TRANSLATING PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Translatability and translation, the possibility and act of conveying some thing between people, objects, languages, cultures, times, spaces and media, have become increasingly important elements of creative practice and works of art. My research explores this proposition. To contextualise this concept of translation as an artistic and critical method mediating the relationship of the seeable to the sayable I retrace an under-mined vein of translation that grew from the Enlightenment, the Early (Jena) Romantic response to it and its subsequent development through Walter Benjamin to other modern theorists. I suggest that this tradition of translation has developed into a creative method that assumes a pre-existent given from which it evolves in order to destabilise, re-appropriate and make-new.

The thesis argues that art has come to occupy the space of translation and proposes that an interpretative mode is ultimately antithetical to a form of thought engaged with in the creative process. This relies on the understanding of a qualitative distinction between acts of translation as presentational and of interpretation as representational. The distinction is not clear-cut since these two forms of mediation operate on a continuum. The probable root of "interpret" in English is "between prices" and derives from trade. This etymology stresses the transactional, hermeneutic role of the interpreter as a responsive agent that negotiates between distinct value systems to ensure equivalence during the process of exchange. While Interpretation operates primarily within the symbolic aspect of language translation retains a relationship to metaphor, which acknowledges that during transfer something becomes something that it literally is not. It must therefore also account for Aporia, or what fails to cross over and for a-signifying, singular aspects that affect or alter the symbolic during this process. In contrast to interpretation, translation's relation to subjectivity, its resistance to schematisation and reduction to the accurate, objective and rational transfer of information provides a prophylaxis of doubt and generates heterogeneity.

The thesis triangulates my practices as artist, translator and critic using translation to destabilise and re-calibrate the relationship of theory to practice. In relation to theory, rather than use this to explain, interpret, or categorize art, it advocates the translational practice of placing in parallel so that lines of thought may be drawn from one to the other, responding to and setting up points of intersection, divergence and congruence to encourage a non-hierarchical associative-dissociative dismantling. Translation informs the research method, structure and content of the thesis, which occupies an inter-theoretical, inter-disciplinary or matrixial space. As such, it is edified through a process that derives from and displays the translational method and diverse sources that constitute it. Four case studies bring together practices employing a translational method from different periods, cultures, creative practices and theoretical sources: Bernard Leach and Ezra Pound's modernist projects; Jorge Luis Borges' theory of translation and Briony Fer's re-presentation of Eva Hesse's studio work; the Brazilian poets Haroldo and Agosto De Campos' theory of Cannibalistic translation and painter Adriana Varejao's work with tiles; and ceramicist Alison Britton in light of Donald Winnicott's concept of transitional spaces.

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This thesis is dedicated to Tom Linden and our daughters: Rose, Grace, Clemency and Isabel, whose love, patience and support make everything possible

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature:

Date:

INTRODUCTION

My project developed from an impulse to try to bring together and make sense of perceived overlaps between my training and practice as a translator and artist and their relation (through and as translation) to a body of critical theory surrounding – drawn in by and attaching itself to – artistic practice. As a translator tasked with the problem of transferring a text from one language or culture to another context I had been inculcated with an understanding of labour as competence. This emphasised the importance of accuracy in the faithful transfer of information from source to target and privileged the representational or symbolic aspect of language as code. However, my experience of teaching languages and translation and facilitating workshops – in which I invariably witnessed the production of difference, of mutation in response to a given source text – had also made me aware of the potentiality emerging from the impossibility – the limitations and aporia – inherent to translation. Coupled with the translator's task, which involves retaining a connection between the signifying and asignifying element in language, this opaque aspect revealed in the act of translation seemed to give rise to and risk

> A mobile-immobile relation, untold and without number,
> not indeterminate, but indeterminating, always in
> displacement, […] and such that it seems to draw-repel
> any 'I' into leaving its site or its role - which nonetheless,
> the I must maintain, having become nomadic and
> anonymous in an abyssal space of resonance and
> condensation.[1]

As an artist I sensed that artistic practice often works within and negotiates this space of translation. The nomadic facility to move between place, time, language, culture and media, and the creative potential involved in the process, the consequent destabilisation of the subject and the encounter with the abyssal space of the echo chamber, had become intrinsic to its practice. For me, translation as such was discernable both as

[1] Maurice Blanchot. *The Infinite Conversation*, (my ellipsis) trans. Susan Hanson
(Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p 67

an artistic method and evident in a relation of visual practice to words: reflective, engaged, critical and theoretical, that was not about commoditisation, ownership or appropriation of an historical or cultural other but involved sharing through translation in the potentiality of an unquantifiable, stemming from irresolvable and recalcitrant aporia held in common.

As I began to unpack this concept, it emerged that implicit in this understanding of art as translation – an understanding, which placed artistic practice on the side of becoming – was a residual adherence to a qualitative distinction between acts of interpretation and translation. I found this distinction formulated by the Jena Romantics and echoed subsequently by critics and artists whereby interpretation that works within the representational and quantifiable, the realm of information, commerce and capital, is defined against translation. Translation thus emerges as a form that sustains resistance to representation and potentiality stemming from the understanding that there cannot be an absolute, or truth, but only confrontation or aporia at the point of encounter between two entities.

As I read into the subject, this potentiality of translation seemed to manifest itself in the ceaselessly giving gift of nature perceived by Ezra Pound, the privileged task of Walter Benjamin's translator and the potential to touch or reconnect with pure language, or the ineffable, in the possibility generated within paradox advocated by Donald Winnicott, and in the capacity of art – as defined by Susan Sontag – to resist interpretation and unsettle. I wanted to try to understand how this perception and the form of practice it generated had emerged, what translation as method facilitated, and how an apparently linguistic model might influence and interact with visual practice and vice versa. As a translator, a maker, reflecting on my own practice the triangulation which emerged between my practice, theory and translation made me reconsider the interface between theory and practice: how, or if, work might make itself available for critique and yet resist interpretation, or whether it might be more apt

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to view work through translations of it, since this might facilitate establishing a relation or connection between theory and practice, while allowing both to co-exist as semi-independent productions.

Historically, translation has both generated and tested theory through practice, finding expression in the translators' notes and introductions that reflect on moments of assimilation or submission and respond to encounters with resistance and aporia. There is a sense in which the relation allows practice to act as a springboard for a reflective form of theorisation. In terms of the integrity of the thesis, rather than follow a model based on a movement from thesis through antithesis into synthesis it felt important to allow translation to generate a method that guided the selection of the subject matter and its edification into chapters. This method facilitated another form of connecting literature and artefact, word and thing relative to theory. As in translation, this required that one practice be read in the light of the other and maintain the instability and provisional nature of it as a reading. As a visual and literary technique it worked from a given and collaged sources from diverse disciplines that juxtaposed and layered temporal, spatial, cultural, technical and stylistic aspects throughout the thesis.

The modular organisation of case studies placed in relation to the other enabled threads of thought to be drawn out at points of intersection and congruence, allowing for continuity of influence and different voices to bring out shifting perspectives. Translation fosters a reflective practice of being with and writing from a given other. As a method aware of its own contingency, translation does not pretend to provide a neutral objective, or comparative layout of thematic concerns, but proposes a form of reading which places the theorist, or critic as interlocutor, in relation to – and engaged in a critical conversation with – the practitioner, and brings out the subjectivity inherent to these interactions as acts of translation. Thus translation emerges as a method, which opens up critical conversational spaces and facilitates an aesthetics and poetics of relation.

Chapter 1 A Tradition of Translation

In the first chapter I retrace the genesis of a concept and tradition of translation that began in classical times and developed through German Romanticism into a contemporary understanding of it. I look at how it was used in the early modern era in the process of identity formation, the evolution of national languages and the nation state in the eighteenth century and Jena Romantic interest in language and translation (through Hamann and Herder to Novalis, Hölderlin, Schleiermacher and Schlegel) that was co-existential with their concern with the locus and problematic of subjectivity. With the linguistic turn initiated by the Romantics, subjectivity became located within language as the subject displaced the object as the basis of interpretation. Language as an instance of schema provided a point of intersection and resistance – between the subject and the object the 'I' and the 'you' – in the relationship of the universal to the particular and a focus for exploring the nature of subjectivity. The location of the subject in language and translation, and their relation to the poetic, allowed for the potential of genius to think and create other in relation to universal structures of thought. This move entailed a distinction between translation and interpretative uses of language, which operated predominantly within the symbolic, functional and verifiable parameters of information.

The chapter follows the development of a Romantic theory of language and practice of translation through Walter Benjamin's understanding of language as coextensive with everything that made translation and translatability both fundamental and central to the work of art – to its practice and criticism, its aura and afterlife – and by extension to his understanding of history.[2] Since we exist in language, then translation's

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[2] See also Giorgio Agamben, 'The Idea of Language', in: *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford University Press, California, 1999), pp. 39-61 (p.50) : "Reason cannot reach the origin of names (li vocaboli) and cannot master them because, as we have seen, they reach reason only through history, *in descending*. This infinite 'descent' of names is history. Language thus always anticipates the original place of speaking beings, retreating toward the past and the future of an infinite descent, such that thinking can

unique privilege lies in its ability to expose the space between representation and reality, in the instances, or acts of translation, where representation fractures allowing it to reconnect with and touch upon a universal, or absolute. With Benjamin, subjectivity became entwined with translation and the thesis traces the progressive narrowing of the conceptual gap between subject and object that this shift set in motion. It moves from the distinction assumed by Ezra Pound and Bernard Leach through Borges' ludic, conceptual subversion and inversion of hierarchies, the De Campos brothers' radical ingestion and digestion of origin made manifest through Adriana Varejão's embodied response to imagined identities and digitised realities, to the flicker or sliver of subjectivity that lingers in the pause or delay as time spent in transit through Donald Winnicott's and Alison Britton's transitional, in-between practices. Benjamin's intertwined concepts of translation, time and history pervade the four case studies, bringing together contemporary artistic practices with translation and critical theory. Resonant of Benjamin's image of history, examples from different times, places and disciplines coalesce around translation as they are drawn from the past – reaching between time and tense – and are gathered into the present to contemplate through language what might be.

Chapter 2 Translation and Authenticity

This chapter contemplates the assumption of a discrete object and origin that might be connected with by the subject in light of translation's problematic relation – as a form of derivation through reproduction, or

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never find an end to it. And this incurable 'shadow' of grammar, the darkness that originally inheres in language and that – in the necessary coincidence of history and grammar – founds the historical condition of human beings. History is the cipher of the shadow that denies human beings direct access to the level of names; *history is the place of names.* The transparency of language – the ungroundedness of every act of speech – founds both theology and history. As long as human beings cannot reach the origin of language, there will be the transmission of names. And as long as there is transmission of names there will be history and destiny."

copy[3] – to authenticity. It draws on the work of Ezra Pound and Bernard Leach to chart the way translation was used by the former to reinvigorate Western poetry and by the latter to establish a tradition of studio pottery in the West based on a Japanese Mingei tradition. Both artists assumed – as their Romantic predecessors had – an appropriative, confident use of translation to enrich their own culture by absorbing foreign elements into it. Pound's theory of the Image and Leach's concept of pattern drew on a similar understanding of language and translation nostalgic for a golden age of direct, unmediated correspondence between subject and object, thought and expression, word and thing. The emphasis on fidelity to an original unity entailed the acceptance of implicit betrayal, post-lapsarian entropy and loss rather than generative potentiality within translation. In Leach's case I suggest this contributed to a failure to fully appreciate that the culture he was translating from was already a hybrid translation, while his adherence to signature as a form of authenticity that ensured continuity by placing it within the originating subject or author prevented him from fully appreciating the potential of translation in the democratising power of technical forms of reproduction, and the common, accessible shared aspect latent in un-authored Standard Ware as a democratic, domestic art form.

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[3] The naming of things evokes a form of reproduction. The newly coined word replaces and reproduces as it represents the thing – once it has taken its place and begun to circulate as a form of linguistic currency it becomes as prevalent, reproducible and insubstantial as the word. It becomes a means of exchange which, lacking a particular, tangible referent to anchor it, is vulnerable to misunderstanding, to its meaning becoming distorted, debased, dissipated, but also enhanced, embellished and developed. A retroactive impulse to return persists – to remove this distance and reunite language with its origin, to tie it to a form of unflinching, immutable gold standard, or authentic original, which ensures value. This Romantic impulse is evident in Novalis and Fenollosa, Leach and Pound, who see the roots of language in a concept of Nature that endlessly provides the context and moment, giving rise to the original metaphor. This approach is premised on the potential for translation to become the means to re-connect with an original moment of creation.

Chapter 3 Translation as Practice

This chapter takes its lead from the way Borges exploited the potential for intellectual abstraction and conceptual game-playing made available by rule-bound systems like language that create order in order to think other. It explores his use of translation – and the concept of origin and copy inherent to it as a form of reproduction – to challenge established colonial power relations and hierarchies between the centre (colonising) and the periphery (colonised) to subvert and destroy the notion of origin. Within Borges' anti-theoretical theory of translation, subjectivity resides in resistance to overarching narratives, in engagement with the particular through the concrete detail that resists transfer and its the capacity to act like the ghost in the machine, to trip it up, force errors, be humorous and play within the mechanics of representation. In light of this it discusses Briony Fer's curation of Eva Hesse's studio work as a form of translation, that similarly questions and destabilises prevailing hierarchies: ideas of the canon, of the art establishment, product and market and of what might be constitutive of artistic practice and production. It evokes the spirit of the studio as a site where art can continue to operate as a practice involving work without end in a commodity culture.

Chapter 4 Translation and Sense

The fourth chapter works within the inter-connectedness of translation, Brazilian Anthropophagy and the Baroque as it outlines Haroldo and Augusto De Campos' cannibalistic translation theory. Adriana Varejão's work with tiles is considered in relation to their proactive, empowered approach to the post-colonial condition that promoted translation as a way of creating a new hybrid identity. A contemporary, connected globalised approach to art practice in the digital age is evident in the way Varejão translates through tessellation, using the fragmentary facility of the tile as pixel to move dislocating itself between cultures – China, Brazil, Portugal, Indigenous Amerindian – between media, dimensions and the

disciplines of painting, sculpture and ceramics, to create new hybrid forms of work.

In this chapter the examination of the gap between subject and object moves from mental process to include bodily process, as translation becomes a digestive, human response to otherness and to virtual, representational realities. De Campos' and Varejão's work introduces the corporeal and sensed in the embodied subjectivity of the artist that creates art from abstracted realities and conceptual virtual worlds. As a practice that translates between and negotiates the interaction of the signifying and a-signifying in language, art as translation reasserts itself against interpretation, as a singular human interaction with function and with forms of reproduction and mechanization.

