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Abstract：This paper argues that modes of understanding built on familiarity with the other，as well as on contrastive opposition can become an obstacle in intercultural research．Built on a critique of Gadamer's idea of a fusion of horizons，it claims that intercultural research not only has to circumvent the danger of reducing the other under the familiar，but also has to prevent a construction of the other as exotic and absolutely different．

Keywords：intercultural philosophy； exercise； hermeneutics； language； translation

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标　题：作为障碍的理解：跨文化研究中的操习视角

摘　要：本文认为，建立在相互熟悉和对比基础上的理解模式会成为跨文化研究的障碍。因此，本文基于对伽达默尔视域混合之说的批判，指出跨文化研究不仅应当回避将彼此化约为熟悉之物的危险，更应当避免将彼此建构为异国情调和截然不同植物的尝试。

关键词：跨文化哲学； 操习； 阐释学； 语言； 翻译

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As a research perspective，exercise has already been introduced to inter- and cross-cultural philosophy by Rolf Elberfeld in his method of transformative phenomenology．Building on Elberfeld but also referring to other positions on exercise and practice，this paper strives to unfold aspects and effects of exercise to explore their potentials for intercultural research as exercise．The constraining，yet at the same time enabling formation of languages and their multiplicity serve as the area to more concretely think about practices of translation as examples for such exercises．In this context，the hermeneutical issues and dangers of intercultural research are rephrased in the terms of translation studies and addressed as acculturation vs. foreignization.

Walter Benjamin's idea of the "way of meaning" serves as an inspiration to investigate modes of exercises beyond the acquisition of a skill or the generation of habits and routine．With

Benjamin, but also with a recourse to ancient philosophy and rhetoric, this paper finally discusses exercises as medium for self-reflection, directed towards exploration and supporting transformation.

1. Introduction

The approach to new and unfamiliar positions, texts or artefacts frequently takes on the form of comparison. We explicitly or implicitly compare what we see or read with what we have read or have seen before, we are reminded of familiar aspects or try to grasp confusion by contrasting it to the recognizable. We might establish analogies, encounter parallels, or discern specific concepts that might work as common ground. Or the subject becomes even more alien and turns into the opposite of what is known.

In the context of inter- and cross-cultural research, understanding based on comparison harbours a certain danger. The history of the relations of, for instance, Asia and Europe surely knows a plethora of examples of (in many cases unintentional) misconceptions and struggles of understanding, resulting from rash incorporation or unreflective othering. I only want to briefly refer to one telling example: the encounter of Michel Foucault with Japanese Zen in 1978. Foucault appears to be convinced that the "philosophy of the future" must "be born outside of Europe or equally born in consequence of meetings and impacts between Europe and non-Europe" (Foucault, "Michel Foucault and Zen" 113). In this dialogue, Foucault struggles to find a language to describe his experiences. It seems as if he feels forced to use categories that have to be withdrawn or restricted at the spot: the practices of Zen, to him, are incomparable to Christian mysticism, but they have to be a kind of mysticism nonetheless (ibid. 112). Their techniques have to be similar, but still Foucault describes Japan, its culture and its people, as a mystery (ibid. 111). [①] Foucault talks about Zen with great care, showing a high degree of

thoughtfulness for the intricacies of this encounter, yet his understanding of Zen on the basis of mysticism and his description of Japan as Other, although reflected as somehow inappropriate, leads him a specific way (i.e. to implicitly posit Zen as a kind of religion). The claim of this paper is that the mode of understanding (as contrast or as common ground) can itself become an obstacle for understanding. This is especially problematic in intercultural research. [②]

This paper roughly consists of four parts. The first part is a brief analysis of the hermeneutic situation as shaped by imprints and routines. In the second part these issues are described as epistemological obstacles and intellectual habits, which are then and thirdly discussed as a crucial factor in intercultural research. In the fourth part I want to discuss modes of exercise[③], especially and in the fifth and final part around the practice of translation, as a potential perspective to tackle these issues. By rephrasing the hermeneutical issues of intercultural comparison as concurrence of the multiplicity of language and as issues of translation, bringing into the debate Walter Benjamin's theory of translation, the various constraints of languages will finally turn into a productive force. In doing so I want to sketch an outline of how intercultural research can specifically use modes of exercises.

The notion of exercise has been already introduced to intercultural philosophy by the German philosopher Rolf Elberfeld as part of his transformative phenomenology. Nevertheless, in his work exercise takes on the shape of a research perspective and although Elberfeld gives numerous references to such exercises, his project can be crucially enriched and made practical by looking at other descriptions and concepts of exercise.

If, I claim, a cross- or intercultural dialogue strives to be productive, it has to display openness and the capacity to radically question oneself. Otherwise it sooner or later risks arriving at clichés and stereotypes or amounting to inadequate acculturation. The need for the study of languages

and knowledge of historical contexts in this regard has to be the unquestioned foundation. This paper however attempts to argue more abstractly that the capacities to critically reflect on and question one's understanding cannot be reduced to language skills or propositional historical knowledge.

