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ANARCHISM, ANTIREPRESENTATIONALISM AND THE TRANSLATION PARADIGM

ABSTRACT: The paper aims at discussing translation as a political and ethical paradigm, as proposed by Bogdan Ghiu and Lawrence Venuti, in the broader context of comparative literature's contrarian turn with the Bernheimer and the Saussy reports, as well as in conjunction with anarchism's minor literary tradition (in the deleuzian sense). I argue that the translation paradigm and the non-vanguardist anarchist aesthetic are stemming from the same *legacy of freedom*, both formulating their basic ethical, political and aesthetical assumptions in the context of the *crisis of representation*, and both encountering the same practical and theoretical difficulties. The analysis will have two main focuses: one will examine the link between translation and the contrarian turn of comparative literature; and the second one will read the minoritizing model of translation through the anarchist antirepresentationalist ethic and aesthetic, in order to illustrate their convergence as alternative, radical lines of thought.

Keywords: anarchism, minor literature, comparative literature, antirepresentationalism, translation paradigm.

Comparative literature and translation: the contrarian turn

"The question is", said Alice, "whether you can make words mean different things."/ "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all."

Lewis Carroll

The 1993 Charles Bernheimer report on the state of comparative literature as a field of study addressed some of the conclusions of two previous reports (the 1965 Levin report and the 1975 Greene report), with the manifest intention to specifically mitigate a certain previous hostility towards translation, while stressing the ethical

engagement implied by any comparative study of literature. It also advocated the broadening of the field of inquiry as to include the ideological, cultural, social and institutional context in which meaning emerges. While prioritizing the study of foreign languages, Bernheimer further mentions the inclusion of the theory and practice of translation in the comparativist approach, arguing that

“(...) translation can be seen as a paradigm for larger problems of understanding and interpretation across different discursive traditions. Moreover, the comparatist should accept the responsibility of locating the particular place and time at which he or she studies these practices.” (Bernheimer, 1995: 44)

Equally important in the Bernheimer report is the shift of focus from the literariness of a text, as a sort of essential property, to the study of the literary discourse *en situation*, in its’ infiltrations and interactions with the other fields of discourse and idioms shaping social differences, exposing conflicts and following ideological power-plays. Translation in this sense is no longer to be understood as an ancillary technique of transposing a text from a language into another as accurately as possible, just in order to supply comparatists with much needed literary material. Translation is comparativism already, not as method, or a set of theoretical assumptions establishing a discipline, but as *poetics*, or

“(...) an elucidation of the art of making as applied to its own practices” (Saussy, 2006: 24).

Comparatism is already translation as the operation of making visible the *encounter* itself, exposing the tacit and explicit assumptions at play, the particular dynamic of positioning that makes every encounter an open-ended experiment, a risk.

In her response to the Bernheimer report, Emily Apter places the emergence of American comparative literature in the circumstances of the Second World War intellectuals’ exile from Europe. This, argues Emily Apter, gave a special nuance to the comparativist inquiries, a certain “epistemological placelessness”, a “criticism wilderness” founded on “linguistic estrangement” and “secession from the main

culture” (Apter, 1995: 89). It made “homelessness” the mode of critique and the melancholic “exilic consciousness” an engine of literary and existential praxis. Comparative literature could thus be (re)read as “comparative exile”, a marginal, denationalized space of “not-being-there”, perpetually haunted by an “eviction scenario” (Apter, 1995: 93).

While Saussy’s predecessors, including Bernheimer, still expressed with various intensities in their reports the concern that comparative literature hadn’t succeeded in establishing a coherent method, a perimeter or a clear disciplinarily, giving thus voice somehow to a seemingly inherited fear of forced eviction, the 2006 report insists that the statute of “counterdiscipline” (Saussy, 2006: 11) has not been a vulnerability. Comparative literature, Saussy argues, has gained traction as a set of ideas and practices, rather than as an established and fixed academic discourse. By becoming a pragmatic art of the in-between, also by showing a constant hospitality to “miscellaneous, disfavored, outmoded or too-good-to-be-true approaches” (Saussy, 2006: 34), comparative literature opened up an *experimental model* of encounter and translations across linguistic, cultural or political borders. Therefore it is not just another discipline that needs to be reified into an institutional identity, but a new *paradigm of understanding*, that brings an ethic of (co)operation into play, teasing meaning out of disciplinary enclosure, producing it heretically against hegemonic accumulations, and as a “contrarian model” (Saussy, 2006: 27).