Chapter 5 Translation and Transition

The final chapter reads Alison Britton's work with slip in light of D. W. Winnicott's theory of the transitional object. It suggests that a translational dynamic facilitated destabilisation of an interpretative psychoanalytical model to promote a third less hierarchical approach that focused on the holding space in which therapeutic encounter took place. A shift in focus from emphasis on provenance or destination onto the intermediate territory within translation and transition established a triangulation, a tripartite dynamic opening-up: a third way that enabled reconsideration of the agents involved, of what took place during the crossing and of the potential of pause in an in-between space. In Britton and Winnicott translation – as transition – becomes internalised, as subject and object reside within and the slippage between the two is negotiated through practice. Here translation and its exposure of the relationship of the symbolic to the semiotic and the pre-symbolic facilitate a reconsideration of assumptions concerning the nature of function in art. Through translation, writing negotiates the ambivalence and sense of intimate distance derived from identification with, and alienation from, the other. My own subjectivity as a translator becomes evident as I write with the

artist from the experience of being alongside them in their spaces of practice. Translation becomes a way of writing from art that facilitates an experience and relation similar to the one described by Bourriard:

> For me criticism is a matter of conviction, not an exercise in flitting about and "covering" artistic current events. My theories are born of careful observation of the work in the field. I have neither the passion for objectivity of the journalist, nor the capacity for abstraction of the philosopher, who alas often seizes upon the first artists he comes across in order to illustrate his theories.
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> [….] I will stick, therefore, to describing what appears around me: I do not seek to illustrate abstract ideas with a "generation" of artists but to construct ideas in their wake. I think with them.[4]

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[4] Bourriard, N. *Post Production. Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, Has & Sternberg, New York, 2002. Preface to 2nd Edition

CHAPTER 1

A TRADITION OF TRANSLATION

An Outline Genealogy of Translation in the West

Although often overlooked or forgotten in some of our more functional or reductionist contemporary concepts of translation that would reduce it to a conventional and primarily technical form of written language transfer, it is important to bear in mind that in other cultures, and in antiquity, there is a plethora of synonyms that acknowledge the intricate web of interactions negotiated and describe the different forms of translation practised. For example:

> The Indian tradition sees translation as a form of rewriting, The Romans distinguished between stricter and less literal translation with terms like verto', converto, transverto, imitari, (loose forms of translation) and interpretor and eprimere (closer translation) with later additions of mutare, transfero and translatate. (Folena, 1994: 8-9.) Medieval vocabulary was even more complex. It distinguished between kinds of languages involved and translating from a noble to a vulgar language or between vulgar languages. [...] and the kinds of texts involved (sacred, didactic, legal, historical, or poetic). It was assumed that these kinds of translation would not employ the same methods or seek the same ends. Paraphrasing and rewriting were permitted when vulgar languages were involved; literalness was called for when dealing with the auctoritates'.[1]

Theorists working within the field of translation studies seem unable to agree on what translation is. It has been suggested that translation could be loosely defined as any of the following: a process; a process and the result of this process; a communication or mediation, or as an art, skill or craft. Definitions seem to emphasise it as a practice and its potentiality, or its hermeneutic function. Others have suggested that it is impossible to define translation, because its definition is dependent on the capacity of language to define it. Translation such as Wittgenstein's concept game would seem to be an open concept.

If we work from the dictionary to trace the genealogy of this untranslatable term, the verb "to translate", generally used to describe the

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[1] Anne Carson and Sherry Simon. 'A Single Brushstroke - Writing Through Translation', in *Translation, Reflections, Refractions, Transformations,* ed Paul St-Pierre, Prafulla C Kar (Delhi: Pencraft International 2009), pp. 90-98 (pp.91-92)

passage of a text from one language into another, derives from a relatively late French adaptation of the Latin verb *traducere* (to lead, or carry across). This verb has come to define a concept and an act that both translates and is subject to translation. In negotiating the transfer between signifiers it implies a link to the phenomenal world, but in that it exists within – both of and subject to – language, it creates and exists in an unstable space of variable and recurrent tensions, in which the act of translation and negotiation of meaning becomes subject to an ongoing process by which its meaning is constantly negotiated. The tensions set up by this dual aspect (the relationship of language to things and of subject to object) contribute to the traditional accusation of *traduttore traditore*, and all that this implies. On one level, translation's relationship to the empirical, or phenomenal, would seem to offer the possibility of fidelity and the precise, accurate transfer of meaning from one language, or symbolic system, to another. However, the subjectivity inherent to mediation, and the process by which we try to translate the verbs that describe the actions and effects of translation, introduces persistent unquantifiable indefiniteness and equivocation into the equation. Thus translation's relationship – through the subject – to context, time and tradition render it infinitely contingent upon something else to the effect that something additional and other attaches itself to, affects and modifies the word, its definition and its practice in the passage from one language into another.

Within the contemporary Western tradition our understanding of translation has evolved through the Greek, Latin, medieval Christian and German Romantic conceptions of language and translation. While it has words that may be rendered as such, ancient Greek lacked a specific word to signify translation. The Greek word *logos* combined the senses of speech and reason, allowing them to make no distinction between discourse and reason, "between the language they spoke and the language proper to man".[2] It could therefore be assumed that the Greek language provided the potential for a perfect, seamless correspondence between rational

[2] Barbara Cassin et al., eds., *Dictionary of Untranslatables: a Philosophical Lexicon*, translation edited by Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood (Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014),p.1139

thought and its expression. However, the Greek word *barbaros* (which loosely translates as 'blah-blah-blah', and denotes the other) is not credited with the same capacity for reason. Similar to *algarabia*, the derogatory Spanish word for gibberish, it is an *onomatapoeisis* that describes an effect of unintelligibility and confusion, and

> refers to a conjunction of linguistic, anthropological and political features that make the 'barbarian' altogether other from the self, a *heteros* that make it unintelligible, perhaps not even altogether human.[3]

Thus to speak correctly was to speak Greek, and an act of translation would naturalise it, making a given text "Greek" (*Hellenizein*). In this respect it functioned essentially as a "monolingual" culture and, in that it underplayed the difference between languages, it denied the space of translation, rendering it a gap or void.[4] The conceptual field for translation, one that we are now familiar with, began to appear later in the Greek language, with the translation of the Bible between the 2nd century BCE and 1st century CE. The Greek verbs for translation that would be drawn upon by later theorists – *hermenuin* (express/signify) and *metagraphein* (to transcribe/copy) – that became synonymous with translation, date from this time.[5]

As we saw above, in the quotation from Sherry Simon, subsequent Latin writers also lacked a specific term for translation. Their use of multiple terms for translation – *vertere, convertere, exprimere, reddere, transferre, interpretari, imitari* – would suggest that a clear distinction was not drawn between looser forms such as adaptation and literal or close translation. It has been argued[6] that what was at stake in Latin "translation" was the "very reception of Greek culture in Rome". While this appropriation by the conquering culture undeniably involved an element of pillaging rather

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[3] Ibid., p. 1141
[4] See *Dictionary of Untranslatables*.
[5] See also Philo's proposition: the speech that translates our thought, which is based on the schema: language (*logos*) as the interpreter (*hermeneus*) of thought or spirit (*nous*). He then applies this to the fact or process of divine revelation. Thus science and God's word (*logos*) have their interpreter in Moses.
[6] *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, p. 1141

than a purely creative encounter and exchange generated by interaction between equals, for Cicero (106 BC – 43 BC), who drew on the potential of the Greek concept of *metapherein*[7] that is also present in translation, the transfer (*transferre*) of art and literature from Greece to Rome described

> [. . .] the displacement of meaning that is at work in the deployment of metaphor. By using the same verb for the activity of translation and the creation of metaphors, Cicero establishes a link in language between translating and writing; one has only to apply to translation what he has to say about the development of metaphor, undoubtedly starting from the Aristotelian reflections on metaphor as a process of enrichment of language, to define translation as a true creation.

Cicero's understanding of translation as more than a merely imitative act acknowledged its potential for an appropriating culture – through acts of emulative rivalry between Greek and Roman culture – to add to itself by using unfamiliar, foreign borrowings from another: "These metaphors are a kind of borrowing (*mutationes*) which enable us to find elsewhere what we are lacking for ourselves".[8]

Horace likewise advocated a "[....] rhetorical imitation of the foreign text whereby the Homeric epics become sites of invention for the Latin Poet."[9]

In accordance with this appropriative impulse, the Roman approach emphasised the relative autonomy of the translated text. Freeing the translator from the shackles imposed by strict fidelity to the original, it minimised the importance of equivalence, restricting it to "a general semantic and stylistic correspondence."

In late antiquity, emphasis shifted back towards equivalence. In part this was because many of the texts being translated were "sacred", key

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[7] *Metapherein* (to transport, transpose, to employ metaphorically or report) is a Greek term also used to describe translation. For Aristotle, Metaphor is a figure of words that gives "a thing a name that belongs to something else", thus in the process a thing becomes something that it literally is not.

[8] Cicero, *On The Ideal Orator,* quoted in *Dictionary of Untranslateables* p.1142. My parenthesis.

[9] Lawrence Venuti, ed. *The Translation Studies Reader,* 2ⁿᵈ. edn. (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 14

religious texts that encouraged a patristic approach, stressing fidelity to their original intent and signification. However, ideas of what origin meant, and where truth might be located, differed. St. Augustine (354-430 AD: *De Dialectica* and *De Doctrina Christiana*) identified three levels of language (or the word): oral, written and mental speech (or meditative thought), which was not constituted by words pertaining to any particular language, but operated trans-idiomatically and drew on the Aristotelian model of non-linguistic mental concepts that were held to be universal. This concept of universality within plurality would make it possible for all languages to have the potential to touch upon truth. Therefore, rather than assuming the progressive decline of humanity and language, Augustine believed in its progression, culminating in the final stage "completed" by the Christ. Augustine's concept of language stemmed from the Stoic doctrine of the *res et signa* ("things and signs"):

> If *on* and *onoma* are fused and *res* and *signa* are separated. The unique and only *res* for Augustine is God and *veritas* is just another way of saying God. Language, on the other hand falls under *signa,* and writing is only a "sign" of a "sign": it cannot be identified with truth, which belongs to the order of the *res*.[10]

Augustine defined the difference between things and signs functionally rather than ontologically: i.e. signs *do something*, while things *are*. Thus a sign operates triadically and relationally. A sign is always a sign of some thing to some mind and all instruction (*to somebody*) "*is either about things or signs; but things are learnt by means of signs*." A word by definition is a sign and a sign is something which, "*offering itself to the senses, conveys something other to the intellect*."[11] The separation of things and signs means that signs function as representations that stand in for something, and therefore are not able to present the thing in itself to the understanding. They are limited to recalling or calling some thing to mind and in the process a third element comes into play, whereby something undergoes a vital change and becomes something else. In terms of translation, the

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[10] *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, p. 1146
[11] *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, p. 1146

question of truth – of origin and authenticity – created by the distance and difference that this third element introduced to the process of transfer was negotiated in different ways.

Rather than insist on close adherence to a given origin, Augustine's idea of fidelity and a standard of accuracy were ruled by a belief in a translation's divine inspiration (i.e. whether it contained truth, or the presence or essence of the some thing other that is conveyed to the intellect through language). For him the Greek Septuagint translation of the Bible contained the Holy Spirit. In support of his conviction that it was "so inspired by the Holy Spirit that many spoke as one", Augustine reiterated the apocryphal tale of its translation whereby seventy Hellenistic Jews, despite working independently and in isolation, produced exactly the same translations. He reasoned that if there were such a thing as original truth, it would be contained within this translation.

The Bible translator and theologian St. Jerome (c.347- 30.09.420 AD) advocated a strategy (widely adopted through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance) of translating sense for sense rather than word for word: "in Scripture one must consider not the words but the sense."[12] Jerome's theory assumed Hesiod's theory of history – based on a Greek conception of authenticity – which placed truth at the point of origin and viewed all that came after it as the progressive and inevitable deterioration of humanity after the Fall. In relation to language, *being* (on) and *name* (onoma) were etymologically and theoretically conjoined, thus locating truth in origin. This mirrored the divine act of calling things into being and the human (Adamic) act of naming described in the book of Genesis. However, the effect of this was to create a schism between the *thing* and the *sign*, which would deny language – as a sign of a sign – any connection to truth. The repercussions of this for a theory of language are predictable and become manifest in enduring hierarchies of languages, which assume

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[12] Jerome, letter to Pammachus, (395 AD), in: *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 21-30.

a gradual degeneration from "*language as such*" to the "*languages of man*"[13], and assert that older ones were closer to that perfect correspondence.

In his translation of the Bible, Jerome wanted to reach back to a less adulterated, corrupted version of the Bible, one that would not interfere with the transmission of God's word and would allow him to deliver a transparent representation of divine meaning. In support of his decision to translate the Bible from Hebrew, rather than the later Greek version, Jerome adopted the doctrine of the relationship between *being* and the *name*, as for him the Hebrew language as primordial idiom must be the most apt to express and guarantee truth:

> The books translated by Jerome will not be 'corrupted by the transfer to a third vase [in tertium vas transfusa]." 'Stored in a very clean jug as soon as they leave the press, so they will retain all their taste' (prologue to the books of Solomon).[14]

Jerome's sense for sense method of translation continued to influence translation into the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as did the concept of the hierarchy of languages that stemmed from a conception of the relationship of God to the Word which persisted into the Middle Ages and beyond. Augustine had contrasted translation (*signa translata*) with *signa propria*, differentiating between names originally attributed to God (and by extension to things). The transfer of meaning through successive translations or displacements set up chains of signification that cascaded meaning by association and inference with distortion arising out of equivocation (resulting from post-lapsarian human error and errantry) and the demands of context implicit in the process. The term *translatio* covered different practices, all of which shared a sense of 'displacement' or 'transfer':

> 1. "transfer from one meaning to another' for one word, or 'from the name of one thing to another' in a given language (intralingual translation)

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[13] See Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and the Languages of Man', in: *Selected Writings, Vol 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael, W Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 62-74.
[14] *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, p. 1145

2. transfer of a term from one language to an equivalent term in another: whence 'translation' (interlingual translation)

3. transfer of culture or government from one epoch to another, from "one place to another" (historical and cultural translation,)[15]

These categories defining different kinds of translation have endured. The first two are reproduced in Roman Jakobson's definition, as set out in his "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation"(1959), which likewise distinguishes three forms:

1. Intralingual translation, or rewording, is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language

2. Interlingual translation, or translation proper, is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language

3. Intersemiotic translation, or transmutation, is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems.[16]

While Jakobson's final intersemiotic form of translation could be implicit in the third example of '*translatio*', it does not explicitly specify this form of transfer; however, it understands the possibility and significance of translation between time and place. The concept of language and translation detailed above, which is evident in Jerome's evaluation of Hebrew and the story of Babel in Genesis, persists into contemporary thought, into Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound's subsequent evaluation of Chinese as the medium for poetry and in Jorge Luis Borges and R. W. Emerson's concept of language as "fossil poetry".

Translation and German Romanticism

Discussions of translation as a subject in and of itself and as a practice began to come to the fore with the end of multilingual Europe, the construction of nation states and national identities. Prior to the 1800s

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[15] *Dictionary of Untranslatables* , p. 1146 (my parentheses)
[16] *The Translation Studies Reader*, .pp.138-143

Europe had been inherently multilingual, with Medieval Latin acting, much as English does today, as the international *lingua franca*. Translation was largely viewed as an activity that was less concerned with the relationship of the source to the target, or the self to the other, through language than as a vehicle to circulate knowledge between them. In part this approach was based on the earlier understanding that the distinction between the thing and the sign assumed the existence of a phenomenal world independent of language. Since these concepts of language still assumed an acceptance of similar universal, Aristotelian non-linguistic mental concepts that made it possible for thought to find its expression in different languages, languages as media and translation were primarily thought of as vehicles for the exchange of thought rather than something that might shape it. Translation was, therefore, a process involving the exchange of *signifieds,* which gave less consideration to their context and connotations, cultural or otherwise. Thus, prior to the establishment of nations that emphasised the importance of languages and cultures to the formation of national identities, neither the possibility nor the potential of translation had been brought into question to the same extent as it would for subsequent thinkers.

Between 1798 and 1804 the Early German Romantics based around Jena were responsible for initiating a linguistic turn that would give particular attention to the practice and theorisation of translation. As Thomas Carlyle subsequently commented,

> Every literature of the world has been cultivated by the Germans [......] Shakespeare and Homer, no doubt occupy alone the loftiest station in the poetical Olympus; but there is space in it for all true Singers out of every age and clime [.....] the Germans study foreign nations in a spirit which deserves to be oftener imitated. It is their honest endeavour to understand each with its own particularities, in its own special manner of existing, [.....] Of all literatures, accordingly, the German has the best and the best as well as the most

translations; men like Goethe, Schiller, Wieland, Schlegel, Tieck, have not disdained this task.[17]

Antoine Berman[18] has argued convincingly that for the German Romantics, who were involved in translation to varying degrees, it was a practice and significant area of engagement that both informed and was influenced by their theory of language. A W Schlegel (1767-1845), brother of the philosopher and theoretician Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), undertook the most comprehensive project to translate Shakespeare, Cervantes, Calderón, Petrarch and many other works in Spanish, Portuguese and Italian into German. Involvement with translation is also apparent in the translations and writings on language and translation by his predecessors and contemporaries. These include Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1804) and his work on the philosophy of language in *On the Origin*, (1772), *Fragments* (1767-8) and *On the Cognition*, J. W. Goethe (1749-1832), Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), "hermeneuticist", translator of Plato and theologian, Johann Heinrich Voss (1751-1826), translator of Horace, Hesiod, Virgil and Homer's Odyssey, Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg, or Novalis (1772-1801), poet, translator, engineer and theoretician, Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), explorer, geographer, linguist, translator and theoretician of language and Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843), poet, philosopher and translator of Pindar and Sophocles.

