità, Dialettica, Contraddizione. Per una teoria-prassi della traduzione a partire da Gramsci* in "International Gramsci Journal", 3 (3).

Ingram, S. 1997,*"The Task of the Translator": Walter Benjamin's Essay in English, a Forschungsbericht*, *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, 10 (2).

Ives, P. 2004, *Gramsci's Politics of Language. Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Ives P. and R. Lacorte (eds), 2010 *Gramsci, Language and Translation*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Jervolino, D. 2010, *Croce, Gentile and Gramsci on Translation* in "International Gramsci Journal", no. 2.

Khatib, S. 2013, *The Messianic Without Messianism: Walter Benjamin's Materialist Theology* in "Anthropology & Materialism", 1.

Ladmiral, J.-R. 1994 *Traduire: théorèmes pour la traduction*, Paris: Gallimard.

Lenin, V. I. 1965a, *Left-Wing Communist: An Infantile Disorder*, in *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 31, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965.

_____, 1965b, *Five Years Of The Russian Revolution And The Prospects Of The World Revolution Report To The Fourth Congress Of The Communist International, November 13, 1922* in *Collected Works Vol. 33*, 1965, Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Lo Piparo, F. 1979. *Lingua, intellettuali, egemonia in Gramsci*, Rome-Bari: Laterza.

Paggi, L. 1970, *Antonio Gramsci e il moderno principe*, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1970.

Pocock, J. G. A. 1989, *Politics, Language and Time*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ragazzini, D. 2002, *Leonardo nella società di massa. Teoria della personalità in Gramsci*, Bergamo: Moretti Honegger.

Rendall, S. 1997, *Notes on Zohn's Translation of Benjamin's "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers"* in "TTR: traduction, terminologie, redaction", 10 (2).

Shapiro, S. and Lazarus, N. 2018, *Translatability, Combined Unevenness, and World Literature in Antonio Gramsci*, in "Mediations" 32 (1).

Schirru G. 2011, *Antonio Gramsci, studente di linguistica* in "Studi storici" LII.

Schulte R. and J. Biguenet (eds), *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Steiner, G. 1998 [1975], *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thomas, P. D. 2009, *The Gramscian Moment*, Leiden-Boston: Brill.

_____, 2020, *Gramsci's Revolutions: Passive and Permanent* in "Modern Intellectual History" 17 (1).

Tomba, M. 2006, *La 'vera politica', Kant e Benjamin: la possibilità della giustizia*, Macerata: Quodlibet.

Tosel, A. 1981,*Philosophie marxiste et traductibilité des langages et des pratiques* in "La Pensée" 223; reprinted in Tosel, A. 1984,*Praxis. Vers une refondation en philosophie marxiste*, Paris: Éditions Sociales.

_____, 1996, *Walter Benjamin et Antonio Gramsci sur la traduisibilité des langues* in "Philosophique", Département de philosophie de l'université de Franche-Comté.

Venuti, L. 1995 *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London: Routledge.

_____, 2000, *The Translation Studies Reader*, London: Routledge.

Wagner, B. 2012, *Cultural translation: a value or a tool? Let's start with Gramsci!* in *Translation: Narration, Media and the Staging of Differences*, ed. F. Italiano and M. Rössner, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

Wickersham, J. 1994, *Hegemony and Greek Historians*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.