The specification of literary study as a form of resistance by Saussy, especially as a form of resistance against a global model of communication and informational economy, as well as his preference for a counterdisciplinary epistemic model, might appear at odds with comparative literature’s own functional premises, seemingly fueled by a dream of common understanding. What is to be resisted though is a comparativist triumphalism which, under the guise of a consensus project, reproduces a uniform domination and framing pattern, fully informed by the same reductionist practice as reduction to the same. Furthermore, the relevance of the comparativist practice, especially when it amounts to a reflection on how narratives

are constructed, circulated, put together or assimilated, is never purely textual, but political and ethical: comparative literature can easily function as an instrument of colonial ideology as well as a subversive practice. In the former case, the comparatist can surreptitiously take the role of the evictor, subsuming to a single, unifying perspective a multitude of idioms and narratives, while the translation (comparativist) operation itself is concealed and naturalized. This is why translation, as Bernheimer suggests, can offer a solid base for any interpretative ventures, especially when it also bring into play the comparatist's / translator's position as a part of the actual translational situation, in a direct, open, and pragmatic manner. Meaning is not imposed from above on a text or a narrative, nor is it simply repeated submissively, as if it would be an actual essence intrinsic to the text, but collectively created in the encounter and as the encounter. Or, as Bogdan Ghiu explains, translation is – or, rather, can be - an immanently ethical and political *thinking-with-the-other* (Ghiu, 2015: 29), a dialogical account of estrangement and of hospitality, always experimental. Translation is a workshop, not a closure, vulnerability rather than a transparent operation that releases no particular meaning. Self-concealed translation attached to a totalizing narrative can, on the contrary, be instrumental to the reinforcement of power and hierarchical structures and used for the containment and domestication of strangeness (Baker, 2006: 25).

In this context, what Ghiu advocates is a translational epistemic that would build on an actual practice of difference, that would not aim at rooting out the bad weeds of otherness, or at discursively taming it, but would instead assume the untranslatable as a creative *line of flight* (Ghiu, 2015: 120). As a *contrarian model*, this *translational paradigm* may inspire a multitude of pirate republics of letters as nomad micro-federations of defectors, non-affiliates, undocumented trespassers, rogues, exiles, “strangers within their own tongue” (Deleuze&Guattari, 1986: 26), translators.

Overall, it seems that the various reports on the state of the discipline have gradually moved from a general concern about the academic status, the institutional and theoretical stability of comparative literature in the broader field of literary studies, towards a discussion that focuses on the ethical and political assumptions that – implicitly or explicitly – determine the comparativist praxis. Such a shift marks

the acknowledgement that all comparatist inquiry raises specific ethical responsibilities that transcend the question of status. Moreover, the comparatist cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary practice is not value-free, but has the potential to undermine, by its constant trade with difference, the unquestioned models structuring dominant institutional and conceptual frames, namely the reabsorption of the narrative in the normative and the subsequent dissimulation of the same operation. After all, the vulnerable position of comparative literature particularly raises the question of legitimation and of its apparent self-evident claim to pertinence and truth. While this question still seems to be pending since the first reports, the success of the comparatist model indicates the partial disengagement of the actual practice from the classic modes of legitimation and containment.

Both in the case of comparative literature and in the case of translation, there are two apparent models at play. One of those two is a static, centric model, building on institutional affiliations and striving to consolidate a discursive perimeter. The corresponding approach is based on the constitution of complete objects of the discourse, as well as the articulation of the discipline as a clearly delimited territory to be claimed. In this case, the *eviction scenario* functions as the bad object within a narrative frame shaped by the core questions of status rather than by the reflection upon knowledge itself. This in turn corresponds to a hierarchical translational approach, which articulates various forms of domestication, labeling and containment. Such an attitude amounts, after all, to a covert refusal of translation, using difference and identity only as tools for self-confirmation and the actual reinforcement of the status quo. The second approach is, on the contrary, based on the corrosion of borders and on the establishment of a multitude of temporary “zones of contact” (Venuti, 2000: 477) as open workshops with precarious stability. It is actually less of a model, and more of a process corresponding to a horizontal translational practice, a pragmatic manner of resisting disciplinary domestication by opening language for minor, creative and insurgent uses. In this case, the *eviction scenario* works like an incentive for thinking an alternative way of assembling exilic

trajectories into vulnerable, autonomous spaces. It also functions as a subversive alternative to the narrative of status quo and the setting up of border claims that normally imply a control over discourse by an elite, and the normalizing of this claim as consensus.

Bernheimer's proposal to envisage translation as a possibly more adequate paradigm for the comparativist enquiry is thus not only a statement limited to comparative literature; more than that, it actually points towards a certain understanding of translation itself beyond the confines of literary debates.

It is in conjunction with this approach that we can better understand Lawrence's Venuti's critical examination of the "scandals of translation" (Venuti, 1998:1), as well as Ghiu's manifesto, both trying to convey a broader sense of the trade, both advocating a broader relevance of translation beyond the quite restricted scenes of academic polemic.