Before proceeding with the analysis proper, I would like to make some short clarifications on terminology and concepts. In writing about different cultures and especially when referring to "another culture", I do not wish to imply a concept of cultures as closed spheres as in, for instance, Herder's philosophy of culture. The interaction and hybridization of cultures is an almost omnipresent phenomenon and it is not limited to the globalized world of the 21st century. The hermeneutical problems which I will address are also almost ubiquitous in the humanities. The same applies to the capacity to question oneself: the humanities, and sciences as well, are built on the precondition that every achievement can be disproved, that every thesis is only valid in a specific context, and that every understanding might have to be revised in the future. Still I am convinced that in constellations of encounter of cultures these issues become pivotal.

Lastly, this article is focused on philosophy in a cross- or intercultural context, but my argument can be, hopefully, valid for intercultural endeavours in general. Under "intercultural research" I do not only understand historical investigations of the interactions, connections, and transfer between cultures or the analysis of third spaces and hybridity, but also the productive confrontation and comparisons aiming at systematic reframing of concepts. [4]

2. Problems of understanding: epistemological obstacles and intellectual habits

Humanities in many regards have often tried to adjust their work and research to their norms and standards and defined themselves in relation to them. But even in the natural sciences, understanding is always entangled with pre-scientific ideas and pre-reflexive judgements. In the 1930s, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard showed how experiences of daily life, metaphors and analogies, childhood memories and collective images shape the experience and description of physical phenomena. He claims that they often work actively as epistemological obstacles. As such they could "encrust any knowledge that is not questioned" (Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind* 25). Once useful, intellectual habits tend to, under changed circumstances, "hamper research" (ibid.). The cases he discusses are, amongst others, a foundational understanding of reality as made of substance (ibid. 104) or the manifold associations around the phenomenon of fire (Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*). In what he calls a "secondary psychoanalysis" (ibid. 21), Bachelard, influenced by psychoanalysis but also committed to phenomenology, seeks to reveal the "under the conscious" (ibid.) and "the subjective value under the objective evidence" (ibid.).

Of course, there are numerous differences between the sciences and humanities. Still, in its primary focus on reconstruction, description and understanding, the study of culture is as well not free from the danger of prejudice, simplification and reproduction of unconscious imprints. The posing of a question always has its preconditions, always points to a specific direction and always implies a specific perspective on the subject at hand. This is not necessarily problematic, but in specific constellations this foundation is likely to turn into an obstacle. What enables comprehension might constrain to comprehend newly or differently. Understanding in the humanities and especially in theory, where procedures like falsification are rarely useful, can be paraphrased as the consistent application of frameworks, concepts and terminology, as an arrangement of the unfamiliar under a familiar point of view. Accordingly, understanding does not only pave one way, but does so by excluding and sealing off others. In the words

of Wilhelm von Humboldt: "Every understanding is all at once a non-understanding" [my translation] ("Alles verstehen ist daher immer zugleich ein Nicht-Verstehen"; Humboldt 64).

Beyond the individual formation in academic upbringing and socialization, it is precisely a formation by language that is at work here: Humboldt describes language as the "formative organ of thought" [my translation] ("Die Sprache ist das bildende Organ des Gedanken"; Humboldt 53). Decades later, Nietzsche, in "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense" and quite relatable to Bachelard's critical observation of verbal imagery and figurative speech, claims that truth is "[a] mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms — in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically" (Nietzsche 46 – 47). After long use they have become canonical and mandatory: metaphors are finally being taken as unquestioned truths, disregarding their historical origin and having lost their sensuous component.

Building on Bachelard, Humboldt and Nietzsche I argue for two aspects of language: language has a formative impact on the way we experience and make sense of ourselves and of our environment. Secondly, although towering above individual biography, this formative quality of language carries a historical, cultural and social index.

If we follow the abovementioned authors then understanding is eroded by encompassing perspectivism. Every understanding, thus, carries the mark of cultural and historical formation. Since the concepts, instruments and methods used to pave the way to knowledge share this historical situatedness, they themselves reproduce and shape the discourses in which they are deployed as tools. This ranges from modes of deduction, via the connotation of concepts and terms, to literary manners of generating evidence like metaphors or analogies.

3. Understanding interculturally: Skewed, not opposed-asymmetrical constellations

Research never starts at the beginning. In Truth and Method, Hans-Georg Gadamer highlighted the relevance of prejudices as "pre-judgments", a prior hermeneutical situatedness that works as an anticipatory structure. According to Gadamer, "pre-judgments" already hint to a completeness that has to be achieved. Prejudices serve as a starting point of a hermeneutic circle. Especially in confrontation with texts or artefacts from an entirely different tradition, hermeneutical issues and the historical situatedness of every approach become particularly problematic.

Gadamer's aim is the fusion of horizons ("Horizontverschmelzung"): a shared framework, merging together the text's context and the context of the reader. He explicitly stresses that understanding is always an effect of history and that the present of the reader always has to be taken into account (Gadamer 306). But in Gadamer's hermeneutics, focused on the reception of texts as part of a continuous tradition, this historicity is addressed as enclosed in an encompassing history of impact or formation. Gadamer's hermeneutics of shifting horizons is first and foremost a process of self-understanding, a constant dialogue with one's own history, barely able to transcend this frame (Gadamer 317). The stream of tradition thus guarantees the assumption of a common ground. But if, for instance, a native speaker of English or German primarily trained in Western philosophy reads Zhuangzi or the Analects of Confucius, every ad hoc interpretation highlighting universal problems and every projection of shared questions rendered from a 21st-century European perspective is questionable. A transcultural common ground cannot be assumed before the very comparison.