As the examples above illustrate, this level of engagement is indicative of the importance they attached to a practice that was linked in Germany to the formation of national identity and to their concept of *Bildung* (development, culture, education, formation and maturation). In this respect, the Romantics drew on a tradition and appropriative impulse that could be traced back to Cicero and the Roman translation of Greek culture, but also to another, closer to home, that had been initiated in 16th-century Germany with Luther's influential translation of the Bible into vernacular

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[17] Thomas Carlyle, quoted in Alison. E. Martin, '"A Cosmopolitan Centre for Mankind": 'Translation in the German Romantic Tradition', UCL Translation in History Lectures, 21 March 2013, pp 1-2.
[18] Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany*, trans. S. Heyvaert (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992).

German: a 'good' German that would be intelligible to the "mother in the home, the children in the street, the common man in the marketplace".[19] As the quote indicates, this act of translation was a foundational, democratising event, which established a common literary, modern German. That an event of such national and international significance should have resulted from a translation might explain a tradition and appreciation of translation in Germany that regarded it as the "creation, transmission and expansion of the language, the foundation of the *Sprachaum*",[20] and which endowed it with a linguistic space of its own. As Bakhtin subsequently noted:

> An intense interorientation, interaction and mutual clarification of languages took place during that period. The two languages frankly and intensely peered into each other's faces, and each became more aware of itself, its potentialities and limitations, in the light of the other. This line drawn between languages was seen in relation to each object, each concept and each point of view.[21]

Reverberations of this event and approach are evident in the following reflections on language and translation made by some of the significant thinkers of the Romantic period.

Goethe:

> Independently of our own production, we have already achieved a high degree of culture (*Bildung*) thanks to the full appropriation of what is foreign to us. Soon other nations will learn German, because they will realise that in this way they can to a large extent save themselves the apprenticeship of almost all other languages. Indeed, from what languages do we not possess works in the most eminent translations?

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[19] Martin Luther, 'On Translating: An Open Letter', trans. Charles M, Jacobs, revised by E Theodore Bachmann, in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament* I, ed. E Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 189.

[20] Ibid., p.27.

[21] Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and his World*, tr. H Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968) p.465.

For a long time now the Germans have contributed to a mutual mediation and recognition. He who understands German finds himself on the market place where all nations present their merchandise.

The force of language is not to reject the foreign but to devour it.[22]

A.W. Schlegel:

Only a manifold receptivity for a foreign national poetry, which, if possible must ripen and grow into universality, makes progress in the faithful reproduction of poems possible. I believe we are on the way to invent the true art of poetic translation; this glory has been reserved for the Germans.[23]

Novalis:

Apart from the Romans, we are the only nation to have felt the impulse of translation so irresistibly, and to owe to it so infinitely in culture (Bildung) ... This impulse is an indication of the very elevated and original character of the German people, Germanity is a cosmopolitanism mixed with the most vigorous individualism. Only for us have translations become expansions.[24]

Schleiermacher:

An internal necessity, in which a peculiar calling of our people is clearly expressed has driven us to translating on a grand scale.[25]

Humboldt:

Just as the understanding of a language increases, likewise the understanding of a nation widens.[26]

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[22] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in Fritz Strich, *Goethe und Theorien des Übersetzens* (Munich: Hueber, 1967, p.50

[23] A,W Schlegel Afterword to Tieck, in Athanaeum II 2, pp. 280-281

[24] Novalis, *Briefe und Dokumente,* vol. 4 of *Werke Briefe Dokumente*, ed Ewald Wasmuth (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1954), p. 367

[25] Freidrich Schleiermacher, 'On the Different Methods of Translating', in: Andre Lefevere, *Translating Literature: the German Tradition from Luther Rosenzweig* (Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977), p.88.

The assured, appropriative impulse toward nation, identity and empire-building through translation that is apparent in the quotes cited above responded to a particular historical and political context that fostered inquiry into identity. However, this inquiry did not limit itself to national identity, but encompassed the formation and nature of the subject comprising it. As such it formed part of their inquiry into philosophy of language and aesthetics in relation to the nature of self-consciousness and subjectivity in the light of the Enlightenment and Immanuel Kant's "Critique of Judgement" and discussion of aesthetics.

With René Descartes' location of being in the act or fact of the individual's capacity for conscious thought,[27] God – as benevolent prime mover – had provided the bridge between the conscious subject and the knowable world outside self-consciousness. Kant had attempted to extend this certainty about the external world that could be derived through self-consciousness without this theological support. He questioned how subjectivity might give rise to objective certainty without assuming a pre-existing objectivity of the world of nature:

> Whenever we make a judgment declaring something to be
> beautiful, we permit no one to hold a different opinion,
> even though we base our judgment on our feeling rather
> than on concepts; bence we regard this underlying feeling
> as a common rather than as a private feeling.[28]

This common sense is understood to be immediate, universal and coexistent with shared schema. In relation to language, its symbolic aspect that generates shared signification and mutual understanding is based on the understanding that the name is able to designate and describe the being and that the name itself makes this conceptually available, visible to the mind's eye or calling it into the present. As Humboldt commented:

> All forms of language are symbols, not the things in
> themselves, nor signs agreed on, but sounds which find

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[26] Humboldt, 'Enleitung zu Agamemnon' in Lefevere, *Translating Literature,* p. 42
[27] Thus reasoning: even if I doubt everything I think I know about the world, the fact that I doubt is proof of my existence.
[28] Immanuel Kant, S22, p89, trans. Werner Pluhar, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1987

themselves . . . in real and, so to speak, mystical connections with the things and the concepts they represent, connections which contain the objects of reality as it were dissolved in ideas. These symbols can be changed, defined, separated and united in a manner for which no limit can be imagined.[29]

Humboldt recognises, in this "mystical connection" between the word, or concept, and the thing, the infinite potential and creativity in the act of naming, thus transforming language, this human-made construct (fracture) into a transcendent form of mediation bridging conscious thought and the knowable world. This approach was congruent with the conceptual move, or linguistic turn, made by the Romantics – articulated below by Schelling, following Kant – that established a relationship between language and Schematism:

Our act of thinking the particular is actually always a schematism of that particular, we really need only reflect upon that perpetually active schematism at work even in language in order to secure an intuition of it. In language, too, we make use of merely universal designations even for the designation of the particular. To this extent even language itself is nothing more than a perpetual schematism ..... Language itself is, of course, completely schematic.[30]

As Andrew Bowie has noted,

[....] the fact of translation between languages, interest in which also grows in this period, would seem to depend upon a universal schematising capacity. The evidence for such a capacity lies in logical and grammatical functions that can be translated from one language into another. These functions are therefore not bound to a single

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[29] Humboldt, 'Einleitung zu "Agamemnon"', p,41.
[30] Schelling, in Daniel Whistler, *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 175

language, and they seem to indicate that a general philosophical account of how language works - and thus a general account of the nature of truth - may in fact be possible.[31]

However, in view of the perception that people do sense, judge, express and articulate their responses to beauty differently Kant's inquiry into the nature of judgment had left space for singularity in the form of genius or the talent for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given, or pattern followed. Thus it is not a predisposition consisting of a skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other, but something that makes it possible for nature to give the rule to art.[32] In their interrogation of the nature of subjectivity in relation to the universal as developed through Kant's apparatus of the Schema, for the Romantics language and translation, or mediation – as a site of singularity, generating and manifesting inherent difference or heterogeneity – provided a point of resistance to the idea of the immediate universal, 'codifiable' and programmable within the 'schematising' context of language. Thus with regard to the nature of judgment the tasks of understanding, interpreting, transferring and re-creating that are engaged with in translation brought out the problematic of difference, the particular and individual.

J.G. Hamann and J.G. Herder

The Jena Romantics were influenced by the philosopher Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) who argued in 1784 that Kant's supposedly universal ways of categorising reality were actually dependent upon particular natural languages. These languages, he maintained, did not divide up the world in the same manner, and could not be made to converge via comparison with or reference to a 'general philosophical language'. He reasoned that

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[31] Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.60.
[32] See Kant, *The Critique of Judgment, p. 174* "Genius is the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art. Since talent is an innate productive ability of the artist and as such belongs itself to nature, we could also put it this way: Genius is the innate mental predisposition (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art."

The diversity of natural languages appears to be linked to a schematising capacity, which does not function in a uniform manner. Different natural languages in differing cultures thus come to be understood as involving a creative, spontaneous aspect, where by the language grows from the culture in which it originates, and particular languages are precluded from being circumscribed by a universal theory.[33]

Thus, while languages share a schematising capacity,[34] they are also symptomatic of inherent difference, symptomatic of subjectivity within mediation, of different ways of perceiving and reflecting upon the world. Following Hamann's location of language within context and thus as inherently contingent, the Romantics posited that reason could not be separable from sensuousness (i.e. just as the body is located in time and place, the rational mind could not be isolated from sense, nor the somatic) and so could never be said to be the pure articulation of truth, since this required both logic and sense. Thus the Romantics' conception of language as inherently poetic, and thus an inseparable combination of sensuous sign and intelligible meaning, challenged this boundary between the sensible and the intelligible.[35] As Andrew Bowie has noted, the importance that we see in their work of literary language and the elevation of poetry as the highest form of expression and of critique derived from this break with the idea of a language that would be able to represent the ready-made truth of the world.[36]

The tension is exemplified by the relationship between hermeneutic accounts of why meaning cannot be reduced to explanation and attempts in analytical philosophy to

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[33] Bowie,1997, p. 60. Thus, whereof we cannot speak we must remain silent.

[34] A capacity which suggests an innate impulse to create structures and patterns and brings to mind Noam Chomsky's concept of universal grammar, or "system of categories, mechanisms and constraints shared by all human languages and considered to be innate".

[35] See Schelling's notion of "absolute indifference", in which there cannot be an absolute division between the sensible and the intelligible because they are inseparable aspects of the same infinite continuum. Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche.* 2nd. ed., (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.59

[36] Bowie, 1997, p.60.

set up a 'formal semantics' valid for explaining meaning in any natural language. Behind these issues lies the awareness, central to early Romantic philosophy, that language itself presents us with a problem of grounding; when philosophy tries to explain language, it must always already be reliant upon what it is trying to explain.[37]

As Azade Seyhan elaborates, the problem of representation is inherent to the never fully answered question of how language can mediate and account for the world of experience and for concepts. The question arises out of the quest for the ideal correspondence of object to subject, word to meaning, image to concept. Since representation aims to make the subject or presence present to itself it strives to present concepts of presence, identity, and being in their totality. However if it were to achieve its objective completely it would negate itself, for then it would become the object represented. If representation is to re-present presence, it can only do so in a formal or material way: that is, through the mediation of synthetic or constructed entities such as words, symbols, and images. These constructs are not what they represent. Thus, representation always involves the duplication or repetition of identity. The form of this repetition, however, is difference: that is, a split in subjectivity and identity. Since representation can never fully recover presence or coincide ideally with it, it will always pursue strategies to cover absence. "[....] instead of presenting presence, any attempt at mimetic representation testifies to absence by tracing and retracing ever elusive presence." [38]

The Romantics' response to, or critique of, a Kantian conception of language – and by implication translation – provided a locus from which to examine subjectivity as mediation and critique the sensuous/intelligible divide. Located within language, the paradox of translation – the presence and absence of the Universal – provided a particular focus for this

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[37] Ibid., p. 61
[38] Azade Seyhan: *Representation and its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p. 5.

investigation. Its possibility is predicated on the assumption of the universal, which gives rise to common traits that would seem to offer an example of synthesis and underlying homogeneity, and yet it resists the uniformity imposed by the purely rational, since it would appear that sense and affect give rise to infinite difference and heterogeneity. In light of this, identity and subjectivity (or being) could come to be perceived to exist within this state of flux between the self and the other, in an incessant, dynamic, restless process of formation and becoming. As such, the Romantics' involvement with translation was also integral to, and formed part of, their broader enquiry into the importance of poetry, critique and their concept of the fragment.

One of the most significant influences on the Romantics' theory of language came from G.J. Hamann's pupil Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803). Herder's theories of interpretation and translation developed from his theory of language. Essentially he believed that we conceptualise through language, that meanings or concepts are equated with the use of words rather than ideal, abstract forms that lay beyond, or were autonomous of, language. He established sensation as the source and basis for all our concepts, and maintained that our capacity to conceptualise was bound to a combination of perceptual and affective sensation. His emphasis on sense as the basis for conceptualisation rendered language as embodied, contextualised and an inherently human facility.

Herder's approach was fundamentally empirical and, unlike earlier thinkers such as Augustine, he did not believe that meaning was subject to systematic distortion through its expression in language, or that problems of interpretation resulted from ineffable thought transcending expression. Non-empirical or abstract concepts could be arrived at through the metaphorical extension of empirical ones, and thus result from progressive distancing between an original sensual denotation – a moment of naming – and future abstract meanings that evolved from this. He reasoned that if we could only think in language, then what we were able to express through it was essentially a reliable indicator of the nature of our thought. For Herder, therefore, meaning could be communicated

and understood, analysed and interpreted, through the subject's use of words.

Herder's theory of interpretation, contrary to the approach of some of his predecessors, who assumed an underlying universal uniformity of humankind, was based on a belief in infinite and radical difference. This approach was in line with his principle of secularism in interpretation, which resisted the transcendent and located meaning and works within a context, in and of the world. The space of inherent difference separating these different contexts, or the gap between the thought of the interpreter and that of the other being interpreted, made interpretation very difficult, although – significantly for Herder – not impossible. Inevitably this gap had to be crossed, but in doing so the interpreter had to resist the impulse to assimilate the other's thought into their own. Herder advocated rather that they should make a journey into, or "feel one's way in", and maintain equal fidelity to the thought and context of the one they are interpreting, whether this is physical, sensational, temporal, geographical, sociological or conceptual.

Herder's approach to interpretation assumed that the meaning of the source text could be considered an objective matter, much as the subjects addressed by the natural sciences. Interpretation, therefore, involved objective, impartial historical-philological inquiry into language and context and was subject to a principle of methodological empiricism. This rigorous, academic process employed similar methods to those used in the natural sciences, which required that the interpreter develop and master their knowledge of linguistic usage and contextual information and systematically and methodically observe, analyse and be faithful to the relevant linguistic and contextual evidence. The interpreter also had to maintain distance, avoiding both over-identification and hostility to the subject of interpretation. However, Herder's theory also introduced a psychological aspect, with clear implications for the later discipline of Freudian psychoanalysis,[39] which demanded that the interpreter

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[39] The equivalences drawn between the methods of inquiry used for natural science and interpretation, including psychological analysis of the subject are sympathetic to Freud's approach to establish psychoanalysis as a scientific, objective discipline. For Herder the

imaginatively recapture the sensations that were felt by the source-language author and audience in response to the given text in order to express these with the same degree of immediacy: "so that it acquires for him, as it had for them, the phenomenology more of a *feeling* than a cognition".[40]

However, while similar to his ideas on interpretation, Herder's theories of translation (developed in the *Fragments* written between 1767-68) seem to differentiate between the two practices, placing less emphasis on empiricism and objectivity, or the forensic distance of the translator. While maintaining the primacy of the original, this allowed for (or acknowledged the existence of) more leeway or elasticity within the boundaries distinguishing subject from object. Herder identified two fundamental approaches to translation, which were subsequently reiterated and elaborated on by F. Schleiermacher (see below). The first, which he called 'lax', allowed the language and thought of the target text to differ freely from its source. The second, 'accommodating' approach required that the language and thought of the target text stretch to accommodate those of the source. These two methods that convention now terms 'free' and 'faithful' remain in use, and their merits and disadvantages – symptomatic of the distinct negotiating strategies over contested territory that they give rise to – continue to generate debate, discord and invention.