Venuti argues that what constitutes a scandal indeed is the fact that, in a world of heterogeneous and multiple linguistic and cultural situations, translation has not yet gained exposure for a larger audience. The few specialists are rather interested into technical questions of linguistic and aesthetical relevance, while translation is dependent on other disciplines and practices for legitimation. Furthermore, translation's ancillary situation can also be read as an indicative of the various mystifications that a non-translational use of translation generates, in order to conceal, preserve and reinforce hierarchical discourses and authoritarian arrangements. These arrangements are not purely linguistic, but part of a dynamic of power imbedded in language and in its usage, aimed at concealing the struggles and endless variations that make up the fabric of the social and of the language itself.

Following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's perspective on the minor usages of language, both Venuti and Ghiu endorse a threefold minor usage of translation. The first is the *detritorialization of language*, the release of the "minor variables" (Venuti, 1998: 10) that exceed communication, subvert the major language and expose it as historically and socially situated, while opening it towards new, creative uses: a process of *defamiliarization* and demystification. The second is "the connection of the individual to a political immediacy" (Deleuze&Guattari, 1986: 18) as an operation of ideological critique. Bogdan Ghiu writes that translation is a

political paradigm: a disclosed situated co-operation with the others, preventing closure and resisting the folding back of translation into hegemonic discourse. The third usage is translation as the “collective assemblage of enunciation” (Deleuze&Guattari, 1986: 18), describing the experience of translation as a reading by means of writing, a creative furthering of the encounter: building of a community with the foreign through translation.

The operation of translation, writes Ghiu, is ethical as well as existential and political (Ghiu, 2015: 28, 29). Ethical, because it is a call to resist the haste of false translation that tries to assimilate, to convert the other. Existential, by virtue of the exilic consciousness that it entails, simultaneously bringing about the recognition of ourselves as strangers in the process of becoming other. Political in that it is an actual effectuation of and a reflection upon the making of community. Translation can be anticipatory without being politically prescriptive. The revolutionary potential of translation means that it can project around it a “utopian community that is not yet realized” (Venuti, 200: 485). Defamiliarization and the inscription of the foreign that translation simultaneously operates, can create breaches into the current conventional usage of language, releasing “domestic remainders” (Venuti, 2000: 485) that act as diachronical openings within the synchrony. This way, translation opens up the possibility to express and imagine different assemblages, to collectively “forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (Deleuze&Guattari, 1986: 17). To further paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari, *translation is the people’s concern*. (Deleuze&Guattari, 1986: 18).

We seem to move between the ethical impossibility of translation and the (counter) political need for an incessant translation. The refusal to *speaking-for* as an ethical engagement presupposes the resistance to the attempts of collectively *being spoken for*. The collective solidarity of translation is pragmatic and horizontal, an actual enterprise of the *speaking-with*. Translational situations are self-organizing, auto-poietic and micro-political. This means basically that they follow a dynamic of escape from mediation, control and framing, deserting the abstract entities outside of

the translational actual experience: a refuse of representation, transcendence and closure.

We can so far already discern the lines of thought that are describing the translational paradigm proposed by both Venuti and Ghiu, and anticipated by the debates regarding comparative literature: the dismissal of a classical academic disciplinary model in favor of an open, non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian, pragmatic, horizontal and experimental model. Related to that, there is a clear critique of the practice of accumulation which legitimizes disciplinary authority and affiliation through enclosure and separation. The situation of fragmented, non-dialogical and highly specialized fields of inquiry is a concern from this point of view, as their pretence of neutrality is only concealment of the wider principle of top-to-bottom organization and control already at work. Translation can serve as a paradigm namely because it illustrates a form of autonomy that does not imply the gesture of fencing-off, while serving as a pragmatic undoing of the ideological assumptions of language, institutions, cultures, societies. Demystifying academic objectivity and criticizing disciplinary enclosure, resisting claims of linguistic neutrality, asserting the need for a socially relevant discursive practice, exposing political representation as pretense and disempowering techniques, are all, therefore, implication of this *translational paradigm* as proposed by Ghiu and anticipated by Saussy and Berhneimer in the context of comparativist practice.

On the other hand, like Foucault argued, we always speak, translate and think in an already given environment, in an already given language. While translation can be regarded as a resistance against the given itself, how can we possibly articulate this resistance using the grammar of containment and the vocabulary of enclosures? The very critique of domination and of the discursive suppression of the other might very well generate positions of domination. Isn't this the true scandal of translation? The fact that, at the same time that we are compelled to resist the false translations, we also risk finding ourselves speaking the language of (our) dispossession?

On the other hand, minoritizing translation bears a high coefficient of deterritorialization, calling for an intensive usage of language as opposed to the symbolic, representative and extensive functions that formulate languages' various reterritorialisations. The movement towards the extremes, towards the molecular

voiceless margins, is a gradual process of bringing language “slowly and progressively to the desert” (Deleuze&Guattari, 1986: 26), an *antirepresentationalist* exercise. With translation as a possible acceleration along this line of flight, the escaping movement of language seems to signal towards silence, interruption, to a cry that no longer signifies something, to abolition.