On the other hand, merely negating commonality and thusly constructing direct

oppositions would be equally problematic. The paradigm of identity is dangerous in inter- and cross-cultural research; the assumption of total difference and opposition is dangerous as well. China and Europe are, according to François Jullien, not defined by their difference, but by their indifference. Their languages belong to entirely different families and for centuries their histories developed almost isolated from one another. Their categories of thought, basic foundations and patterns of understanding are no oppositions: China is not the mirror-image of Western metaphysic or vice versa (Jullien, "Von Außerhalb Denken" 171 – 74). On the level of concepts and foundations of thinking, their relation is never linear, but always skewed.

Jullien's thinking strives for using this constellation to perform a detour of thought: originally starting from ancient Greek philosophy, he uses this hermeneutical situation to deconstruct Europe from the outside. China serves as a heterotopy — a counter-place which follows different rules, and questions and defies what is set as regular (ibid. 173 – 74). Jullien's aim is to shed light on the pre-reflexive basis of Western philosophy (ibid. 171; 189 – 94). In his own work, he unambiguously highlights the dangers on both sides: intercultural dialogue always has to navigate between exoticism and universalism; it has to neglect the construction of total difference and the incorporation of the other under a paradigm of identity and universal, presuppositionless concepts.

It is in this landscape that the problem of understanding is restaged on the next level: without a shared tradition, how could a universality of thought be empirically? On the other hand, how to address an unfamiliarity without risking fostering a radical difference and thus fuelling a process of othering? Applied and further developed in many books and essays, Jullien's method tends to set China as a contrastive counterpart to Europe and in doing so artificially cements it: if it is supposed to be used as lever, there has to be a fixed spot to unhinge Western thought. A method of contrast

necessarily favors the production of monolithic poles and thus blurs internal plurality. Jullien is well aware of these dangers and counters them in emphasizing his approach as an exploration and as construction or montage in which China is placed as exterior, and not as representing an alterity. He focuses on concepts and phenomena on the margins of discourse, such as blandness (Jullien, *In Praise of Blandness*: *Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*), efficacy (Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy*: *Between Western and Chinese Thinking*) or nourishment (Jullien, *Vital Nourishment*: *Departing from Happiness*). Still, a method of contrast is in itself hardly able to reflect on the dynamic of epistemic obstacles when analyzing the position marked as other, since its very mechanic is built on the setting of known vs. unknown, familiar vs. foreign. Put simply: the higher the contrast, the clearer the results.

Reacting to these questions and by focusing more strongly on one's own position, a dynamic of comparison can be created that enacts a double bind: by reflecting on one's own hermeneutical situation whilst analyzing the other's, the very framework of this understanding can be addressed. Such a comparison can foster a deconstruction on both sides. Here, exercise as guiding activity comes into play. This attempt takes over Jullien's idea of deconstruction from the outside and questioning pre-reflexive foundations of thought, but tries to approach this disruption as being induced practically by forms of specific exercises and not as merely theoretical reflection.

4. A perspective for intercultural research

4.1 Transformative phenomenology: intercultural research as exercise

German philosopher Rolf Elberfeld has presented the concept of exercise as a perspective for intercultural philosophy to counter the aforementioned hermeneutical issues: he developed the method of transformative phenomenology, first discussed in a

2007 paper (Elberfeld, "Transformative Phänomenologie") and further developed it in his 2018 book *Philosophieren in einer globalisierten Welt* (literally translated: "philosophising in a globalised world") (Elberfeld, *Philosophieren in einer globalisierten Welt*). Regarding the current hermeneutic situation of comparative philosophy Elberfeld analyzes a historicity of philosophy without teleological predetermination, an encounter of different language families and their respective worldviews and a global coming together of various impact histories embedded in different forms of life (ibid. 170). Elberfeld claims that in a more and more polycentric world with arguments and contentions reaching far beyond Europe and through productive comparison, the structures of knowledge and the order of sciences will change permanently (ibid. 184).

In contrast to Husserl's descriptive and Heidegger's and Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology, the method of transformative phenomenology is characterized by an exercise of transformation (Elberfeld, "Transformative Phänomenologie" 26). Beginning with experience and directed towards dialogue and encounter, transformative phenomenology attempts to illuminate the ever-shifting blind spots of every order of knowledge and discourse and exposes one to the boundaries and demarcations of one's own tradition (Elberfeld, *Philosophieren in einer globalisierten Welt* 425). As a transformative exercise it does not aim at any external *telos*, but subverts the distinction of theory and practice and strives for the exploration of new possibilities and other understandings (ibid. 448).

The performative character of thinking in its historical and cultural dimension is at the centre of this practice. Referencing Husserl, who already emphasized the lived presence of thinking, but also building on the encounter of Western phenomenology with the East-Asian world, mainly Buddhism and modern Japanese philosophy, Elberfeld considers language as the plural medium of this transformation (Elberfeld, "Transformative Phänomenologie" 27). The goal, finally, is to unfold perspectives

relevant to the present times in the plurality of cultures and modernities as a performance of interculturality (ibid. 29). As areas for these exercises, Elberfeld points to several directions: orders of knowledge, aesthetic practices, meditation and bodily training of perception, therapeutic procedures and social experiences as well as experience of nature. One of the most privileged fields of exercise in transformative phenomenology is language — one's own language as well as other languages (Elberfeld, *Philosophieren in einer globalisierten Welt* 446).