Herder, like Schleiermacher who followed him, favoured the second approach, because it retained and prioritised semantic faithfulness to the original (generally considered the most basic goal of translation). This approach to translation was underpinned by Herder's belief in the primacy of language. Thus, following his conviction that we exist in, and are shaped by, language, poetic and literary creations did not just find

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subject matter of interpretation is not sharply different from that studied by natural science: both examine in order to determine the forces that underlie them. Interpretation investigates human verbal and non-verbal behaviour in order to determine the forces that underlie them. Herder identifies mental conditions, including conceptual understanding as "forces". *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*: Herder) https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/herder/

[40] *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy:* Herder, Philosophy of Language. Interpretation and Translation https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/herder/

expression in language: they were made possible by the language in which they were conceived. The thesis that the medium determined the message would dictate that translation strategies such as those that were used by his contemporary French translators, requiring the translator to create or compose a version of work that the author would have written had they written the original in the target language, were unviable, since the work would not exist had there been no native language.

> Other nations have adopted a totally conventional phraseology in poetry, so that it is totally impossible to make a poetic translation of anything whatsoever into their language - French is an example . . . It is as if they wanted every foreigner among them to behave and to dress according to the customs of the land, and that explains why they never really get to know the foreign. [41]

In order to achieve semantic accuracy and 'accommodate' the otherness of the source language in translation, Herder developed strategies which required translators to distort and bend the target language in response to the demands of its source. He did not limit this to semantic, syntactic or contextual aspects of the text, but also required that the translator pay attention and be faithful to the musical qualities – the metre, rhythm, tone and rhyming rhythmic patterns – of the text. (We see this prioritised by Hölderlin and again in Ezra Pound's commentaries and categories of translation that are explored in Chapter Two). Herder thought that the musical form of language could not be separated from its semantic content, as this form of language carried its own particular meaning since it was intrinsic to the expression of feeling, or affect, and therefore meaning.

The tension that Herder's theory of translation establishes between fidelity to the self and fidelity to the other in the act of translating fuels it with energy generated by two irreconcilable and conflicting demands. There is a breath-like impulse of expansion outward towards the other, drawing it within, which is counterbalanced by a contraction inwards, prompted by

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[41] A.W. Schlegel, *Geschichte der klassichen Literatur*, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1964), p.17.

fidelity to self that expels, distancing the other. Ideally and in theory, for Herder, this dynamic of reaching out towards the other is not exclusively appropriative, but cultivates respect for it, as it enriches the translating culture and language. Thus, Herder's accommodating and preferred form of translation is more than an imitative mechanism: it becomes an organic, generative act requiring both skill and creative genius. In doing so I would suggest that it employs Kant's conception of genius as originality and non-imitative agency that has the ability to formulate its own rules and to arrive at ideas independently that would normally have to be taught by other people:

> *Genius* is the talent (gift of nature), which gives the rule to art. As talent, as an innate productive capacity of the artist, itself belongs to nature, one could also put the matter as follows: *genius* is the innate aptitude *[ingenium] through which* nature gives the rule to art. [42]

Translation and the Jena Romantics

Herder's theories of language passed relatively unchanged into the Jena Romantic philosophical project and much of their subsequent writing could be seen as evolving or shifting perspectives on this shared understanding of language and translation. As the quote below from Schleiermacher illustrates, language for the Romantics became accepted as a 'given' that the individual worked within.

> Every human being is, on the one hand, in the power of the language he speaks; he and all his thoughts are its products. He cannot think with complete certainty anything that lies outside its boundaries; the form of his ideas, the manner in which he combines them, and the limits of these combinations are all preordained by the language in which he was born and raised: both his intellect and his imagination are bound by it. On the other

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[42] Quoted in Bowie, 2003, p. 39. See Kant, (1790) *The Critique of Judgment*, p. 46: 'Genius is a talent for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition consisting of a skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other.'

hand, every free-thinking, intellectually independent individual shapes language in his turn.[43]

This acceptance of language as a given entailed a shift in focus from an inquiry into the origin of language facilitated by and facilitating a concern with subjectivity (or the sliver of humanity we now call singularity) that centred on the interaction of the individual as a sentient, sensuous and rational being with the structures and limits of language. Thus A.W. Schlegel was less concerned with the theoretical debate about whether language derived from a natural or a divine origin than with questioning the extent to which it could be explained in exclusively rational terms. His interest in the nature and origin of language stemmed from questioning the extent to which it could be said to originate from an imitative and representational impulse – as a transcription or reproduction of external objects – and therefore formed part of a rational schema or structure of signs based on rules and conventions, or whether language derived from a sensual, imaginative, creative impulse as a primal, elemental expression of emotion through sound, which he located in the musical and poetic aspects of language (the potential of language through the facility of rhythm, tone, cadence and rhyme to carry sensual, emotive aspects and to communicate independently of "literal meaning").

Following Hamann and Herder, A.W. Schlegel, like his fellow Romantics, thought that language held these two impulses in tension: the grammatical, structural, rule-bound and signifying and the creative, poetic, musical, asignifying; the universal with the particular and / or the schema in relation to the singular subject. Within this purview, language, as an example of schema, as ordered stable entity in tension with language, as subject to more arbitrary, creative development, once again becomes a focus for analysing the nature of subjectivity. This concept of language was made possible by a Romantic understanding of language as a human-made organic entity, as structures evolving in response to processes of human interaction with the world and relationship to context. As an organic, embodied entity its response to impermanence was

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[43] Schleiermacher, p.46

generative, dynamic, reproductive, subject to mutation and essentially translational. Thus it is

> [the] living force of the individual that causes new forms to emerge from the tractable matter of language, in each case with the initial aim of passing on a fleeting state of consciousness, but leaving behind now a greater, now a fainter trace on the language that, taken up by others continues to have an ever broader shaping influence. [...] only to the extent that a person influences language in this way does he deserve to be heard outside his immediate sphere of activity.[44]

Similarly, for Schleiermacher speech was both a work of language and an expression of its spirit (*geist*), or particular being of the speaker. Utterances were actions performed by a speaker, that

> One can understand only [...] if one can feel where and how he was seized by the force of the language, where along its path the lightning flashes of thought snaked their way, where and how in its forms errant imagination was held fast.[45]

Language – as voiced words, sense and perception sounded out, existing on an air's breath for a moment in time – here has the quality of the image, the capacity to capture the fleeting passage of thought across the mind's eye. It is an elusive idea that we see searched for and shaping the work or project of later poets such Ezra Pound.

Schleiermacher and Schlegel: Poetry - Language - Translation - Interpretation

For A.W. Schlegel[46] and his fellow Romantics this intrinsic feature of language, its poetic aspect, could not be reduced to a mere system of signs

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[44] Ibid., p.46

[45] Ibid., p.47

[46] A. W. Schlegel's founding of *The Athenaeum* journal with his brother Friedrich, his relationships with Goethe, Schiller, Humboldt, and Schelling and the influential lectures he delivered in Berlin (1801) and Vienna (1808) were responsible for disseminating the intuitions of Jena Romanticism beyond the narrow circles that had generated it.

and signifiers. Rather, theories of language needed to take into account the non-rational, affective and sensual aspects of it. Schlegel and his fellow Romantics prioritised this aspect of language, holding that at its moment of origin – contained within the act of naming – language was poetry and always essentially remained poetry.

> Language is always born from the bosom of poetry. Language is not a product of nature, but a reproduction of the human spirit, which consigns to it [. . .] the entire mechanism of its representations. Thus, in poetry, something already formed is formed again; and its ability to take form is unlimited as the spirit's ability to return to itself by reflections always carried to the higher power.[47]

Poetry (or language) forms out of something already formed. In other words, language emerges from a given, separating itself from its origin. As such, it is a fragmentary response to a given that brings something into being and makes it present. Therefore, while language has a representational dimension in that it carries the symbolic aspect, or trace of the given, for the Romantics spirit, or *geist*, had the potential to elevate this facility to a higher, transcendent poetic level, or "linguistic absolute".[48] The Romantics believed that the way in which an individual encounters and responds to the world would always have a poetical aspect, and these encounters could never be merely receptive since there would always be an inherently creative aspect to the formation of them. This view challenges an exclusively instrumentalist, functional approach to language as a medium, since it implies that just as fact cannot be separated from fiction, and function cannot be divorced from form, the utilitarian, mundane and prosaic cannot be entirely devoid of the aesthetic. Since language was already poetry, Schlegel maintained – democratically, collectively, horizontally – that people in their day-to-day, everyday lives used language poetically, imaginatively and creatively: they were perhaps

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[47] A.W Schlegel, Lectures on Art and Literature. "Die Kustlehre", Quoted in Berman, p. 133

[48] Identified and discussed in Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute: the Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988)

just less aware of doing so. However, Poetry as composed by a poet was a (self-) conscious creation: the Poetry of poetry:

> […] because it already presupposes language, whose invention depends on poetic aptitude, and which is itself a poem by the whole of humanity, a poem in perpetual becoming, in perpetual metamorphosis, never finished.[49]

This line of thought assumes the possibility of infinity within the finite, that any language could be "transformable without measure" through our interaction with it. Poetry conceived as such is essentially an act of translation, a *poiesis* that results from our experience of being in the world. By extension the labour of the "production" of poetic forms also corresponded to their reproduction, or translation. And because language is a work ("fracture", and not "nature"), translation – with and as a form of criticism – becomes "one of the aspects of the process by which language becomes more and more *work and form: Bildung*. Thus, the theory of the artificiality of language and its forms grounds the possibility and the necessity of poetic translation".[50]

The division between a democratic view of language as poetry and the Poetry of poetry, which can touch on the transcendent, allows for hierarchy within creativity based on the autonomy of the subject, on subjectivity, *différance* and the potential for genius. While use and reproduction, or re-creation, as translational forms of engagement with language may not preclude a work of this type from the transcendent, unquantifiable realm of Poetry, it seems possible that features of commerce or trade that inhere in the mechanics of exchange in an interpretative act may.

In his lecture "On the Different Methods of Translating", Schleiermacher drew on and developed a distinction made by Herder between the practices of translation and those of interpretation, which underpins the distinction drawn in this thesis and still pertains in contemporary practice. According to Schleiermacher's definition, interpreting, which he sited in

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[49] Ibid, p.349.
[50] See Berman, pp.133-134.

the realm of trade and commerce, assumes the exchange of supposedly equivalent linguistic values in the passage from one language to another according to the methods of an interpreting agency. The different methods employed, whether interpretative or translational, must in turn respond to the demands of these different types of text.

> The interpreter plies his trade in the area of business, while the translator proper works above all in the area of science and art. [...] The areas of art and science are best served by the written word, which alone can make their works endure; and interpreting scientific or artistic products aloud would be just as useless as, it seems, impossible. For business transactions however, writing is only a mechanical means; verbal negotiation is their original mode, and every written interpretation should only be seen as the record of a spoken exchange.[51]

Schleiermacher expressed the difference between the two as primarily between verbal and written modes of language. Interpretation as primarily verbal was more suited to functional, technical purposes, "*little more than a mechanistic task*" requiring only a "*moderate knowledge of the two languages, with little difference to be found between better and lesser efforts as long as obvious errors are avoided*." Interpretation happened in an ad hoc way, simultaneously, in the moment and on the hoof, and this form of trading words as information or commodity was in keeping with more mercantile forms of interaction. The influence of an understanding of the workings of capital on this process of verbal exchange and of language as a symbolic, abstracted form of exchange value (as highlighted by Schleiermacher) is also evident in the probable root of interpret as "between prices", originating from the concept of trade, wherein goods are exchanged. This understanding positions the interpreter as agent who negotiates between distinct quantifying systems, whose role is to ensure that there is adequate equivalence, or equal value, and emphasises the mediating role of the interpreter within a market. The location of

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[51] Schleiermacher, p. 44

interpretation within a linguistic system of exchange is made possible by a cognitive relation to language; an understanding of it as a symbolic, representational, system that allows for abstraction. Translation, in contrast, would seem to involve an aesthetic relation to language, and its relation to affect and asignification would render it unquantifiable.

> The tension between the cognitive and the aesthetic relation to the object displays a vital role in the culture of modern capitalism, which, as Marx's theory of the commodity claims, leads to objects becoming involved in the processes of abstraction not unlike the constitution of an object of science by the understanding. The object as exchange value is abstracted from all its sensuous particularity in order to make it exchangeable for any other commodity. This leads to the need for ways of restoring the role of sensuous particularity if the commodity's abstract status is not to diminish its desirability." Thus advertising's role to give back sensuous appeal to the object of exchange value.[52]

For Schleiermacher, interpreting – that used writing as a mechanical means to record transactions – and its location within the sphere of trade was governed by the need to tailor the content and presentation of one's thought to the demands of a particular audience, or consumer. This verbal form of trading in words was antithetical to the multi-faceted form of thought engaged with in meditative reflection, when thought responding primarily to an internal dialogue is not interrupted by the question, interjection, comment or demands of another mind, but allowed to muse, or run a course directed by and answering to itself. The slower-paced act of writing involves a greater degree of distance between the sender and receiver, central to translation. Functioning in the absence of the sender – between responsiveness and reverie – the delay or lapse inherent in writing that creates space for subjectivity and difference within mediation structurally inscribes it with possibility.

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[52] Bowie, 2003, p. 61

> The more [...] the author's own particular way of seeing and drawing connections has determined the character of the work, and the more it is organised according to principles that he himself has either freely chosen or that are designed to call forth a particular impression, the more his work will partake of a higher realm of art, and so too the translator must bring different powers and skills to his work and be familiar with his author and the author's tongue in a different sense than the interpreter.[53]

Translation of written texts more invested with subjectivity would seem to occupy the reified, poetic sphere that resists quantification. For Schleiermacher, this form of translation proper was a different operation, more akin to a Poetry of poetry that touched on the poetic and required the capacity of genius to recreate the new from the given. It is radically different from his conception of interpretation which, as we have seen, is essentially an act of negotiation, taking place within a particular state of affairs or discipline, regulated by a particular framework that generates terminology – governing thought – with which the participants must be sufficiently familiar and conformant. For Schleiermacher, translation in relation to science and art is a creative act that participates in their search to establish new frameworks.

> [...] the translator ascends higher and higher above the interpreter until he reaches the realm most properly his, namely, those works of art and science in which the author's free individual combinatory faculties, on the one hand and the spirit of the language along with the entire system of views and sentiments in all their shadings represented in it, on the other, count for everything; the object no longer dominates in any way, but rather is governed by thought and feeling.[54]

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[53] Schleiermacher, p.44

[54] Ibid., p.45.