The *scandal of translation* acquires a new dimension, revealing a problematic theoretical and practical positioning stemming from its own ethical and political assumptions. Whereas even a minoritizing translational practice can seemingly run the risk of reasserting dominance positions, collapsing this way the difference between the language of critique and the reproduction of given authoritarian structures, the antirepresentationalist dynamic connote the voiding of language in favor of pure intensities that do not produce effects of meaning. Under these circumstances, can translation still be a viable paradigm, or does it finally lead to the same supposedly insurmountable paradoxes? In other words, can translation really be the key to a different functioning of language, which would do away with despotic signs, or is it just another mode of producing generalizing representations and hierarchical structures? Does a minoritizing translation escape the coercion embedded in all the uses of language only when resorting to hermetical silences, only by ceasing to be a translation? Isn't this translational pessimism an actual rejection of society, testifying to the impossibility of speaking-with? Is speaking-with just a mask obscuring the speaking-for, further concealing a generalized speaking-against (the other, oneself)?

Bogdan Ghiu argues nevertheless that the “paradigm of the social extensive translation” (Ghiu, 2015: 212, my translation), the translation-paradigm, is a radical and contrarian model inasmuch as it is the positive, constructive continuation of deconstruction. Moreover, translation, understood as a translinguistic, transcultural and transmedial pragmatic is an open, non-secretive production of knowledge, a putting together of creative concepts, a collective and public creation, that retains, repeats, and passes on precisely against the submissive operations of mimicking, and

as a resistance to the coercive pressure of the identical (Ghiu, 2015: 59). Ghiu advocates all in all a translational practice that would not only produce aesthetic or accurate translations, but a paradigm that would yield a whole translational society.

The scandal of translation, as well as the minoritizing, and the paradigmatic extensive understanding of translation seem to illustrate on one hand the epistemic deadlock of the current critical systems. On the other hand, they mark an attempt to find a way out precisely by articulating a new model, equally remote from the essentialist stances as well as from the exclusively aesthetic, textualist views.

In the opening pages of his essay Ghiu notes that the *translation-concept* that he tries to put forth is, actually, a translation itself and only invites further translation, in a theoretical context where philosophy and critique seem more and more prone to revert to simplistic metaphysics, actually signaling a turning away from thinking, from translation. His approach, as well as Venuti's, is after all an attempt to hinder closure, to propose creative concepts as working tools for a vivid, socially relevant and rejuvenated critique, drawing it away from theoretical deadlocks and the hermetical sealing of discourse for elite usages.

Bogdan Ghiu's creation of a translation-concept is nothing less than the putting forth of the translator's tool-box for reading and re-writing along the dotted and interrupted lines of permeation of the so-called French Theory. It is a work of preservation and continuation as well as a commentary of the encounter itself. French theory, despite its' academic and public success in the '60 and '70, could be considered as well a minor tradition: fragmented, subversive and antirepresentationalist, putting concepts to strange uses and claiming ethical and political grounding. A tradition that now survives more in its infiltrations and heresies than into an improbable per se continuation.

When he proposes translation as a pragmatic and daily practice, a day-to-day procedure of *decolonization* (Ghiu, 2015: 211), as a positive continuation of the deconstructive project, Ghiu takes an old, unsettling question a bit further and in a slightly different direction. Can you make revolution with a pen? Can you write, talk, think away oppression without actually enacting it? becomes *Can you translate away domination, can you fathom a usage of language that is neither servitude nor enslavement?*

Translation: an anarchist reading

So given the choice between incoherent, insular jargon and the clear transmission of rational arguments, let us add another dimension to the discussion. We hypothesize a third pole—the mysterious third, the factor that effects change.

CrimethInc. Writers' Bloc

The best way to proceed in order to formulate an answer would be precisely a translational approach, taking a detour towards another fragmented, interrupted and minor tradition of thought, namely *anarchism*. Anarchism's seemingly forgotten influences fueled many of the cultural alternatives and creative paradigms of resistance that we are familiar with today. Peter Marshall spoke of a „river of anarchy” (Marshall, 2008: 3) that infiltrated symbolism, Dadaism, and surrealism; it contaminated counterculture, French poststructuralist theory, and inspired insurgency and radical aesthetics throughout the 20th century.

The historical development of anarchism has been a constant practice of translation, proceeding from anarchism's very basic political and ethical assumptions: opposition to the state, religion, and class system implies the contestation of borders and direct action to corrode and challenge them. Starting from the early calls for a spreading of knowledge as means of fraternal emancipation and also subversion – the nihilist *going to the people* – the anarchist movement has grown with and by translation: on the one hand, the translation as popularization so vital to the breaching of arbitrary social and national enclosures; on the other hand, translation as infiltration, eroding hegemonic narratives from within, opening them up to their inner anarchy, to the paroxysmal experience of their own residual, irreducible, uncanny *other*.