On the following pages I want to elaborate on the notion of exercise by unfolding several aspects. Based on this description I then want to pass on to the field of translation. To that end I will take up one of the main fields of Elberfeld's thinking as area of exercise: the multiplicity of language. The practice of translation will help to rephrase and specify the hermeneutic considerations of the beginning of this paper and will also provide the scenery for a concrete application for a mode of exercise in intercultural research.

4.2 What can it mean to exercise in research? Explorative exercises and experience

Although widely present in the history of European philosophy, modes of exercise and training have hardly been developed into influential concepts. Recent decades however have brought a growing interest in exercises as a specific mode of practice in philosophy and cultural studies: the last lectures of Michel Foucault at the Collège de France, especially *The Hermeneutic of the Subject* but also *The Care for the Self*, Pierre Hadot's and Martha Nussbaum's reception of ancient philosophy (Hadot; Nussbaum) or Richard Shusterman's project of somaesthetics (Shusterman, *Performing Live*; Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body*) and Peter Sloterdijk's *You Must Change Your Life* are only a few examples.

What, now, is the benefit of intercultural research as exercise? This paper started with declaring the need of questioning oneself and began

with a profound scepticism towards habits in thinking and understanding. But when we exercise something, we repeat it over and over again. We engage in a structured practice with the purpose to improve in executing a specific skill or ability. In this process, habits and routines emerge, until an activity is executed almost by itself, without strict awareness or conscious control. Exercise is often considered to bridge theory and practice: one needs to practice to be able to fully apply what is already known. And the more one practices, the more accustomed and habitual an ability becomes. Habits are formed and tacit knowledge emerges (Polanyi 19). Following Gilbert Ryle, one could say that exercise and practice form a Knowing-How in opposition to the propositional Knowing-That of theory (Ryle 16 - 20). We engage in exercises to reach an external *telos* and to become better and better at a specific performance. In their direction towards habit, exercises are at their core conservative: their efficacy relies on a reproduction of the known and the familiar and consists of a projection of the past into the future: a specific ability is reproduced under constant or similar circumstances.

This directedness at continuous improvement of exercise traverses the claim for reflection that has to work as an interruption of understanding — as, i. e., in Jullien. Even if we focus on exercises like the antique practices of the self in Hellenism, the technologies of the self (*techne tou biou*) which have been famously described by Pierre Hadot (Hadot) and Foucault (Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*), the aspect of habit remains: although these exercises do not find an end after a skill or ability is acquired and their goal lies in the performance of the exercises themselves, the stabilizing function of practice prevails. Still there is something to find here: the intention of Stoic exercises was not only to acquire a virtue, but, furthermore, to conduct a continuous transformation of the self. A process that will come to a halt and regress as soon as the exercise is interrupted. John Sellars describes the

exercises and techniques of the Stoics as *praktiké*, performances more like singing and dancing, whose goal is their very performance, not producing an external good (as in the manufacturing practices of *poiesis*). In Stoicism, as exemplified in Marcus Aurelius, philosophical, ascetic exercises were supposed to incorporate the stoic doctrines and thus transform the practitioner (Sellars 154). Theoretical knowledge was reflexively embedded in personal life and this embedding was expected to foster experiences allowing a deeper understanding of Stoic precepts. According to Marcus Aurelius, the ultimate objective of philosophical exercises is to overcome an egocentric perspective, to become free from individual judgments, leave the first person perspective of ordinary life behind, and to adopt the view of the ever-changing cosmos (ibid. 151)[⑤].

Despite their orientation towards a specific truth and their reliance on a dynamic of enhancement, these exercises are expected to cultivate experiences. The exercises, conducted repeatedly over a considerable period, work as a medium. Framed by the philosophical texts of Stoicism (ibid. 77), the practices of fasting while sitting in front of grand meals or the vivid reflection on one's own mortality expose the individual to specific experiences. These experiences are again the foundation of a deeper insight into theory, which supports deeper reflections and therefore transforms experience and one's relatedness to the world.

Exercises, when conducted over a long time and guided by a set of concepts, can foster reflection and become a medium of experience. Proceeding from the term "aesthetic of existence" in the late works of Michel Foucault, an experimental and explorative notion of exercise has been further carved out by Christoph Menke. The effect of a practice, according to Menke, is not only to be able to perform and carry out an activity, but also to "direct *oneself*" (Menke 201). Beyond the freedom of expanding one's options to act by increasing one's abilities, the aesthetic-existential exercises explicitly counter the status quo and thus address the imprints,

habits, and attitudes produced by social disciplines and normalization, from daily life to education and labor. Those exercises work experimentally; "they test other-other than those by which we were disciplined and normalized — possibilities and capacities for self-direction in view not of carrying out social practices well or better, but rather of leading a good life" (Menke 207). They, Menke finally remarks, succeed if a transformation occurs and one actually becomes another through the performance of aesthetic activities (Menke 208).[⑥]

5. Exercising translations

5.1 Constraining and enabling: the multiplicity of languages

Elberfeld especially highlights the problems and potentials of the multiplicity of languages and emphasizes the role of language in the exercise of transformative phenomenology. Many of the abstract hermeneutical issues stated at the beginning and which are problematic in intercultural research can be framed regarding the multiplicity of languages as issues of translation. As media, languages shape the way we perceive and view the world. Every language carries its features and peculiarities-urges one way of expression and thinking and obstructs others, without strictly determining thinking and understanding. This article is mainly focused on the European reception of non-European texts, but the current situation of philosophy is far more "polylogical" (Elberfeld, *Philosophieren in einer globalisierten Welt* 168). Looking primarily at the reception and translation of European texts in Japan or China would therefore add or hopefully question my position in a fruitful manner.