This investment of thought and feeling in language and its capacity to form and carry identity also paves the way for assuming the primacy of the mother tongue over the other acquired or translated language. For Schleiermacher, echoing Herder's distinction between lax and accommodating, or free and faithful, approaches, translation essentially followed two methods:

> Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him.[55]

In the first case the translator attempts to compensate for the reader's ignorance of the foreign language by providing them with an image of it that recreates the translator's experience of reading it in a foreign language. This method exposes the differences between them and allows the source to distort or disrupt the target language. In the second the translator effectively acculturates the author into a foreign context by displacing and moving them beyond the position of the translator, who works between both languages. Any sense of difference is erased and they are made to write as if their thought had originated and been composed in the target language. Discussions around whether a translation may be faithful or true to meaning, or too literal or free, arise differently in relation to these two methods. Schleiermacher suggests that a method which veers towards the first is preferable, since

> Translation [...] concerns a state that lies midway between these two [...] and the translator must make it his goal to furnish his reader with just such an image and just such enjoyment as reading the work in the original language would have provided the well-educated man [....] who is well acquainted with the foreign language, yet to whom it remains none the less foreign, who must no longer think each detail through in his mother tongue like a school boy before he is able

[55] Ibid., p.49

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grasp the whole, yet who, even where he can take pleasure unhindered in the beauty of a work, remains very conscious of the differences between his language and his mother tongue.[56]

Translation then needs to capture and retain a sense of the in-between space created within bilingualism:

> [..] what is being aimed at is plainly far more than merely causing some indifferent sort of foreign spirit to waft in the reader's direction; rather he is to be given an inkling if only a distant one, of the original language and what the work owes to it, and thus some of what he loses for not understanding the original tongue is here compensated: he is not only to have a vague sense that what he is reading does not sound unquestionably native to his own tongue; rather, it should sound foreign in quite a specific way ....[57]

To communicate the sense of encountering the foreign when presenting the reader with a translation in their own tongue the translator has to use a method which employs a *disposition of the language that not only departs from the quotidian but lets one perceive that it was not left to develop freely but rather was bent to a foreign likeness".[58]* For Schleiermacher to achieve this degree of artifice or discordance with art and measure is probably the hardest task of the translator, since it requires that they become in some respect alienated from their mother tongue. He describes this as seemingly the most extraordinary form of humiliation for any writer of quality, and discusses it in relation to translation using metaphors of contamination and pollution, linguistic, familial and racial . . . – metaphors which belie his appropriative approach and continue to pervade contemporary discussions of translation significantly. He identifies the introduction of the foreign as a device used by more "bounded", or self-confident,

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[56] Ibid., p.51
[57] Ibid., p. 54

[58] Ibid., p.53

expansionist languages seeking "*to expand their territories by introducing foreigners who require more than their native tongues to speak them...*"

Arguing against the method of translation that would pretend to present the author seamlessly as he would have thought and written in another, foreign, tongue Schleiermacher identifies an inner core to language which can be neither penetrated nor reproduced in the relation of natural language to logical man-made structures of thought:

> Whoever is convinced of the inner, essential identity between thought and expression - and this conviction forms the basis for the entire art of understanding speech and thus of all translation as well - can he sever a man from his native tongue and still believe that this man, or even so much as a train of thought, might turn out the same in two languages? [....] can he presume to break down speech to its inmost core so as to separate out that part played by language and then through a new and, as it were, chemical process conjoin the inner core of speech with the being and force of another tongue? [...] This will not be possible until we have succeeded in assembling organic products through an artificial process.[59]

For Schleiermacher, as for other Romantics, the relationship with the language in which one first experienced, sensed and named the world is conceived of as a naturally occurring phenomenon, which carries within it the irreducible element of subjectivity and identity. This conviction is arguably of its time in that it does not need to confront possibilities such as those we may now contemplate i.e.: that the work of human hands and ingenuity may be capable of recreating and improving on naturally occurring phenomena, such as the ability of artificial intelligence to replicate singularity, to create, replace and improve on the workings of the human brain.

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[59] Ibid., p.56

It is also indicative of a conceptual, or limit, point that Schleiermacher will not breach. As practising and accomplished translators the Jena Romantics (Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Novalis and Hölderlin) had experienced the limit of language and translatability in a way that might not always be as obvious, nor as concretely demonstrable in the composition of poetic works, or Poetry of poetry. These limits stemming from problems of subjectivity within mediation were exacerbated in translation in that they arose out of the limitations experienced when the mother tongue encountered the other tongue and was silenced by its incapacity to express the other, falling into the abyss between languages.

Schleiermacher stopped short, limiting himself to advocating that translation should base itself on the premise that "*the understanding of foreign texts be acknowledged as a known and desirable state, and that certain flexibility be granted to our native tongue*", with the aim of influencing the "*intellectual development of a nation*". His remained an appropriative nation-building impulse (*Bildung*) played out through and using translation. It was ultimately still a conservative and synthesising operation in that it limited translation to making the reader become aware the foreign of the other text but not fully experience or sense its strangeness. In doing so it refused those aspects of the other that would contaminate or dilute the integrity of the mother tongue and negated the violence of rupture – caesura – or the disruptive potential of the foreign, the encounter with asignification and the abyss of silence that we find in Friedrich Hölderlin.

Walter Benjamin: Siting Translation at the deepest level

The influence of Heidegger's thought on later theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Maurice Blanchot, Paul de Man, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari has been well charted. However, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe[60] (with Samuel Weber, Azade Seyhan, Andrew Benjamin, Antoine Berman, Rainer Nagele, Michael Jennings and others) have noted the enduring significance of the Romantic predecessors discussed above and through them of Walter Benjamin, who emphasised and radicalised

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[60] Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*.

the role of translation in relation to the work of art and its creation, and the function of criticism.

> If we are to evaluate Benjamin's contribution to the theory of literary criticism, we need to balance this acknowledgment of his very real debt to Hegel, Marx and the Kaballah with an appreciation for Benjamin's reliance upon the thought of a diverse group of poets and philosophers of the age of Goethe.[61]

This influence of Kant, Herder and Hamann, AW & F. Schlegel, Novalis, Hölderlin, Fichte, Goethe and Gershom Scholem is demonstrated in Benjamin's early essays "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (1916), "The Task of the Translator" (1921) and in his first major literary essay, "Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin" (1914-1915). In "The Task of the Translator" Benjamin positions himself, as translator, in relation to his predecessors, stating that the Jena Romantics,

> .. more than any others, were gifted with an insight into the life of literary works, which has its highest testimony in translation. To be sure, they hardly recognized translation in this sense, but devoted their attention to criticism, another, if lesser, factor in the continued life of literary works. But even though the Romantics virtually ignored translation in their theoretical writing, their own great translations testify to their sense of the essential nature and the dignity of this literary mode.[62]

Theorisation after the Romantics, while employing many of the techniques and operations of translation, seems in the main to have reproduced their emphasis on critique. Benjamin was unusual and prescient in his consideration of the importance of translation: its *essential nature and*

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[61] Michael Jennings, 'Benjamin as a reader of <u>Hölderlin</u>: the origins of Benjamin's theory of literary criticism', *German Quarterly*, 56(4) (1983), 544-562

[62] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in: *Selected Writings, Vol 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 253-263. (p. 258)

dignity as a primary form of mediation that ensured the survival of artistic works. Translation, for Benjamin, became fundamental to his thought and his method:

> Adorno first pointed to Benjamin's refusal to think 'freiwig' or 'amateurhaft': that is without a precursor text upon which to comment, however idiosyncratically. Benjamin's thought took shape only in the process of [such] commentary, so that many of his central notions represent radical reworkings of elements derived form texts about which he had written.[63]

Thus Benjamin develops his theory and practice working from the Romantics – as his given, or source – and translating from the under-articulated, between-the-lines but implied-through-practice of his Romantic predecessors. According to the terms of Benjamin's essay on this subject as a translation, "The Task of the Translator" should not call for translation in its turn, since these are finite, dependent responses to an original issue from, and generated by, its capacity to live on as part of its afterlife. However, as a translation of translation that set out Benjamin's shift in optic and estimation of the essential nature of translation it has, and continues to do so. From my perspective, while carrying with it the enduring influence of a romantic sensibility on our relationship to art, its practice and theoretical response to it, Benjamin's shift facilitated the recasting of the relationship to artistic production and its reproduction (mechanical, technical or otherwise), and underpinned his understanding of time, history and tradition.

In view of this, it is helpful to revisit what was directly assimilated and to consider what, through Benjamin's reworking, became something distinctively his. In other words, how and why did Benjamin radicalise and foreground the Romantics' [and in particular Hölderlin's] theory of translation? As the Romantics had, Benjamin identified language as schematic and also as a signifying process capable of communicating knowledge and ideas that retained an asignifying aspect singularly resistant to it.

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[63] Jennings, p.19

For language is in every case not only the communication of the communicable, but also, at the same time, a symbol of the noncommunicable. This symbolic side of language is connected to its relation to signs, but extends more widely - for example, in certain respects to name and judgment. These have not only a communicating function, but most probably also a closely connected symbolic function….[64]

Again, like his Romantic predecessors Benjamin sought a solution to the split brought about by Kant between subject and object, nature and ideas, spontaneity and conception, man and his world, in the form of a new reintegration, or bringing together, of these elements. Echoing Schleiermacher, Hölderlin had found the potential for this in language and in the revelatory capacity of Poetry in which the act of writing or articulation makes possible the cognition of something beyond it: for Hölderlin the poem, or the "poetized as limit-concept is the synthetic unity of the intellectual and perceptual orders."[65] As such, this represented the key to a new epistemology and to a new post-Kantian unity.

Benjamin adopted the Romantic concept of language and poetry as a reciprocal one:

while the poet transforms the world through his song, he is in turn determined and formed by the conditions existing in the world. The people, pressed into a plastic form about the poet are thus a spatial representation of the human fate to which the poet has submitted; [..][66]

This human-wrought unity was an organic, existential unity in that it assumed that "Life, as the ultimate unity, lies at the basis of the poetized."[67] Following Hölderlin, Benjamin worked from the Romantic premise that we are born into language, generate language and live within

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[64] Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', in: *Selected Writings, Vol 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael, W Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 62-74 (p. 76).

[65] Jennings. p.19
[66] Jennings p. 18
[67] Jennings. p. 20

and at the limit of language, but shifted this further to make the "existence of language [...] coextensive [...] with absolutely every thing".[68]

As Benjamin stated,

> Every expression of human mental life can be understood as a kind of language and this understanding, in the manner of a true method, everywhere raises new questions. [...] all communication of the contents of the mind is language, communication in words being only a particular case of human language. [...] All that is asserted here is that all expression, insofar as it is a communication of contents of the mind, is to be classed as language.[69]

In response to the question of what language expresses, or communicates, about the object or world around us, Benjamin wrote:

> All language communicates itself. *[it does not communicate the object in itself, but the]* language-lamp, the lamp in communication, the lamp in expression. [...]: *the linguistic being of all things is their language.*[70]

In part this occurs because language is a cognitive abstraction that we inhabit. In expression it abstracts, and as abstraction it carries with it its condition of resulting from an omission of difference and of particularity. This involves a necessary suppression of the multifaceted, imperfect essence of objects in order to provide an accessible shorthand that operates within understood perimeters. During this process of translation into the name, language communicates our knowledge of the object:

> The translation of the language of things into that of man is not only a translation of the mute into the sonic; it is also the translation of the nameless into the name. It is therefore the translation of an imperfect language into a more perfect

[68] Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', p. 63.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.(my italics)

one, and cannot but add something to it, namely knowledge.[71]

Quoting Hamann, and drawing on Judeo-Christian theories of language and creation, Benjamin sites the origin of our relationship to language and the world, and its dislocation from original unity, in Genesis:

> Everything that man heard in the beginning, saw with his eyes, and felt with his hands was the living word; for God was the word. With this word in his mouth and in his heart, the origin of language was as natural, as close and as easy as a child's game... [72]

Since God is inexpressible except in the form of their pure expression, they are identical with being expressed. The first language of creation, and of God, that Benjamin calls "Language as Such" is one that "knows no means, no object, and no addressee of communication. It means: *in the name, the mental being of man communicates itself to God.*"[73]

In his pivotal essay "On Language as Such and the Language of Man", Benjamin sets up an opposition between pure language, or language as such, and the post-lapsarian, finite human languages of knowledge that in functional, factual uses of language communicate information through language. Benjamin's reference to the word of God in this essay needs to be understood as signalling the absent possibility of complete translation to which all translations necessarily refer. However, in the name, language retains the potential to reconnect with Language as Such:

> The name [.....] is the innermost nature of language itself. The name is that *through* which, and *in* which, language itself communicates itself absolutely. In the name, the mental entity that communicates itself is *language*. [...] Name as the heritage of human language therefore vouches for the fact *that language*

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.,, p.70
[73] Ibid., p.65

as such is the mental being of man;[74] and only for this reason is the mental being of man, alone among all mental entities, communicable without residue.[75]

In language, in the process of linguistic formation, humanity experiences the potentiality of impossibility within possibility in the "conflict waged between what is expressed and expressible and what is inexpressible and unexpressed": between what is known or knowable and what resists transformation, or passage into knowledge.

> For language is in every case not only the communication of the communicable, but also, at the same time, a symbol of the noncommunicable. This symbolic side of language is connected to its relation to signs, but extends more widely - for example, in certain respects to name and judgment. These have not only a communicating function, but most probably also a closely connected symbolic function,[76]

For Benjamin this is because in the name, as in translation, we encounter the frontier between the finite symbolic language of humanity and the infinite asignifying language of God, or the "communion of man with the creative word of God". Through the name a unity between humanity and the transcendent is established that becomes associated with the presence of truth in the world:

> In God, name is creative because it is word, and God's word is cognizant because it is name. [...] The absolute relation of name to knowledge exists only in God' only there is name, because it is inwardly identical with the creative word, the pure medium of knowledge. This means that God made things knowable in their names. Man, however, names them according to knowledge [...] Man is the knower in the same

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[74] A preferable translation of Benjamin's original text is: "the spiritual being of man". The translators use of mental in this context reinforces a division between mind and body that Benjamin would have found problematic and that disregards an important aspect of his thought.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., p.76

language in which God is the creator. [....] All human language is only the reflection of the word in name. The name is no closer to the word than knowledge is to creation. The infinity of all human language always remains limited and analytic in nature, in comparison to the absolutely unlimited and creative infinity of the divine word.[77]

For Benjamin, language through the name is a

means through which to achieve the transcendence of self-consciousness [...] the mode wherein man can come to develop his potential to its' fullest. (And) this development is in turn only possible when man exercises his function as the one who lends language to nature, which is without language.[78]

Benjamin's concept of language takes us away from the ideas of fixed languages with a shared origin in national identities and cultures that were adhered to in the Romantic project of *Bildung* and de-territorialises and dislocates it, transforming it into a broader concept of languages of practice, of existence and of Being in a Hölderlinian sense. The significance of this for translation as understood by Benjamin is that while it can take place as conventionally assumed between languages it operates primarily within language itself, mediating between thought, or mental being and its expression. By extension, since our relation to the world exists in language and it is coextensive with absolutely everything, translation becomes essential and fundamental. And in the practice of translation languages of humanity encounter the possibility of reconnecting in the name with Language as Such and the "creative" word of God, or the Absolute.

Whereas in the various tongues that ultimate essene, the pure language, is tied only to linguistic elements and their changes, in linguistic creations it is weighted with a heavy, alien meaning. To relieve it of this, to turn the symbolizing

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[77] Ibid., p.68
[78] Jennings, p. 20

into the symbolized itself, to regain pure language fully formed from the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation.[79]

Benjamin located the potential for this not in the *spontaneous, primary, manifest* form of poetry, but in the *derivative, ultimate, ideational* labour of translation. Its privilege derived from being removed: at the edge of language rather than immersed – as poetry – in it, and from being tasked with finding the particular intention toward the target language, which produces in that language the echo of the original:

> This is a feature of translation that basically differentiates it from the poet's work, because the intention of the latter is never directed toward the language as such, at its totality, but is aimed solely and immediately at specific linguistic contextual aspects. [….] [T]he great motif of integrating many tongues into one true language informs [the translator's] work. This language is that in which the independent sentences, works of literature, and critical judgments will never communicate – for they remain dependent on translation; but in it the languages themselves, supplemented and reconciled in their way of meaning, draw together. If there is such a thing as a language of truth, a tensionless and even silent depository of the ultimate secrets for which all thought strives, then this language of truth is – the true language.[80]

Following Hölderlin, and quoting Pannwitz, Walter Benjamin saw in translation a disruptive capacity contained in its potential to render radically foreign the language we consider our own, that could challenge pre-existing synthesising structures.:

> Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a false grounding: they wish to germanize Hindi, Greek, and English instead of hindicizing, grecizing and anglicizing German.

[79] Benjamin, 'The Task of The Translator', p.261
[80] Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p..259.