There is no explicit theoretical anarchist approach towards translation as such. However, the anarchist thought has developed within actual translational situations, as most of the anarchist writers were outcasts, exiles, or fugitives, always on the run,

always addressing foreign audiences: princes trying to speak to workers, thieves trying to speak to literates, Russian and French geographers writing for Swiss workers, deportees translating indigenous stories, etc. A translational critique, related to the minoritizing paradigm exposed so far, can be nonetheless formulated in a way that could help us sketch both the specific anarchist understanding of translation and a possible answer to the antirepresentationalist ethical and practical impasses proceeding from it.

In doing so, we will follow to a large extent Jesse Cohn's exposition regarding the relevance of anarchist critique in contemporary theoretical debates, presented in his book *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation – Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, Politics* (2006), a convincing and well documented essay arguing that a re-translation of anarchist ideas could offer a viable alternative to the exhaustion of dominant critical models.

Known mostly for its social critique, for its preaching of insurgency or for its so-called utopian imagining of the future stateless communities, anarchism has always been involved in the literary and theoretical discussions of its time, whether we think of classical *la Belle Époque* anarchism, or contemporary post-anarchism. It should be of no surprise then that anarchism has developed with and out of its extremely prolific literary production. Of course, we cannot speak of literary anarchism as of one unitary or coherent body of work; however, we can speak of it in the sense of a deleuzian *minor literature*, anarchistic in itself, with various and sometimes conflicting expressions, styles, or engagements. Moreover, literary theory or art critique have always been a major part of the “classical anarchists”¹ work and preoccupation. In a sense, anarchism is a literary phenomenon as much as it is an actual social practice: the two are just different ways of engaging authority and, also, different expressions of direct action and subversion, two of the basic anarchist principles.

¹ When we refer to classical anarchism we generally mean those authors who are considered to have laid down in a consistent manner the basic principles of anarchism: Proudhon, Stirner, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta. Without intending it to be a restrictive label, we also use this expression to broadly indicate a time-period between the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, considered to have been the period of maximum vitalism for anarchism.

Invited to write an article on anarchism in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1910) Piotr Kropotkin gave a detailed account of anarchism's social philosophy principles, historical development and situation, defining it as an expression of a broader social dynamic that historically opposed the hierarchical and hegemonic organization of society, in favor of a model of voluntary associations of free, self-ruled individuals. Kropotkin included, at the end of his article, a somewhat brief, yet powerful mention of the profound ties that the development of libertarian ideas had with the literary and intellectual movements of the time, noting that the anarchist literature was driven by the same goal: "enfranchisement of man from the bonds of the state as well as from those of capitalism" (Kropotkin, 1910).

Anarchism, as defined by Murray Bookchin, is a part of a "legacy of freedom" (Bookchin, 1982: 167), a statement that somehow recalls the *interrupted tradition* (Ghiu, 2015: 11) that Ghiu referred to. With multiple currents, anarchism is thus not a fixed body of thought and practice, but

"(...) a movement in which a core ethic is rearticulated time and time again in the historical idioms of particular people in specific struggles."
(Bookchin, apud Jesse Cohn, 2006: 94).

As a practical way of putting things together - or, for that matter, of putting things into pieces - anarchism stems from a basic belief that people can come together and organize themselves freely, without the supervision of the State, or the disciplinary narratives of religion and privilege, and outside of all structures of domination and authority.

Other than that, anarchists understand very well the fact that there is an "imaginary institution of society" (Castoriadis, 1987). Therefore, any thought of emancipation must strive to expose these *spooks* (state, religion, class, nationality), as Stirner would have probably called them, and liberate the imaginary. In other words, in order for people to find and experiment ways of being together outside the strategies of control or submission to authority, it is necessary that they can at first

fathom them. This is not about fantasizing as a means of escape, but about being able to (collectively) imagine and express the other and our being together, outside the projections of fixed identities or socially assigned frames.

As Jesse Cohn noted, what at first might seem to be a theory of political practice is, in fact, a “theory of meaning” (Cohn, 2006: 80), and a reflection on language. The opposition of anarchists to the state needs to be understood, as Uri Eisenzweig argues in *Fictions de l’anarchisme* (2001), as a particular stance of a general anarchist mistrust in representation, be it political, aesthetic, economic or linguistic. Anarchists question and resist the symbolic as well as the denotative function of language, the speaking-for as well as the standing-for that shape our common usage of language and, in the end, our understanding of things. Delegating the power to act (politically) is coherent with a delegation of the power to speak and to be heard in favor of an elite who alone claims the right to speak on behalf of the others. Signs, symbols and narratives are not neutral signifiers that correspond to or depict more or less accurately the reality, but they are *order-words* that constitute and enforce a version of reality rather than merely representing it (Mona Baker, 2006: 5). Thus, representational hierarchical mediation is seen as a scamming method aimed at falsifying and alienating language, the basis of social bonding. The dispossession of one’s language is only a facet of the general scheme of economic and political dispossession already at work. As pointed out by Santiago Colás in his essay, *What is wrong with representation*:

“Consider just two of the social practices in which representation functions centrally: literature and democratic politics. Both have operated historically as practices of exclusion. If representation . . . always presupposes a distance, then . . . literary representations and representative democracy always seem to extend the distance under the illusion of narrowing it.” (apud Cohn, 2006:11)

The fight against the authority (of state) is the same as the fight against (literary) representations, unquestioned (social) formulas or against capital, the representation of wealth. However, the dilemma was exactly there, as any subversive

action, any resistance would eventually have to be formulated in the language of masters and enact the same reality, leading to the same falsification, and the same alienation of the structures of meaning from life itself.

Jules Vallès, one of the most influential anarchist writers of the 19th century, dreamt of inventing a new language, purged of the old scars of domination and authority (Granier, 2003: 489), while Mécislas Goldberg, critic and poet, spoke about the necessity for a recovery of words, away from their mutilated significations (Granier, 2003: 490). A certain tension and a feeling of overall “linguistical powerlessness” (Eisenzweig, 2001: 154, my translation) seems to mark the anarchist discourse, leading to what Uri Eisenzweig called “the inherent epistemological pessimism” of anarchism (Eisenzweig, 2001: 119, my translation).

Anarchism, event in its incipient formulations takes the form of a “crisis of representation” that, as defined by Frederic Jameson in the introduction to the 1984 English translation of Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A report on Knowledge*,

“(…) calls into question the relationship between our concepts and the truths they are meant to denote, our images and the realities they are supposed to depict, our institutions and the interests they are supposed to serve.” (Frederic Jameson, apud Cohn, 2006: 11).

Political anarchism and aesthetic subversion seem to go hand in hand. The symbolists in 19th century France were flirting with anarchism and calling for the revolutionary undermining of language. The anarchist sympathies of the symbolist poets even lead to a point where the two, symbolism and anarchism, became somewhat interchangeable and were often confused (Eisenzweig, 2001: 180). On the other hand, the literary debates around the realist novel and the realist narrative at the same period were, as Uri Eisenzweig argues, a telling sign of the overall crisis: the opposition to all systems of representation stemming from a *negative conception of language*. The mirror that the realist author pretended to lent to the world was denounced as nothing but a disciplinary mirror, either falsifying it or, worse, framing

it as natural and inescapable. The mirror is a trap, a labeling technique, a prison, a *Bastille of the word*. Mallarmé in turn, dreamt of a future literature that would not strive to express the ineffable, but would be a process of emptying words of their meaning, a nonrepresentative, nonfigurative art (Eisenzweig, 2001: 204) returning the words to their hermetic, intransitive and pure state. There is an irreducible opacity within all discourse, a disaster at the core of language that cannot be framed into a narrative. Language is nothing but an artifice imposing a reified structure over the unnamable. Releasing this unnamable by exposing language's artifice is, in the case of symbolists, "the expression of anarchist politics in the form of aesthetic individualism" (Jesse Cohn, 2006: 126): refusing meaning and thus lucidly purging by poetry the illusion of all representation. As Jesse Cohn, citing Julia Kristeva, wrote,

"One cannot ask that 'art' . . . emit a message which would be considered 'positive,' since art is only 'ethical' in destroying the language within which this 'message' could be carried, the language that situates self in relation to society, the univocal enunciation of such a message would itself represent a suppression of the ethical function as we understand it." (Jesse Cohn, 2006: 127)

In the end, the symbolist response to the crisis of representation was silence, intransitivity, and an aesthetic practice that targeted the social and political function of language. The ambiguous mentions that Mallarmé made to the bomb attacks of the time, apparently inspired by the anarchist urge for a wordless *propaganda by the deed*, seemed to indicate a fascination for the un-representable gesture, pure of signification and folding back on itself hermetically: a terrible act that signifies, but doesn't say anything (to anyone) (Eisenzweig, 2001: 286). A poet, Mallarmé said, should reproduce the method of the bomb within the text itself (Eisenzweig, 2001: 200).

It is not our intent, thought, to make a thorough and extended presentation of the links between modern vanguards in art and literature and a specific antirepresentationalist vein of anarchism, as that would stray us away from the

subject at hand: translation. Our example was intended to be an illustrative analysis of the impasses implied by in a radical antirepresentationalist paradigm, that proceeds from an ethical injunction (never speak for the other!), only to find itself entangled and locked in postures that defeat its very premises: isolation of meaning from life, isolation of the aesthetic from the ethic, and the political alienation of literature and art from the community, which in turn tend to maintain an exclusionary hierarchical structure. It also makes translation not only problematic, but impossible: isn't translation a form of re-presentation? The implicit rejection of translation signals in turn a failed deterritorialization, the collapsing of a revolutionary line of flight into a *black-hole* that can surreptitiously turn a creative practice of enfranchisement into a hermetic suicide note². Or, as Jesse Cohn notes,

“The wish to escape from representation is a wish for an escape from all relationships, which is to say, an escape from life, a self-annihilating wish.” (Cohn, 2006: 195)

A return to a static, fixed and hermetic aesthetic is just another form of reterritorialization: aestheticizing is nothing less than an etatization technique, as Bogdan Ghiu warned in his translation manifesto (Ghiu, 2015: 115).