Many problems of translation in philosophy are those of thick concepts, which lie at the core of a culture or a philosophical tradition, encompassing a wide range of meanings. The experience of centuries is sedimented in those concepts. The ancient Greek notion of *logos* (λογος) ranges from "language", "structured speech" and "definition" to "reason",

"judgement" or "thinking" (Roueché; Bühner). Used as a fundamental term from Pre-Socratic philosophy onwards and in manifold ways, it is almost impossible to find a proper term in another language family covering similar areas. An example from Chinese would be *dao* (道) and *xin* (心). *Dao* (道) is often translated as "way", "the way of things", as "nature" or "ultimate reality" and "metaphysical origin of things", but also as performance of a person or as way or path in human society (Bo, "Dao"; "Xin")[⑧]. Xin (心) can mean "disposition" or "feelings", literally referring to the physical heart, but going beyond any dualism of mind and body. It is "more a blend of emotion/desire and rationality/belief" (Bo, "Xin"), sensation as well as perception (Unger 94; Bo, "Xin"). Therefore, it is oftentimes translated as "heart-mind", undermining the widespread dichotomy of mind and body in European culture.

Problems of understanding regarding the formative aspect of language by far exceed the sphere of semantics. Numerous linguistic features of the very structure of a language shape the way it enables and fosters understanding. Ancient Greek favors a metaphysic of substance, whereas the old Japanese allows sentences without a subject. Long compound nouns are common in German and the German language encourages to juggle around a wide variety of prefixes.[⑨] Chinese sentences are not structured by word classes, but the mere position of characters defines syntax.[⑩] Roland Barthes once wrote in his notes on Japan: "We know that the chief concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy have been somehow constrained by the principal articulations of the Greek language" (Barthes 6).

In "A Dialogue on Language", Heidegger discusses the differences and problems of reference to concepts of Japanese philosophy in European languages. He states that there are dangers "hidden in language itself" (Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language" 4), not in what is discussed nor in the way the discussion is performed. Heidegger once called language the "house of Being" (ibid. 5). In

this dialogue, however, he revises this statement as clumsy and writes: "If man by virtue of his language dwells within the claim and call of Being, then we European presumably dwell in an entirely different house than Eastasian man" (ibid.). Here, a crack is exposed in Heidegger's fundamental ontology that allows thinking about languages as plural media of thought, beyond *the language as a singulare tantum*.[⑪]

Similar to being caught between the assumption of universality or the sketching of the other as exotic, the terms foreignization and domestication have become labels in contemporary translation studies: Lawrence Venuti introduced these terms to formulate an ethics of translation. He especially criticizes the acculturation of a source text "in which a cultural other is domesticated, made intelligible" (Venuti 128).[⑫] The dilemma of the translator is a vivid example of the hermeneutical predicaments in intercultural research. The translator is always caught between two options: he/she can either translate in a way that leads to a text that reads like it has been written by a fluent speaker of the target language and in doing so eliminates differences and probably radically transforms the original, or the translation can preserve the relational foreignness of the original, risking estrangement and even irritation.[⑬]

5.2　Benjamin on the way of meaning: extending one's language

Although translation in everyday language is considered to be an issue of finding equivalent terms in another language and thus transporting the meaning of the source text adequately, translation theory for a long time struggled with the impossibility of translation as exact rendition. The still young yet flourishing field of translation studies has established a vast discourse on these issues. Far beyond the transfer of meaning, translation studies, for instance, analyzes translation as re-creation and transformation in a wider cultural context, taking into account especially postcolonial theory, gender and frameworks from sociology (Bermann and Porter).

One of the core text of translation studies is Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay "The Task of the Translator", originally written as foreword to his translation of the poems of Charles Baudelaire. Despite its ubiquitous presence in translation studies, Benjamin's text is rarely used in inter- and cross-cultural theory (Elberfeld, for instance, builds his thinking of the multiplicity of languages primarily on Humboldt), yet his understanding of translation can help further develop intercultural research as exercise.

Walter Benjamin presents translation as deeply rooted in language as such. Language, to Benjamin, cannot be reduced to its instrumental use in a relation of subject and object. Influenced by early Romanticism, he describes translation as an eternal task and ongoing completion of the original, not as mere reproduction of meaning. According to Benjamin, translation should serve as an impulse to transform and extend a language. Surprisingly, he declares the communicable information as negligible, but also opposes free adaptions which he polemically describes as "inaccurate transmission of an inessential content" (W. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" 253).

Directing translation towards the depiction or rendering (German "Darstellung") of the hidden though "innermost relationship of languages" (ibid. 255), Benjamin is interested in the dissemblance and disfigurements, which almost unavoidably take place in translation. To grasp the unbridgeable difference of words of a work of literature and the words used in source and target language, he introduces the idea of the "way of meaning" (ibid. 257): distinct from what is meant, the way of meaning only in a relation of two languages becomes addressable, but it is never transferable by only translating what is meant. His example from German and French seems simple:

In the words *Brot and pain*, what is meant is the same, but the way of meaning

it is not. This difference in the way of meaning permits the word *Brot* to mean something other to a German than what the word *pain* means to a Frenchman, so that these words are not interchangeable for them; in fact, they strive to exclude each other. (ibid.)