They have much more significant respect for their own linguistic usage than for the spirit of the foreign work... the fundamental error of the translator is that he holds fast to the incidental state of his own language instead of letting it be violently moved by the foreign.[81]

Thus Hölderlin's understanding of translation was attractive to Walter Benjamin for its radical resistance to an appropriative impulse that might obscure the division, or fragmentation of a larger whole, that is central to it. As Andrew Bowie notes, the complexity of Hölderlin's thinking

[....] bursts the simplicity of the schema of *Bildung* (of Schlegel, Schelling, Schleiermacher): It is neither the apprenticeship of the infinite, nor of the finite. In fact it brings forth something more profound and more risky. On the one hand, the movement toward what is one's own and the movement toward the foreign do not succeed each other in linear fashion, in the sense that the second would be like the mere condition of the first.[82]

For Hölderlin, division as found in translation was essential to his concept of being in that the origin of consciousness entailed a birth-like moment or original separation of subject and object. As Andrew Bowie has noted, Hölderlin saw this moment of schism contained in language, held together in "The German word *Urteil* [meaning] both judgment, and, via the artificial separation of its two parts into '*Ur-Teil*', original-separation".[83] Thus subject and object presupposed a "whole", which Hölderlin termed "being", of which subject and object are the parts. "Being - expresses the link of subject and object [. . . .] this being must not be confused with identity"[84], since the essence of this being lay in resisting it. As Bowie explains in relation to aesthetics and the subject:

Only the I, as free spontaneity, can apprehend nature aesthetically or produce aesthetic objects. The object here entails the subject to grasp what it would be like to achieve a

[81] Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 261.
[82] Berman, p. 163
[83] p.83, Bowie. (my parentheses)
[84] p.83, Bowie

harmonious existence, and prevents the division in self-consciousness leading merely to alienation. Because it recognises itself in the external world without surrendering itself, which it would do if it made itself dependent upon the desire to appropriate the object, the I can begin to realise how it need not repress its divided nature and can instead regard this nature as a source of ever-renewed possibility. The division it is important to remember came about by a free act, which moved the 'I' beyond the imaginary stage into the complex world of self-consciousness. Hölderlin, then, wishes to make the dividedness of self-consciousness part of its own creative potential. The I can strive to show in aesthetic production what it would be to overcome its dividedness, without regressing into an imaginary unity.[85]

Translation as Hölderlin conceived of it – as a bridging that held itself, as subject in between, at a point of division, resisting a move toward synthesis through assimilation to either side and the identity that it might engender – also held the possibility of falling into the schism between the two and out of the structures or representations that condition and contain thought. For Benjamin, in Hölderlin's last translations of *Oedipus* and *Antigone* the harmony of the languages achieved in these singular translations was so profound that sense was "*touched by language only the way an Aeolian harp is touched by the wind.*" Hölderlin's poetic theory and praxis, given form in these translations of Sophocles (the last works he produced), which approach the sacred text but are abysses, provided Benjamin not only with the model of translation but the archetype of this model. For Benjamin these translations are

> [...] prototypes of their form: they are to even the most perfect renderings of their texts as a prototype is to a model, [....] For this very reason Hölderlin's translations in particular are subject to the enormous danger inherent in all translations: the gates of language thus expanded and modified may slam

shut and enclose the translator with silence ... in them meaning plunges from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language.[86]

Translation occupies a privileged position over the abyss, and between finite and infinite languages, or the site of the pre-symbolic and asignifying bottomless depths of pure language, wherein in the act of translation the language of humanity is touched by Language as Such, as the harp by the wind. Benjamin's concept of Language as Such and the relationship of the Languages of Man to it, in and through translation, here seems to touch on Aristotle and Augustine's theory of language, or the word. Language as Such would occupy a similar place to that of Augustine's concept of mental speech (or meditative thought, also latent and operative in Schleiermacher's distinction between translation and interpretation), which was not constituted by words pertaining to any particular language, but operated trans-idiomatically and drew on the Aristotelian model of non-linguistic mental concepts that were held to be universal. The Augustinian concept of universality within plurality would make it possible to conceive that all languages have the potential to touch upon truth through translation. Following this allows Benjamin to found translation at

the deepest level of linguistic theory, for it is far too powerful to be treated in any way as an afterthought. Translation attains its full meaning in the realisation that every evolved language (with the exception of the word of God) can be considered a translation of all the others. By the fact that [...] languages relate to each other as do media of varying densities, the translatability of languages into one another is established. Translation is removal from one language into another through a continuum of transformations. Translation passes through continua of transformation, not abstract area of identity and similarity.[87]

[86] Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 263.
[87] Benjamin, 'On Language as Such', pp. 69-70

Translation itself, or the capacity or potential for it, seems to be preserved within metamorphoses. It remains immutable in its removal from one language to another, as the *essential quality of certain works*,[88] which essentially unfolds in its very transformation. The essentiality of essence in its inexhaustibility, its ability to generate difference, is thereby affirmed through its genuine selfhood and selfsameness. The heterogeneity of the latter stands in sharp contrast to the vapid selfsameness of the homogeneous, which is the only way the unity of essence can be thought when it is taken merely as the universal.

Translation, Fragment, Time and History:

In the post-Babelian context that we inhabit, languages as the broken parts of a greater whole – an absolute, perfect language – in translation the relationship and potential of plurality within this form of universality is manifest.

> Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. [89]

Language, as schematic, was also fragmentary in that it allowed one to draw the analogy of monads, or Leibnizian units of being to fragments. For Leibniz,

> [....] monads are self sufficient perspectival substances that are extrinsically unrelated to anything else. Belonging together in a single world is a product of correlated perspectival states of the individual monads. The systematic property of the pre-established harmony is what the relation of monads to one

[88] Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator'. p.254.
[89] Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 260.

another consists in. Because the correlation consists entirely in synchronized independent and internal changes in monads, this systematic property is not one that compromises the substantial integrity of the monad. Monads are together, not because they are joined in synthetic unity but in such a way that their differences persist. Romantic fragments are perspectival, as are monads. All finite monads, which is to say all monads but God, can consciously represent in only a partial way their interconnection with all other monads, in proportion to their apperceptive capacities. Humans, as finite substances, have limited apperception, and this means that a large part of the connection of things is only registered subconsciously and only available consciously in terms of indistinct feelings. [90]

This relation of the part to the whole retained the Romantic understanding of it as an organic, vital one. Thus Benjamin posited that all fragments were holistically connected with one another, and relations between them analysed as a property of a system composed of nothing but its self-affecting constituents. Benjamin's understanding of translation in relation to the fragment fused a Romantic understanding with a Kabbalistic concept of language as described by Gershom Scholem:

> The world of tikkun, the re-establishment of the harmonious condition of the world, which in the Luianic Kabbala is the Messianic world, still contains a strictly utopian impulse. That harmony which it reconstitutes does not correspond at all to any condition of things that have ever existed even in Paradise, but is at most a plan contained in the divine idea of creation. This plan however, even with the first stages of its realization, came up against the disturbance and hindrance of the cosmic

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[90] Fred Rush, 'Jena Romanticism and Benjamin's Critical Epistemology', in *Walter Benjamin & Romanticism,* ed. by Beatrice Hanssen & Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2002), pp.123-136 (p. 128)

process known as the breaking of the vessels, which initiates the Lurianic myth.[91]

Unlike the Christian interpretation, the Lurianic myth does not posit a Babelian view of an initial language. Reconstitution is an initial constitution. Harmony is not retrieval of the past, but futural projection; a utopian impulse. In Kabbalah the multiplicity of languages is not the result of sin. Therefore the possibility of pure language is not to be understood as involving that which is either gestured at or which ensues from salvation or redemption. Significantly for Benjamin's thought in relation to the work of art and its technological reproduction, in the Jewish tradition creation involves reconstitution at the point of origin: reconstitution that is essential to the process of translation and reproduction. Thus this does not exclude repetition from the act of creation, but presupposes it as a movement of differentiation, variation, alteration and of infinite possibility.

Translation bears a relation to time, history and tradition through its capacity to mediate, as discussed above, between the infinite essential and incommunicable quality of art and the secular, or time- and knowledge-bound productions of language alluded to by Benjamin in the quotation below.

> The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at the moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time.[92]

This reference to information, and the possible reduction of the literary work to information, is significant in that it acknowledges the capacity of art to resist time, and implicitly introduces time into the problem of translation. For Benjamin, translation – as a form governed by laws

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[91] G. Scholem, KABBALA (Jerusalem, 1974), p.13)
[92] Walter Benjamin,'The Storyteller', in *Selected Writings, Vol 3, 1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W.Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 53-65

contained within the translatability of the original work of art – should not concern itself with audience, or with transmitting information, since this would constitute an interpretative, rather than translational, act:

> Any translation that intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but communication – hence something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translation.[93]

In translation the linguistic representations of earlier texts (of literary tradition) represent an unfamiliar other to the reader/author/translator with which the reader-as-subject has to find a method to negotiate their way into it and to do this between the terms of the text and self. In a process of negotiation essentially modelled on the act of translation the subject is forced become aware of their own 'terms', language and concepts, and then to trade terms with the text or the tradition which will then change the composition of their original set. Finally, from this change-in-terms the subject gains a sense of himself as other in language and in time.

Hegel suggested that with the passage of time,

> … the world and language of the old masters, the ancestors, are alien to us; but the tolerance and utilization of these historic others in the recreation of their structure, the metonymic relations of their signifiers, could create a historical insight into one's own representations.[94]

This interaction with the past and consequent historical insight would be the product of an act of translation. Following Novalis & Schlegel, who held that the materiality of texts "resembled corpses of meaning or unreadable 'hieroglyphs'", for Benjamin,

> Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomena of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as

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[93] Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator,' p.253.
[94] Quoted in Angelika Rauch, *The Hieroglyph of Tradition: Freud, Benjamin, Gadamer, Novalis, Kant*. (London: Associated University Press, 2000, p. 126

form its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks a stage in their continued life.[95]

Through the parallel he draws with language, "Like language, the historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad,"[96] translation is made inherent to Benjamin's understanding of our interaction with art and history. Thus historical materialism adopts the caesura active in the practice of translation to the rupture established in historical narratives, since

> In this structure [*the historical materialist*] recognizes a sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history, blasting a specific life out of the lifework.[97]

In Benjamin's concept of the "dialectical image", the individual, imaginatively, partakes of her past as it defines her as a historical subject. In its perception, the historical subject translates a potentially significant element of the past into the present as objects or signs at hand. Through perception the existence of the subject is unthinkable without history, for only through history are phenomena and objects transformed into signs. Hence it is through the referential nature of signs that the subject is referred to its past in every perception of the present. Benjamin's "claim of the past on the present" strongly infers the structure of *Nachtraglichkeit* inherent in the event, and its transformation into a sign, by means of which history is constituted for the subject. The signifying structure that results from *Nachtraglickeit* is a language whose mimetic features, as

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[95] Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 254
[96] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', trans. H Zohn, in:. *Illuminations*. Trans. H Zohn, p.262-3, 1968.
[97] Ibid.p. 263

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Benjamin says, are dependent on semiotic effects of words derived from their relational inscription in a text.[98]

In "On Language as Such," Benjamin effects an important shift in translation theory away from a "fidelity to the original" model (valorizing ideals of *adequatio,* commensurability, isomorphism, likeness, and same) and toward a transcoding model, in which everything is translatable and in a perpetual state of in-translation. The chronotype of Benjaminian translation is the '*now-time' (Jetztzeit)*, the same time that Benjamin associated with revolutionary historicity in his theses on the concept of history.[99]

Benjamin's understanding of translation, time and history permeate the thesis.

Andrew Benjamin,*Translation and the Nature of Philosophy: a New Theory of Words* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 86.

[98] Rauch, *The Hieroglyph of Tradition*, p. 40.

[99] See Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 7

CHAPTER 2

TRANSLATION AND AUTHENTICITY

Mediated Authenticity

What thou lovest well remains,
                    the rest is dross
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee
What thou lov'st well is thy true heritage
Whose world, or mine or theirs
                    or is it of none?
First came the seen, then thus the palpable
   Elysium, though it were in the halls of hell,
What thou lov'st well is thy true heritage
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee

The ant's a centaur in his dragon world.
Pull down thy vanity, it is not man
Made courage, or made order, or made grace,
   Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down.
Learn of the green world what can be thy place
in scaled invention or true artistry,
(Ezra Pound, from Canto 81, *The Pisan Cantos*) [1]

Fig 1. Korean Moon Jar

". . . amongst my purchases was a very large pickle jar, for which we found a fine iron-bound chest in an antique furniture shop, large enough to protect it within a packing case. It did arrive safely and I still have that Korean chest in the room where I write these lines." [2]

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[1] *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1975), p.541
[2] Leach's description of his discovery of the Korean Choson dynasty moon jar, in: Bernard Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits and Essays* (1978) (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 203.

The Korean Moon Jar: Pot and Image

Of a trip to Korea in 1935 with his friend Yanagi Soetsu, Leach recounted his impression of it as a sad, isolated land of "lonely, poetic beauty": a land not of form, but of line. His diary records in great detail the meals shared and dishes tasted, exhibitions and meetings, travel arrangements, conversations with nameless interlocutors, even the mechanics of their underfloor heating. Then, on the last day, scouting around the antique shops of Seoul to find examples of old Korean pottery he describes buying large and small Yi dynasty pieces. He "also spotted, in a dusty rack out of doors, a small incised Koryo twelfth- to- thirteenth century wine-cup with a reduced grey-green celadon on one side turning to a yellowish tinge 'oxidised' effect on the other. The gleam of gold lacquer told me it must have been prized and mended in Japan." [3]

The words that he used to describe the discovery of the moon jar seem rather more perfunctory. They want us to know that it is first of all a common pot. A day-to-day pot – a storage pot – a pickle jar. A pot to contain pickles: perhaps the kind of pickles that Leach loved to eat, Korean Kimchi – preserved embalmed perishables, the parsimonious husbandry of natural seasonal abundance, to endure, resist and delay the natural processes of decay and decomposition. I wonder, did it still smell of pickles when he found it?

Maybe initially it was only its very large size and spherical ensõ-like form that made it remarkable, made it stand out on a cursory scan of a dealer's shop in Seoul. Maybe its monochrome, glazed white surface caught his eye, the small random black pock-marking blemishes and slight separation or curdling in the opaque satin sheen of its skin. I have only an image, can see it only behind a glass, but my fingers evoke a soft, butter-creamy coated surface warming under their touch, feel themselves stroking the smooth, soft pile of the glaze running over its humanly, unevenly rounded form; sensing the slight jarring at the join between the two hemispheres, a visible and felt flattening marking an equatorial line

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[3] Leach, *Beyond East and West*, p. 202-3

around its middle; the bulge just above the belted belly, sloping down from its top right-hand shoulder, the simple, steadying foot just raising it from the floor and shallow rim collaring the neck.

But Leach doesn't mention the colour or form of the pot, just its function and size. His account of the encounter is rather matter of fact, almost utilitarian. He doesn't eulogise. It doesn't seem to have caused much of a stir. Maybe someone else spotted it for him, or guided his eye? For Leach it would appear to be a simple jar, hastily acquired on a quick trip scouting for ceramics with his friend Yanagi during their tour of Korea in 1935, before he set off back to Europe. But then barely a breath, a pause before a fulsome description of the fine iron-bound chest found in an antique furniture shop to protect it on its journey back to England. It must have been important to get it home in one piece and unharmed. First it is cradled in a packing case and then encased inside the chest and its iron bindings. "It did arrive safely." It did not fracture, split or shatter en route. Pieces weren't chipped off and it wasn't pulverised in transit. It survived the passage and arrived dislocated but whole. Then the jolt, a jarring note is struck. It isn't the pickle jar that he has before him as he writes these words, but the Korean antique iron-bound chest. It is the packaging that is retained and prized, not the pot: the now iconic pot, the image or archetype that caused such a stir; the shock waves created by the first encounter still reverberate. This pure white porcelain Korean Choson dynasty (1392-1920) moon jar, "the epitome of austere Confucian taste", is now kept by the British Museum.[4] Maybe Leach knew, as he organised its carriage over, that all he could keep of it was the husk, the carapace that protected it while it was transported over, intact and untranslatable, but that it had to be somewhere. Maybe this story is indicative of the role Leach played, as carrier-over, courier or conduit between East and West. The British Museum have a letter Leach wrote to Lucie Rie asking her to pick it up from a friend's house in London, to keep it safe for him in her small modernist studio and flat in Albion Mews in west London during

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[4] For a recent example, see the work of Adam Buick and the exhibition 'Moon Jar: Contemporary Translations in Britain', at the Korean Cultural Centre UK, London (June - August 2013).

the blitz and bombing of the war years. Then, seeing it in her studio, he left the moon jar in her care, where it stayed for the next fifty years.