Georges Darien wrote in his essay about the birth of the anarchist novel, published in 1891, *Le roman anarchiste* (Granier, 2001: 40), that literature at the time was sterile because it was too “parliamentary” (Eisenzweig, 2001: 204, my translation): it was less showing than preaching and legislating. Darien's commentary can be read as bearing the same antirepresentationalist critique discussed so far, however it introduces a nuance. Representation, as Caroline Granier argues, is to be

² In *The Deleuze Dictionary* (2005) edited by Adrian Parr, a black-hole is defined as a possible outcome for a failed line of flight, leading, during the process of subjectification, to self-annihilation. Deterritorialization can have two outcomes: the complete obliteration of subjectivity or the re-engagement of the deconstituted subject with new assemblages, forming new planes of becoming. “As a potential outcome for both paths of transcendence and destruction, the lure of the black hole indicates the subject's attraction toward an absolute (lack) of signification. This expresses the absolute impossibility of representation at the same time as it actively works to show how grand narrative statements continually intertwine subjectivity and signification.” (*The Deleuze Dictionary*, 2005: 30)

subverted only in its pretense of actually replacing reality, in its simulation of a verifiable, objective discourse passing for reality itself. Anarchist writers are equally weary of confusing language with reality and reality with discourse. Both, in their view, are idealist distortions that either empty words of their meaning or, worse, revert them to a mythological and magical use, as the critic Mecislas Golberg warned in an article published in 1895 (Granier, 2003: 490). The anarchist critique is thus more like a critique of the usage of language than of language itself. It is suspicion aimed at representation as technique of widening the gap between signs, their referents and their usage, rather than a rejection of representation and meaning as such. One should never take the signs literally, should never confuse the ballot paper, the banknote or the word with their actual designates, as one so often does.

When Kropotkin spoke of a revolutionary literature, he described it as “an aesthetic of realist description to serve an idealist goal”, reuniting the sense of the actual and the sense of the possible (Cohn, 2006: 167) in one expression. What Bernard Lazare, an anarchist literary critic, subsequently called in his 1896 *Manifesto* “social art”, equally distant from a naturalist reifying vision and from a symbolist mystification, Proudhon called “critical idealism”: a realist literature with a critical and lucid testimonial function, however “refusing to reify these experiences into the supposedly eternal facts of human nature or the human condition” (Cohn, 2006: 170). Ursula K. Le Guin, a contemporary science-fiction anarchist writer, described her writing as “strange realism” (Le Guin, 1986), a joining of actual description of what people do and feel with speculative extrapolations turned into *ambiguous utopias*, as the subtitle of one of her novels warned. The alienation of language, either by an imposed usage, or by an aestheticized hermetism, sends directly to the question of the social itself, to the way people relate to one another. Anarchism’s antirepresentationalism needs to be therefore understood only in relation to the principle of direct action: language has to be drawn out of its’ closures and reappropriated, subjectivated, put together in new and voluntarily constituted assemblages. The anarchist view of popular empowerment is far from being just another theory of domination, where the people would act as the new masters. Bakunin had already warned Marx, that *the people* is just another spook conveniently concealing the same pretense of a self appointed elite to be their representative. In

fact, this would enact the same social scam, with yesterday's revolutionaries taking the place of priests, capitalists and politicians in the unharmed structures of silencing, while pretending to speak for the others. On the contrary, the crisis of representation is not only the crisis of a vacant centre that should just be occupied by the right narrative. The centre does not need to be occupied, but scattered, disseminated, put in motion and disseminated (Cohn, 2006: 72).

In the anarchist (counter) narrative, the real, the true, the positive are those things capable of transformation, incomplete and fragmented, while the false, the fictions, the abstract, comprise the realities that appear fixed, complete, incapable of conversion (Cohn, 2006: 76), incapable of being translated, put into play, experimented. For Bookchin, as for Deleuze, reality is not a fixed, but a changing referent comprising "the order of emergent (virtual) possibilities" (Cohn, 2006: 78). It is in this sense that we should understand Ursula K. Le Guin's remark that "the truth is a matter of imagination" (Ursula K. Le Guin, 1986). Meaning, representation, narratives are not oppressive as such, nor are they simple illusions, but ways to (collectively) articulate, fathom, and shape our being together. Stories, words, assemblages need to be put together, need to be anarchically circulated and taken astray, modified incessantly and reassembled not only by a few scholars, but by everybody. It is a practice of vernacularization, of direct action, bypassing the elite cultural intermediaries and exclusions, resembling the call for popularization and for "population" in Bogdan's Ghiu translation manifesto (Ghiu, 2015, 205). Translation is a *river of anarchy*.