With Andrew Benjamin this peculiar momentum can be described as a signifying beyond referencing, as an enactment of history and tradition, almost sedimented in the words (A. Benjamin 160). History is inscribed in both original and translation. Benjamin calls the translation the "afterlife" of the original: a "transformation and a renewal", in which even those words that have a fixed and obvious meaning can become subject to change and transformation (W. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" 256). Over time, the translator's mother tongue changes as well and new translations of the same text might become necessary.

The task of the translator amounts to producing an echo of the original in the target language. The translator's position in the process of translation is strangely outside the target language, calling into it like into a forest (ibid. 258). Since in translation there is neither an outside of language nor a third, neutral position in the comparison of the two languages, the translator acts on the borderline of language itself. The translation, finally, has to lovingly and in detail fashion itself as a counterpart to the original's way of meaning.⑭ The ideal is to let his language be put to movement to broaden and deepen it (ibid. 163 – 164). Benjamin calls this fidelity.

For Benjamin, translation in this manner finally leads to a messianic pure language, in which all differences and constraints in ways of meaning are sublated and redeemed and language becomes free of any kind of impartation. Notwithstanding this mystical tendency in Benjamin, Samuel Weber considers Benjamin's text as bridge between theory and practice of translation and interpretation (Weber

55). It is precisely the way of meaning that Weber has in mind to serve as a category for orienting practice and that can help in the context of intercultural research.

What the translator finally achieves is to break through the decayed barriers of his own language to release the foreign language in his own tongue (W. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" 261). Benjamin gives a telling example of how this can look like: the interlinear translation that proceeds word by word. Almost entirely ignoring the grammatical structures of the target language, the interlinear translation disrupts the common production of meaning and the source language shines through.

Benjamin's idea of translation can be read as a plea for sensibility towards the differences of languages. Although the way of meaning of a language as a relation of expression and meaning can never be transported to another language free of alteration, as a perspective it can provide a framework for an exercise of translation aiming at productivity and transformation of one's own understanding. In the light of Benjamin's idea of translatability, translation itself becomes an experimental undertaking with the possibilities of language.

5.3 Impulses from ancient rhetoric

With Benjamin, the practice of translation can, and many times is, described as a creative, ongoing practice that, due to its own historicity, will never find an end in itself. And by approaching the multiplicity of languages with Benjamin's category of the way of meaning in mind, an entanglement of difference and relation can be stated that can enrich intercultural research as a language-sensible project of self-questioning in dialogue with the other. This very moment Elberfeld describes as exercise. Based on Foucault and Shusterman, Menke and ancient ascesis, it becomes clear that there is more to exercise than repetition, closure, and stability. The field of translation, finally, is where Elberfeld's transformative phenomenology and the experimental

and explorative dimension of exercise can be put into practice.

Inspiration for such an endeavour can come from an unexpected direction: In his 1st century AD *Institutes of Oratory*, the rhetoric scholar Quintilian wrote an entire program of rhetoric education from childhood to retirement. Alongside argumentation technique, language and appearance, he discusses various practices and exercises to achieve skilfulness, the afforded habitus and mindset and the disposition to speak publicly and act spontaneously in critical, complex situations. One of these exercises is translating texts from Greek to Latin. Here, Quintilian refers to Crassus and Cicero, and to how both have claimed having conducted this exercise (Quintilianus 357; X 5,2). The exercise itself is not part of the formal education of the orator, but is related to the formation of a specific *hexis* or habitus. Cicero mentioned it as one of the exercises he performed regularly as a young man after completing his training as orator (Cicero 107; I 155).

What exactly is the aim of this exercise? In the context of translation and paraphrasing one's own but also other texts as a continuous practice, Quintilian praises the inexhaustible abundance of language (Quintilianus 357 – 61; X 5,3 – 11) and describes the exercise of translation as an agon, "to rival and vie with the original in expressing the same thoughts" (ibid. 359; X 5,5). Additionally, he mentions the difference of the Latin and Greek sense of language, and, as a result, the necessity to create new figures (ibid. 357; X 5,3); Cicero mentions the relevance to coin new words by analogy (Cicero 107; I 155).

Without doubt, Cicero was one of the most influential translators of philosophical terminology from Greek to Latin and significantly influenced the development of technical prose in Latin culture. Cicero strived to broaden and extend Latin instead of adjusting it to Greek (Cicero 107; Quintilianus 359; Widmann; Puelma). According to Derrida, it was Cicero who "freed translation from its obligation to the verbum, it's debt to the word-for-word" (Derrida 428).

As for the education of the orator in Cicero's *De Oratore* and in Quintilian, the translation of Greek texts as an exercise does not aim at a finished work. The exercise as activity stands on its own. Beyond the training of a sense of language and style it is supposed to enrich the target language. In this fashion it is a practice at the boundaries of the constraints of language (Zimmermann 242). And the options of expressions in language are, according to rhetoric ideal, almost infinite (Quintilianus 359; X 5,5 – 7).