Authenticity

In response to his question "where does truth lie?" Nietzsche wrote:

> A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations, which were poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned and after long use appear to people as fixed, canonic, and binding: truths are illusions which one has forgotten that they are illusions; worn-out metaphors which have lost their sensory power, coins which have their obverse effaced and now are regarded no longer as coins, but only as metal.[5]

Nietzsche's understanding of truth is couched in a metaphor of language, and evokes a gradual dissipation succeeding an act of naming, or evocation. Authenticity can be located both in the subject as namer and as an attribute of the object that elicits the name. Thus our relationship to truth, like the relationship of the subject to the object, is mediated by the word. Nietzsche's coin, like the word, represents the notion of convertibility and the interstice between the two. Significantly, and in light of Benjamin's thought, it allows us to think of authenticity through language, and as existing within the space of translation between subject and object.

Authenticity has become a strange and slippery concept. Like paper money, or a representation of a promise, with the advent of modernity came a heightened perception that it had started to slither off the gold standard. Authenticity thus conceived became contingent upon time and context. The past and elsewhere undermine our relationship to it as a concept, making it feel like a relatively recent and more typically Western preoccupation, since we are given to understand that the East and the medieval world did not share our concern with authenticity or copyright.

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[5] Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Werke,* 3 Vols, ed. Karl Schlecta, (Munich: Hanser. 1956), vol. 3, p. 314

Originally, through our English naming of it, we understand it as a derivation from the Greek, meaning 'of first-hand authority', and original. Etymologically it also speaks of one who does a thing himself and is uniquely responsible: a principal, master, or autocrat. Like the creative word it resided in the subject, in the hand and mind of the originator, in an idea of authorship: by God – the Creator – or by nature, and thence into humanity. This leads to a sense of greater authenticity arising from a closer, less mediated relation with nature as origin and in non- or less technological modes of existence, thus – as with Heidegger in later life – giving rise to a perception of technology as a factor that created a sense of alienation and distorted this more immediate relationship with the natural world.

As with language, its passage from the divine to the human, the infinite to the finite, made authenticity secular. It introduced mediation into the equation, allowing authenticity to slip between subject and object opening up the possibility of delegation and the potential for duplication. Vicars, experts and leaders – spiritual or secular authorities – had the power to sanction or bestow authenticity on objects and practices. Authenticity developed a sly adaptability and an ability to insinuate itself into sacred objects and practices with imperceptible ease and to confer on them the perdurable, originary quality of tradition or custom, to fix the fleeting impression and set the provisional and transitional in stone.

Under the aegis of authenticity, originality (or aura) became tied to authority and caught up in the man-made mesh of its power play, where an elaborate system or fiction of checks and balances established genuineness, pedigree or creditworthiness, sanctioned copies or exposed fakes. From the perspective of the contemporary the situation feels less stable and less certain. The structures which mediated and controlled the relationship between copy and original have been undermined and exposed, and authenticity has come to be perceived as an essentially precarious, mutable quality, occupying a slippery space open to negotiation:

I do not seek to establish any kind of authenticity' the point of this work is "to show that nothing is purely authentic; inauthenticity, forgery, charlatanism and so on are always possible and indeed constitute a necessary possibility inscribed in the very structure of the allegedly authentic. Derrida seeks to highlight a law of necessary but undecidable contamination at work in every attempt to distinguish between authentic and non-authentic, pure and impure, charlatan and non-charlatan.[6]

Contemporary authenticity thus exposed, deriving from its exposure of inauthenticity, is allowed to float unfettered from any ties to origin or standard. As a commodity subject to the ebb and flow of market forces it requires us to invest, buy back into and to believe in it. A transaction involving an investment, whether emotional, financial or intellectual, must still be made for a leap over the mire of mediation and into the unknown and unknowable to take place. It is a leap into being that, like the best advertising, removes temporal, physical and critical distance wherein event and thought become the same. And perhaps this is why the most paradoxical characteristic of the strain of authenticity we experience today is that it would still pretend to deny its essence as an inherently mediated, fickle and untrustworthy attribute. In the hollowing-out practice of undermining prior authenticities in order to establish new and alternative ones a gilded standard of 'authenticity' must be invoked. It seems that in order to exert authority, command respect and perpetuate itself, authenticity needs to ignore the fact of, or turn a blind eye to, its negotiated existence – as some thing which is always extra and external to the thing itself, decided by committee or by a crowdsourced gathering of consensus it is constantly provisional and precarious.

Similarly subject to requirements of equivalence that set into play metaphors of fidelity, treason and loss, translation, like the work of art, has been tangled up in the problematic of authenticity. Sited in the slippery, strange area between provenance and destination, between word and object, original and copy, it is a process of slippage, of constant flux

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[6] See Derrida in Limited Inc a b c (p.55) Northwestern University Press, 1988 quoted on p.11, After Derrida, Nicholas Royle, 1995, Manchester University Press.

and transit between subject and object. In this state of slippage or suspense, of never arriving because its origin always holds part of it elsewhere, it carries a lack that needs to be supplemented, or granted authenticity. As Benjamin noted,

> The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity ... The whole sphere of authenticity is outside the technical -- and, of course, not only technical – reproducibility [,,,] In the case of the art object, a most sensitive nucleus -- namely, its authenticity -- is interfered with whereas no natural object is vulnerable on that score. The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter.[7]

Benjamin resists institutional models of authenticity and locates authenticity, in nature and in the presence of the original, not in the object, or in the subject, but in everything transmissible from it. This is grounded in his understanding of potentiality, in language and the essential nature of translatability to the afterlife of a work. Authenticity, or aura, thus lies at the point of slippage between subject and object, which generates potentiality: the point at which the work of art, its call for translation and its mechanical reproduction intersect and interact.

What follows slips between, moving from Ezra Pound to Bernard Leach, in order to bring out the relationship between their involvement in processes of translation and their search for, and assumptions of, authenticity. This involves tracing the emergence of the image through the relationship of nature to pattern – to image – to draw out parallels between the genesis and application of these two concepts in their projects to reinvigorate Western traditions of poetry and craft. It reflects back on

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[7] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility' (1939) , in: *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 329

how Pound's concept of the Image developed out of translation, and in light of this how Yanagi and Leach's comparable concept of pattern was used to re-establish craft's claim to beauty and the useful: the reproducible pragmatic pot as poetic object. In view of this it considers Leach's Standard Ware in relation to

> The paradox [that] lies between the desire for 'empirical uniqueness' and the desire of the masses to bring things closer, spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of everyday reality by accepting its reproduction.[8]

Leach - Pound – Imagined Authenticity

It is well known that Ezra Pound and Bernard Leach both shared a fascination and ongoing engagement with the East, and translated from it. Although near-contemporaries, operating in similar spheres with shared points of reference and acquaintances, their work has only glancingly been considered in relation to each other's. In this chapter I read into Leach's work in light of Pound's ongoing poetic practice, his translations from Oriental poetry and use of translation to question ideas of authenticity and homogeneity.

This pairing is germane in light of the comparable issues relating to mediation and authenticity that have been raised in relation to the partiality of Pound and Leach's knowledge of the East, its language, traditions and history. A similar set of assumptions to those used to critique Ezra Pound's translations has been brought to bear on Leach's project, critiquing the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent of his translation of Mingei into a Western context. As Lawrence Venuti has pointed out, "The mere identification of a translation scandal is an act of judgment; here it presupposes an ethics that recognises and seeks to remedy the asymmetries in translating, a theory of good and bad methods for practicing and studying translation."

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[8] Ibid., p. 330

At the risk of stating a truism, knowledge can often be shown to be incomplete or partial, and translations are most easily and superficially judged against rules of fidelity. These judgements are often made according to a particular agenda and against the criteria of accepted tradition. As explored in Emily Apter's[9] recent theorisation of translation as a practice, which unfolds within and negotiates the demands of a space of conflict and imbalance in power and influence, it is important to bear in mind that these standards are often wielded in a hegemonic relationship between source and target, as an exercise in iconoclasm or power, precedence and authority, to undermine and suppress rather than affirm dynamic or destabilising forms of creative practice.

Thus, as we saw above, and as Pound's work with the image in relation to translation and poetry shows, the concept of fidelity to an original is a slippery and subjective factor among the many to be considered in a translation. This pairing, facilitated by a focus on translation, creates a holding space in which to consider the conflicting demands at play, shifting perspective away from recent discussions of Leach's work as of its time, as both colonial and Orientalising in approach, and opens it up to less polarised interpretations capable of holding contradiction and inconsistency. In doing so it questions the placement of Leach's work within structures set in place by power relations involved in a political tug-of-war between programmes which tend to foreground issues of authenticity and authorship. This shift in emphasis allows us to understand and appreciate Leach's project, like Pound's and other modernist projects, as originally created between cultures, as constructions suspended above a flying freehold rather than as a bridge with foundations firmly fixed in and connecting two shores; as castles in the air, whose "work need not be lost; [since] that is where they should be", and whose legacy became established by placing the foundations beneath them.

It also allows us to discuss Leach's practice, which could be said to operate within, and draw its energy from, the "in-between-ness" inherent to

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[9] Apter, 2006.

applied art: from a concern with the domestic, reproducible forms of accessible art, and as a practice that was grounded in the belief that the unseen and unremarked activity that takes place in this interstice is worthwhile and remarkable. Much as Pound used translation to reinvent poetry, to propose not just that a translation could be a poem, but that a poem could also be a translation, Leach's translation from East to West helped us to understand the pot as art, and to question assumptions of what can be art and where art can be. As Patrick Heron commented, Leach

> […] demonstrated the aesthetic parallel existing between Sung and medieval pottery - thus creating a genuine East-West synthesis; and in doing this, he has given us a ceramic idiom very much in accord with aspects of modern art. One can compare him to Henry Moore in some ways: both by-passed the Renaissance. [10]

Pound: Translation and Luminous Detail

Ezra Pound began with languages, studying modern and classical languages and comparative literature in the United States. At the beginning of his career Pound set himself the goal of discovering all that there was to be known about poetry: his project involved a search through history in order to create newness and find one's place in it. It lacked any anxiety of influence and looked to the past not to kowtow to it, or to perpetuate tradition along a linear progressive trajectory, but to draw on the past to establish new forms and tenses: a past-present, or past-presencing. As he wrote later, the time he spent

> [….] pawing over the ancients and semi-ancients has been one struggle to find out what has been done, once for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains for us to do, and plenty does remain, for if we still feel the same emotions as those which launched the thousand ships, it is quite certain

[10] Patrick Heron, in Doug Fitch, 'The Ceramic Heritage of Devon', in *Going Modern, Being British: Art Architecture and Design in Devon, c. 1910-60*, ed. by Sam Smiles, (Bristol: Intellect, 1998), pp. 79093 (p.90)

that we come on these feelings differently, through different nuances, by different intellectual gradations.[11]

His project to make new from the past using translation as its method was confident in the power of the subject, the sensibility, intellect and difference inherent in the individual, to nuance and make new.

In order to understand the workings of a poem, Pound thought it had to be possessed. This could not be achieved by mere analysis, discursive criticism or theory, because these methods did not go far enough. For him, that form of critical penetration was not the same as possession. It was only by translating, or transposing a poem from one language into another, or one medium into another, that it could be properly understood.[12] So Pound embarked on a lifelong practice of translating poetry to know what was counted as poetry by finding the part of it that could not be lost in translation. To find out what had been done, once and for all, better than it could ever be done again Pound passed verse through the furnace of translation to see what survived. He studied what it was – both nothing and everything, the elusive and indeterminate split of a hair's breadth – that was not lost in the process.

"What thou lovest well remains,

The rest is dross

What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee

What thou lov'st well is thy true heritage

Whose world, or mine or theirs

or is it of none? "

(Ezra Pound, from Canto 81, *The Pisan Cantos*)[13]

Like the pottery shard, these remains were the elements of poetry that could not be obliterated by the temporal, political and cultural forces

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[11] Ezra Pound,'A Retrospect', in: *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound,* ed. T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p.11

[12] The influence of Pound's thought on Haroldo and Augusto de Campos in Brazil in the 1950s, when they were developing their theory of cannibalistic translation and cultural appropriation around ideas of ingestion, digestion, assimilation and excretion, is evident and acknowledged.

[13] *The Cantos of Ezra Pound,* p.541

inherent in the destructive processes of translation. This quite radically shifted the focus of the accepted dynamic in translation away from entropy, the mourning of an inevitable loss and infidelity to a concentration on what could survive. By 1911, influenced to some degree by Emerson's ideas of language as 'fossil poetry' – "As the limestone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin"[14] –Pound's approach had begun to fuse his two practices and to foreground "translation as a model for the poetic art: blood brought to ghosts."[15]

China and translation came together in Pound's famous modernist mantra, a translation of the words engraved on the bathtub of a Chinese emperor. The Chinese emperor was Tching Tang [Ch'êng T'ang], founder of the Shang Dynasty in the eighteenth century, who

> "wrote MAKE IT NEW
> on his bath tub
> Day by day make it new."[16]   (Canto LIII).

Pound's powerful, immersive image pulls together many of his concerns about life, politics, art and poetry and their interconnectedness. The original context of the mantra was the practice of statecraft, of which economics forms a part, the concerns of husbandry and ensuring that there was enough rice for the emperor's subjects to stave off social unrest. Pound's thought is based on an underlying conviction that nature is abundant and provides by making things new, day by day. Thus the politics of the economy should mirror this in the creation of forms of circulation and distribution of resources to provide for natural contingencies rather than facilitate shoring up vast stores that create artificial scarcity. He thought that the health and wealth of a nation's

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[14] Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Poet', 1844 in *Nature and Selected Essays*, (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 271

[15] Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), p. 150.

[16] *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, p.265

culture could be gauged inversely relative to the degree and extent of usury prevalent in a given society.

Translation, as a model for the redistribution of culture through absorption and reproduction and a regenerative form of constantly making new, was at the heart of his method. From Pound's perspective there was no place for a tight-fisted approach to cultural production, since art should circulate unfettered, available to all as a freely reproducible form of influence. Pound felt increasingly that the capitalist system had created a market around the art object, that it was becoming fetishised and that its value was determined primarily by the price that could be obtained for it on the market. This stifled creativity and allowed cultural production to be dictated to by money, which became an end in itself rather than a means of exchange or facilitator of creativity. As Pound wrote, "Gold is durable, but does not reproduce itself - not even if you put two bits of it together, one shaped like a cock, the other like a hen. It is absurd to speak of it as bearing fruit or yielding interest. Gold does not germinate like grain. To represent gold as doing this is to represent it falsely. It is a falsification."[17]

Pound, like the Romantics, placed his faith in Poetry and the Poet. He thought that Poetry (and art) could resist the influence of the market that would package or process art as a commodity. "The genius can pay in nugget and in lump gold; it is not necessary that he bring up his knowledge into the mint of consciousness, stamp it into either the coin of conscientiously analysed form-detail knowledge or into the paper-money of words, before he transmit it."[18]

Using metaphor that evokes the Romantic understanding of language and creation, Schleiermacher's differentiation of an interpretative, functional

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[17] And the term '*falsificazione della moneta*' (counterfeiting or false-coining) may perhaps be derived from this' Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose: 1909-1965*, ed. with an introduction by William Cookson (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 348-9

[18] B.H. Diaz [Ezra Pound], 'Art Notes', *The New Age* (27 November, 1919), Reprinted in *Pound's Artists: Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts in London, Paris and Italy*, ed. Richard Humphreys (London: Tate Gallery, 1985) , p. 124.

approach from a translational, disinterested one, and which was reminiscent of Nietzsche quoted above, "[….] suggests an absolute dissociation between the economy of art (in which the artist 'pays' or 'transmits' or exchanges his 'knowledge' directly, without recourse to the negotiable tender of coins, words, or 'form-detail') and the economy of a marketplace mediated by a system of arbitrary reproducible signs (or currency)."[19]

As the only art capable of resisting commodification, poetry, in its oral aspect, passing from mouth – to ear – to mind – to mouth, could be given away, overheard, stolen, memorised and carried away. This relationship of poetry to language – to translation – to art – to commodity – to systems of mass production and of reproduction, to contemporary, heterogeneous, democratic mass-media systems of diffusion and communication is at the core of translation. It is also what makes Pound's translational approach applicable to the contemporary and places it alongside Walter Benjamin's thinking in his essays "The Task of the Translator" and "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility".