Anarchist aesthetic and practice, on the other hand, does not strive to produce actors, nor spectators, but translators. Translation, as a generalized epistemic and ethical paradigm is, I argue, an actual anarchist practice: translational reappropriation of the means of expression, a pedagogy of encounter driven by an exilic consciousness.

The crisis of representation is the crisis of translation, or, better, it is the crisis of the lack of translation. The crisis of representation is the scandal of (non)translation.

David Graeber spoke of the anarchist internationalism as opposed to the “globalist ideology” (Graeber, 2004: 103). The latter is a mere “identity machine” (Graeber, 2004: 103) working with abstractly labeled parcels in a perspective of a totalizing world. An anarchist model calls for a tearing down of borders and the destruction of conceptual walls in order to open alternative spaces of “free play and uncertainty” (CrimethInc. Writers’ Bloc, 2013), creating “temporary autonomous zones” (Hakim Bey, 1985). Another form of resistance is defection or the “engaged withdrawal” (Graeber, 60). This is quite similar to Ghiu’s calls for a “de-translation”(Ghiu, 2015: 115, my translation) that would act as destabilizing conceptual raids, bringing “the subterranean currents of resistance within the language to the surface” (CrimethInc. Writers’ Bloc, 2013) and creating, through the untranslatable and the unfamiliar “new points of departure” from the “enemy territory” (CrimethInc. Writers’ Bloc, 2013). Translation as a *defective* reproduction, and a defective representation.

We have tried to show so far that the translation-paradigm and the anarchist aesthetic and practice are stemming from the same *legacy of freedom*, both formulating their basic ethical and aesthetical assumptions in the context of the *crisis of representation*, and both encountering the same practical and theoretical difficulties. The translation *minoritizing paradigm* proposed by Bogdan Ghiu or Lawrence Venuti exceeds the linguistic or aesthetical frameworks, calling into question the actual ethical and political engagements that translation expresses and endorses. Likewise, the minor anarchist literature and critique were, more than anything else, reflections about the moral hypothesis, world-outlook as well as the and the understanding of human relationships contained and enforced by the usage of language. Both the translation paradigm and anarchism, understood as practices, are forms of *direct action*, *critiques of mediation* and *subversions* of the dominant major practice. Also, they express a horizontal, multiple, nomad and experimental attitude, as opposed to hierarchical, elitist, totalizing, closed and authoritarian

systems. On the other hand, the antirepresentationalist deadlock, either converting the ethical injunction into an insurmountable epistemic pessimism, or collapsing it into hermetic, auto-destructive silence, finds a solution not into a global theoretical breakthrough, but into a certain understanding of translation as practice. Translation is a form of anarchist encounter, not of containment or as mimetic repetition; it is a practice of releasing meaning, of putting-it overtly together for new (monstrous) uses, opening it for associations and possibilities, across and against borders and enclosures. Translation is an open usage of language, as there is no absolute points, no fixed idiom, no origin, but only points of passage, points of transmission, only translations. New usages of language, new distortions and estrangements are altering languages, defamiliarizing words and calling for other new, different translations. To translate is to de-aesthetize language, to write as a stranger, as a barbarian, as a servant, if we are to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari's illustration of Kafka's minor, arid writing and his fascination with workers, with servants, with the underclass (Deleuze&Guattari, 1985: 26).

Translation works, like anarchism, as a core ethic to be articulated in different historical idioms or situations; it is a *concept-in(process-of)translation* rather than a definitive theory of meaning. The internal dynamism of translation is similar to that described by Graeber when he proposes an anarchist non-vanguardist approach to research, giving anthropology as example: an auto-ethnographical moment doubled by *utopian extrapolation*. In other words, the operation of translation itself is presented as part of the situation, is scrutinized, making the translation rather than a finite product, an open workshop for everybody to see and to participate in. Translation is the *strange realism*, the *minor social art* of anarchism, reuniting in one operation the sense of the actual, the recognition of the same, with the sense of the virtual, the apprehension of the different.

Anarchism as translation, assumes its own contingencies and contextual dependencies, as well as the task of (self) *decolonization* as a chance and as an ongoing ethical project (Bogdan Ghiu, 2015:211). Translation as anarchism

acknowledges its own liberating potential and the necessity of a political and situated practice. They both are part of an interrupted and fragmentary tradition: a nomad, changing and vulnerable legacy of freedom, creating temporary associations, rogue usages, local encounters and the eventual precarious “pirate utopias” to come (Hakim Bey, 1985): translation is still an unknown pathway (Ghiu, 2015: 228).

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