Instead of a focus on perfecting the ability to translation as transporting meaning as precisely as possible, this exercise can potentially serve the purpose of interrupting routines of understanding. In its continuous conduct, the exercise loses its *telos* and becomes a medium in which the differences of understanding can be explored: in comparing various options, an experience of the multiplicity of understanding can be cultivated. Every association, every interpretation and every decision for a specific translation is put up for reflection in the very next iteration of this exercise and is questioned to find another term, exploring new and other modes of translation and thus of understanding, without losing the connection to the source text. Benjamin's category of the way of meaning beyond expression and content can serve as a guiding concept for such an expedition at the margins of language and understanding, to operate creatively and to perform language *in actu* or, with Humboldt, as *energeia*: not as a work, but as an activity. The diverse options of understanding themselves become the subject, and the subtle distinctions of interpretation and translation are exposed to reflection and problematization. Here Benjamin's affinity for the interlinear or verbatim translation as translucent and radically disrupting the structure of the target language can serve as another impulse. Exercising translation in this way would have to explicitly focus on the pre-reflexive positings and untranslatable

aspects of any language: what lights up in between two languages without being isolated. [⑮] Such an exercise could help to cultivate one's sensibility towards impulses from beyond one's habits and routines.

As an explorative access to translation it could provide a space for reflection of affective resistances and the situatedness and historicity of any understanding, far beyond the contemporary practices of translation but, for instance, as part of academic training in philosophy or study of culture. Following Benjamin, de Man and Derrida and in the light of the lost hope of a faithful transfer of meaning, Eve Tavor Bannet describes the process of translation as a Rorschach test: translation becomes

> a matter of what each of us sees or hears in, of, or from a letter, and of what each of us fails to see or hear. No longer enclosed in the column of any single tongue, and traveling in a space where multiplicity and diversity of meaning and of technes always offer, the translator can no longer claim to be a helpless and purely passive tool of what speaks through her/him. (Bannet 591)

Furthermore, such an exercise could help to examine the impact of various translations of specific concepts in the context of a text and a tradition, thus supporting the associative rise of implicit or hidden connections and correspondences and, in this fashion, undermine canonised readings and basic distinctions like 'own' and 'other'. Finally, the practice of translations becomes a dialogue with oneself and can start a phenomenological description of the emergence of understanding.

6. Conclusion

Elberfeld argues that in phenomenology language and experience are connected in the form of a double bind: In and from experience verbal descriptions emerge to explore this experience, and at the same time these descriptions enable new experiences (Elberfeld, *Philosophieren in einer globalisierten Welt* 412). In this vein, Elberfeld describes transformative phenomenology as an exercise in the performance of transformation in encountering the other (ibid. 416). Especially in philosophy and theory and in the explicit realm of comparative and intercultural research, the study of languages of other families accordingly is far more than only the acquisition of access to a culture or tradition, but a potential instrument of transformation, regarding oneself as well as institutions and traditions.

As an interculturally oriented research approach, transformative phenomenology is focused on the transformation of one's very own modes of understanding in confrontation with a phenomenon. Transferring Elberfeld's method to the practice and exercise of translation, the exercise I have tried to sketch strives to enable an experience of understanding and a transformation of this experience in confrontation of two languages. In this way and in this constellation, the pre-reflexive, constraining and enabling aspects of language in their connection to individual experience become addressable (ibid. 411-413).

Since these discussed modes of exercise are not structured teleologically and do not aim at an external goal, they do not lead directly to scientific progress as such. Their function is co-constitutive and supportive. In this regard, intercultural research ought to be conducted dialectically: on the one hand, it has to build on the study of historical contexts, philological expertise and a consciousness of history, it has to foster intercultural dialogue, and has to rely on a self-reflective scientific community; on the other hand, it has to constantly practise a self-interruption and self-questioning of one's own understanding. In this vein it can become a self-description or observation of one's own relationally funded modes of understanding and their transformation, regarding the view of one's own, as well as of the 'other' culture(ibid. 220).

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Notes

① Foucault even states that despite all similarities in social structure and way of life, the inhabitants of Japan "seem in every way a lot more mysterious compared with those of all other countries in the world" (Foucault, "Michel Foucault and Zen: A Stay in a Zen Temple" 110－111).

② François Jullien analyzed Foucault's encounter with Zen in detail in an interview with Thierry Marchaisse in *Penser d'un dehors (La Chine)*, *Entretiens d'Extrême-Occident* (Jullien and Marchaisse).

③ I will use the terms "exercise" and "practice" in the following way: "exercise" is used if I refer to a specific bodily or mental practice that is structured, guided by some kind of rule, code or role model and that is executed intentionally and repeatedly over a longer period. A reference for this use would be Pierre Hadot's understanding of exercises in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* or Michel Foucault's reading of stoic exercises in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. "Practice" I will use when referring to more general modes of activity, very similar to its use in contemporary practice theory.

④ Similar reflections on aspects of the method of intercultural philosophy and on notions of practice to deal with the constraints of hermeneutical situatedness I have developed in the article "Interkulturelles Philosophieren als reflexives Üben. Überlegungen zu hermeneutischen Problemen in asymmetrischen Konstellationen" in the collected volume *Aspekte interkulturellen Philosophierens*, edited by Tony Pacyna, Robert Lehmann and Anna Zschauer (Heidelberg University Press, forthcoming).

⑤ Sellars here refers to the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius: "Change is the universal experience. Thou art thyself undergoing a perpetual transformation and, in some sort, decay: aye and the whole Universe as well" (Aurelius 243; 9.19).

⑥ In his reading of Foucault's aesthetics of existence, Menke refers to Shusterman's somaesthetics and particularily Shusterman's essay "Somaesthetics and the Care for the Self". There Shusterman describes somaesthetics as a reading and basic understanding of philosophy as lived practice, consisting of the analysis of bodily perceptions and practices, their role in relation to knowledge and the creation of reality (Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and Care of the Self"). In his prolific work, Shusterman pays special attention to what he calls the "*experiential* form of somaesthetics" (ibid. 536). This form or mode focuses primarily (but not exclusively) on the quality of "'inner' experience" (ibid.), bodily awareness and perception, and its subject is the reciprocity of somatic and psychological development (ibid. 535). In this regard, Shusterman points to practices as diverse as yoga and Alexander-Technique, Zen and dance, martial arts, Feldenkrais and Reichian bioenergetics (ibid. 536).

⑦ Primarily focused on the multiplicity of language in philosophy is Elberfeld's book-length study *Sprache und Sprachen. Eine philosophische Grundorientierung*.

⑧ Many examples can be found in translations of Daodejing. In his 1891 translation, James Legge, like most of the contemporary translators, chose the transcription "Tao" (Lao-Tzu), whereas D. C. Lau in 1963 opted for "way" (Lao Tzu). Richard Wilhelm in his famous 1910 German translation used the German word "SINN" (meaning) (Laotse). 1949 Rudolf Backofen went for the German formulation "das Unergründliche" (the unfathomable) (Lao-Tse). In his French Translation, Ma Kou chose "vérité (Tao)" (truth) (Lao Tseu). In *Chinesisch-deutsches Lexikon der chinesischen Philosophie*, Geldsetzer and Hong translate "dao" as "allgemeines Gesetz, Regel" (general law, rule) and, referring to *Daodejing*, as "Ursache, Substanz aller Dinge im Kosmos" (Cause, substance of all things in the cosmos) (Geldsetzer and Hong 25).

⑨ In the Introduction to Being and Time Heidegger elaborates on the "formal structure of the question of Being" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 24). The English translation of this paragraph is a vivid example of circumlocution and paraphrasing: "Any inquiry, as an inquiry about something, has *that which is asked about* [sein *Gefragtes*]. But all inquiry about something is somehow a questioning of something [*Anfragen bei …*]. So in addition to what is asked about, an inquiry has *that which is interrogated* [ein *Befragtes*]. In investigative questions-that is, in questions which are specifically theoretical-what is asked about is determined and conceptualized. Furthermore, in what is asked about there lies also *that which is to be found out by the asking* [das *Erfragte*]; this is what is really intended" (ibid.).

⑩ In their concise article "An Analysis of Untranslatability between English and Chinese from Intercultural Perspective", Jiajun Wang and Sunihan present basic differences of Chinese and English and discuss practical strategies to deal with the resulting problems of translatability (Wang and Sunihan).

⑪ Especially in his reading of Pre-Socratic philosophy, for instance in his 1941－42 lectures on Parmenides, Heidegger's thought can be seen as maybe "the most profound integration

of the idea of translation within philosophical discourse" (Young 49).

⑫ Ethical issues are not only present in the very translation, but also *as what* they are translated, under which label they are published. If we take the example of philosophy: we still live in a time in which discourses centred on Europe and North America eventually define which texts are accepted as the philosophical canon- and which are 'only' part of a tradition of thought, religion, or literature.

⑬ This dichotomy has a long history in the theory of translation and can, in German discourse, already be found in Friedrich Schleiermacher (Wyke 112), but also in Goethe and Humboldt (Kristel 31).

⑭ Benjamin's formulation is rather odd. He uses the neologism "anbilden", a kind of forming or composing in a directed fashion, yet without explicitly imitating or resembling the original. Harry Zohn translates this as "incorporate" (W. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" 260), whereas Steven Rendall chooses "fashion in its own language a counterpart to the original's mode of intention" (ibid. 161).

⑮ The strong relationship of philosophy and translation has already been analyzed, despite the neglect of the issue of translation in the history of Western philosophy (Young; A. Benjamin). The maybe most striking example from the intersection of philosophy and translation studies is Barbara Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables*. First published in French in 2004, it attempts to "rewrite the history of philosophy through the lens of the 'untranslatable'" (Apter vii). It uses philosophical translation "as a way of doing philosophy, or theory or literary criticism" (ibid. xv). "Untranslatable", here, does not refer to the essential core of a nation or culture, but marks "singularities of expression that contour a worldscape" (ibid. xv). The *Dictionary* not only tries to "communicate the political, aesthetic, and translational histories of philosophical keywords" (ibid. ix), aims at a "comparison of terminological networks, whose distortion creates the history and geography of languages and cultures" (Cassin xvii), but also sheds light on the way concepts emerge and develop "through, and across, languages" (Apter ix), affirming the multitude of languages and perspectives (Cassin xix). It hereby gains awareness for contexts and shifts of meaning and has the potential to foster new interpretations of canonical texts. Since it is only referring to European philosophy, such a dictionary with a global scope remains to be written.

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