As in contemporary poetry, in the field of translation Pound's thought is omnipresent, if controversial, criticised and misunderstood. Pound is cited by Augusto and Haroldo de Campos as formative for their development of a theory of 'cannibalistic' translation. However, as a translator he came under constant criticism for his free approach, ignorance of the source language and over-reliance on Ernest Fenollosa's theory of Chinese script. Should a distinction be drawn between his two practices, then Ezra Pound translated more poetry than he wrote.[20] His interest in translation was always also part of a poetic, creative, modernist agenda to draw on the past. This motivation helped to shape his approach as a translator in the sense that it made him essentially a translator who wrote poetry from

[19] Richard Sieburth, 'In Pound We Trust: The Economy of Poetry / The Poetry of Economics', *Critical Inquiry*, 14:1 (Autumn, 1987), pp. 142-172. (p. 151)

[20] In his drive to know more about poetry than anyone else, Pound translated from the poetry of the troubadours, Arnaut Daniel, Cavalcanti, The Seafarer (from the Anglo-Saxon), Sextus Propertius, Japanese Noh Plays, Chinese poetry, the Confucian Odes and Analects and many more.

shadows or traces, and in that it works and creates from a given this is also Benjaminian in approach. "The true economy of a poem", Pound writes in one of his earliest essays, "lies in setting words to a tune that precedes them"[…] "the poetic fact pre-exists: as something that has simply 'come upon the intelligence' and which the poet in turn merely sets to words or transcribes or translates from the 'original'"[21] Thus:

> The act of translation is for him to respond to the *virtù* of the
> translated - what Pound called, translating Cavalcanti, the
> "forméd trace" (Canto XXXVI/178) - and to relive these traces
> and make them one's own. Translation is thus a concatenation
> of tensions between a foreign poem as model and the translating
> poet in his own circumstances.[22]

Pound's early work on the poetry of the troubadours, translated between 1908 and 1910, was a formative involvement, since it was from this that he began to develop a method of translation that followed the errant etymology of the word *trobaire*.[23] This word comes from the Provencal *trobar* which means to find or invent, and derives from the Latin *tropus* and the Greek *trephein* meaning the "turning" of a thought or expression. Through this Pound began to see translation as an "inventive turning" or *translatio* of something already there: of a found object, so to speak. This approach was in sympathy with the contemporary modernist artistic practice of appropriating or using and assembling found objects in collage and later as quotational 'readymades'. It enabled a more creative, innovative approach to translation, allowing him to fuse or confuse the two practices, since it did not lose sight of the aspect of *metapherein* contained in the Greek, and retained this metaphorical aspect of *translatio*, or a carrying across, whereby something in some sense becomes something that it literally is not.

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[21] Sieburth, 1987, 168-9 (SP, p.37).

[22] Ming Xie,'Pound as Translator', in: *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) , pp. 204-223 (p. 207)
[23] See the exposition of this by Ming XIe, Ibid.,

This way of thinking is apparent in Pound's first theoretical writings on translation which appeared during 1911 and 1912 in A.R Orage's *New Age* weekly magazine as a series of twelve articles, with Pound's translations, titled "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris". According to Egyptian mythology, following his death and dismemberment the scattered limbs of Osiris are gathered together again by Isis, the limbs' reunited energies reassert themselves and Osiris, reassembled, becomes the God of the Dead and also the source of new life in their son Horus. The interaction or movement between past and present, old and new, fragmented and whole, found and re-invented in the creation of the new – inherent in the practice of translation – would become pivotal to Pound's thinking. Throughout his poetic career I think that this idea – this translational method that draws on the past to make new in the now – remains a constant. Later on in his work, in his progression through Imagism into Vorticism, we see it carried forward – as the essence of translation that cannot be lost in translation – into his description of the vortex, where the image as a complex instance of sense and reason persists while the earlier sense of "gathering" gives way to stronger, compelling forces of energy and attraction:

> The vortex is the point of maximum energy.... All experience rushes into this vortex. All the energy past, all the past that is living ... Impressionism, Futurism, which is only an accelerated sort of impressionism, DENY the vortex ... The vorticist relies not upon similarity or analogy, not upon likeness or mimicry ... An Image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time ... [24]

Similar ideas and questions concerning the nature of time and history and its relation to the present were prevalent at the time, and Pound's ideas are relative to those developed by T.S. Eliot in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. This formed part of a contemporary impulse to go back to antiquity in search of certainties that might still pertain, and in the absence or disintegration of grand narratives that had given shape to and

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[24] Pound, 153-4, Blast, 1914 Vortex, http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1143209523824858.pdf (accessed 2017-07-13)

could aid navigation through a modern world that was literally and figuratively fragmenting, politically and conceptually. As this quotation from the *Cantos* implies, Pound responded to this, advocating a more translational, non-linear, fragmentary, literary conception of history, which posited the interconnectedness of history, poetry and politics and where, as we saw in the vortex, all ages might coexist concurrently in dynamic interaction and where history could never be complete or finite.

And Kung said "… even I can remember

A day when the historians left blanks in their writings,

I mean for things they didn't know,

But that time seems to be passing   (Ezra Pound, *Canto XIII*)[25]

Unlike the more 'quotational' approach to history used by Eliot, which preserved pieces unaltered, ring-fenced within inverted commas, detached from the body of prose or poem from which they had been lifted and translated in time, Pound's translational method and its approach to history acknowledged gaps in the composition of it ("No one language is complete"[26]) It allowed space for alterity and heterogeneity, for knowledge and language to change, to live on, meld to or camouflage itself within another piece of poetry or prose. For Pound this was the reality of literature because, since the period of Old English poetry, "English literature lives on in translation, it is fed by translation; every new exuberance, every new heave is stimulated by translation, every great age is an age of translations."[27]

This dynamic, which began early in his poetic career, can be seen played out to its conclusion in the *Cantos,* Pound's later work without end where the

> . . . *Cantos* is a poem that would simply uncover or transcribe
> what was already there as a given - "a poem whose economy

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[25] *The Cantos of Ezra Pound,* p.60
[26] 'How to Read', (1928), in: *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, p.36
[27] How to Read,, pp.34-35

depended less on *inventio* (production) than on the ideogrammatic *dispositio* (or distribution) of preexisting materials." "It recalls the Aristotelian definition of the philosopher as an *oikonomos*, a term meaning steward or householder with whom the good has been deposited and whose duty it is to dispense faithful likenesses of those impressions he has received from nature. The *Cantos* are "a dispensation of likenesses, a disposition of facts given by history, an arrangement of verities that inhere in nature and tradition. He need invent or produce nothing: his job is simply to point to what is already there (by deixis or quotation), to distribute or place into circulation what has been entrusted to his care, to apportion the sustenance that has been deposited in his keeping.[28]

Pound & Mediation: Fenollosa and the Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry

Before Ezra Pound had published *Cathay*, or been introduced to Ernest Fenollosa's widow and become the custodian of his manuscripts, he was part of Lawrence Binyon's circle (with other poets and nascent Sinologists such as Arthur Waley) that was based around Binyon's work with the Oriental collections at the British Museum. Pound was not able to speak or read Chinese, but he was a regular visitor to the Museum's Oriental collections. He had translated poems from Herbert Giles's *History of Chinese Literature* (1901) and published these translations of translations ('Fan-Piece, For Her Imperial Lord' being the most notable example) in *Des Imagistes* in 1914. As Robert Kern has shown,[29] the work of these previous translators – Herbert Giles, James Legge – had tended to anglicise the Chinese, colonising, domesticating and making it read as familiar or originally British, Victorian poetry. No sense of foreignness was retained and their translations were rather more a form of assimilation into the target culture than translation proper. There was no

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[28] Sieburth,1987, p.168

[29] Robert Kern, *Orientalism, Modernism and the American Poem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

fracture of target language or culture in the Benjaminian sense, in that English – its style, sense or syntax – was not disrupted in the apparently seamless process of transmission from the source language. The method of creating new, modern poetry through translation, which Pound had tried to work out in opposition to Giles' late Victorian versions and in response to the Chinese texts, had been incorporated by him into a series of examples. Pound thought that these imagistic principles, which we see put into practice in his famous earlier poems 'In A Station of The Metro' and 'Fan-Piece, For Her Imperial Lord', were confirmed by his subsequent discovery of Fenollosa's work.

Pound's translation of Chinese poems from the manuscripts, which he received from Fenollosa's widow in 1913, and his work editing Fenollosa's essay 'The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry', profoundly affected, fostered and confirmed his development of a theory of the image and of energy of language. This short essay on the ideographic nature of the Chinese written language, originally supposed to have been written by Fenollosa as a lecture, continues to exercise a significant impact on poetry and ideas concerning the relationship of language to the natural world and to objects. Its far-reaching influence is apparent in Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and in Foucault's work: both refer to the qualities of the ideogrammatic nature of Chinese writing in contrast to Western script. The ideas set out by Fenollosa are underpinned by the conviction that the Chinese language was closer to nature and not as removed from the '*lingua adamica*' or from Benjamin's idea of a 'pure language' or 'language as such' as were Western, Indo-European languages, which for Fenollosa were manifestations of a linguistic fall from grace. In contrast with Chinese, he thought that Western languages were "thin and cold because we think less and less into them. We are forced, for the sake of quickness and sharpness, to file down each word to its narrowest edge of meaning. Nature would seem to have become less like a paradise and more like a factory"[30]

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[30] Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* (1920), ed. by Ezra Pound (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1968), p.24

From this point of view, Western dictionaries, as the custodians of language, give us the current "vulgar misuse" of language and display its evolution, or dissolution, through its etymology, "arrested and embalmed" in "a late stage of decay". It is symptomatic of a language of mass production that had become a merely "utilitarian, commercialised and industrialised speech, a language stripped down and streamlined on an assembly line, cut off like the 'heap of broken images' in 'The Waste Land', from ancient unities and 'accumulations of metaphor'".[31].

Again we see through these analogies to industrial methods of mass production a sense that, as a medium of expression, language had begun to lose touch with its craft and its ability to bring something into being; of it becoming purely functional and representational as a medium of mechanical, or technical reproduction. Fenollosa thought that Chinese had retained a closer relation to nature because, unlike Western languages, it did not have a rigid grammatical structure. For example, it often omits number, tense, subjects of verbs and connectives, which make it possible to read it as lists of "things-in-themselves". Fenollosa thought that grammar was an alien construct created by men, and as such was an artificial imposition on natural language. For him, grammar (and grammarians) is a post-lapsarian system that structures and regulates language rather than describing the structures inherent within them. Thus, natural languages such as Chinese were superior, because they had been formed and structured by nature and maintained a direct correspondence with it through the word, while grammar confined language within artificial boundaries, restricting words in terms of time, sequence, place and action.

He thought that this tendency had begun with what he perceived as the tyranny of medieval logic, when European thinking had started to prioritise a kind of thinking that favoured abstraction, by which a sifting process would draw concepts out of things and that resulted in a "logic of classification".[32] This approach had had the effect of privileging the

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[31] Kern, p. 140.
[32] Kenner has pointed out a certain irony in this, as thinkers such as Leibniz were influenced by the Chinese language via the Jesuits. (I suppose this would continue

concept over the object or thing from which it was drawn and of maintaining an unnatural separation of the two. Thus, he said, "It was as if Botany should reason from the leaf-patterns woven into our table cloths." It was, therefore, what Fenollosa perceived as the Chinese language's freedom from the restrictions of grammar and its rootedness in the verb as a form of action, rather than the inert nouns of European languages, that allowed it to be more dynamic and more in tune with nature. This emphasis on action and natural processes rather than nouns and structures made it possible to conceive of words as endowed with energy and dynamism and the freedom to transfer energy or power from one place or thing to another, and to establish connections unfettered by the restrictions of grammar or logic.

Fenollosa also thought that unlike Western scripts the Chinese written language was inherently poetic because the Chinese character was "[...] something much more than arbitrary symbols. It was based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature", so that a sentence "holds something of the quality of a continuous moving picture".[33] Much like the medium of film, it may no longer be live, but its pictograms retain the trace or index of animation, and as such it still manifests an illusion or aspect of life that he thought had been lost to Western alphabets. Fenollosa believed that in the radical the Chinese character retained its original metaphor, and as characters developed they displayed their evolving etymology within them:

"It retains the creative impulse and process, visible and at work. After thousands of years the lines of metaphoric advance are still shown, and in many cases actually retained in the meaning. Thus a word, instead of growing gradually poorer and poorer as with us, becomes richer and still more rich from age to age, almost consciously luminous."[34]

For this reason Fenollosa thought that Chinese had retained closeness to nature and to objects which Western script had lost, since these had

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through into the taxonomies, invented universal languages and calculus of subsequent thinkers such as Liebniz and Bacon)

[33] Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*,(1920), p.8
[34] Ibid., p.25

evolved into purely symbolic, self-contained signifiers with obscure etymologies, and were removed from the natural world to which they referred. The most famous example of this, which was cited from Fenollosa and repeated by Pound well into his older age are the Chinese characters for:
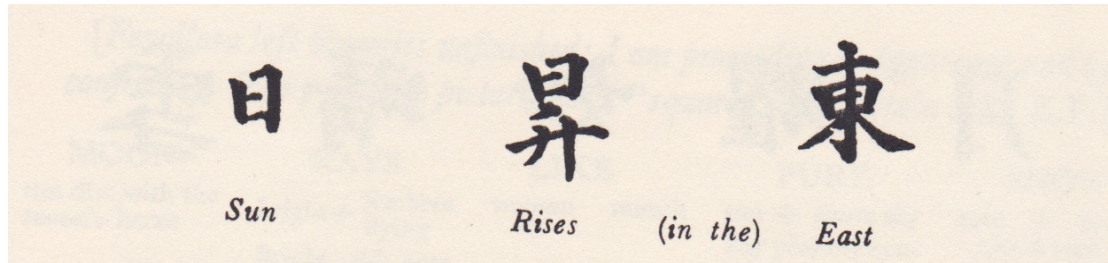
Figure 2 Illustration from The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry

> The sun, the shining on one side, on the other the sign of the east, which is the sun entangled in the branches of a tree. And in the middle sign, the very 'rise', we have further homology; the sun is above the horizon, but beyond that the single upright line is like the growing trunk-line of the tree sign. This is but a beginning, but it points a way to the method, and to the method of intelligent reading.[35]

It was this conception of the Chinese language and of the ideograph as "a symbol created through the juxtaposition of two (or sometimes three) distinct parts, without connecting links, and without reference to phonetic representation"[36] that Pound had learned from Fenollosa which formed the basis for his idea of a new American poetry. As Pound abandoned the term "Amygism", developing his thinking through Vorticism and towards the Ideogrammatic method, his idea of the image in poetry evolved to combine the concept of "energy in words" with that of luminous detail,

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[35] Ibid., p.33
[36] John R. Williams, 'Modernist Scandals: Ezra Pound's Translations of 'the' Chinese Poem', in: *Orient and Orientalisms in US-American Poetry and Poetics,* ed. Sabine Sielke & Christian Kloeckner (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 145-165. (p. 146). The phonetic is rather a shocking omission by Pound, but is in line with Fenollosa.

contained in Fenollosa's theory of the Chinese language.[37] This becomes apparent from his description of the vortex as

> .... a radiant node or cluster, it is what I can, and must perforce call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which ideas are constantly rushing.

Language or words became charged with energy and luminous detail, like particles charged with forces of attraction and repulsion, and this required a focus on points, details or fragments rather than on creating a whole, theoretical unified meaning of a piece of work.[38] Within this perception of language words were not simply inert marks on a page, which represented something-other, elsewhere, but like sculpted images, words carved into or out of matter established a direct relation between the word and the thing, subject and object. Again there is a sense here of something pre-existing, from which meaning is drawn, or hewn out, which coheres with a translational approach. And this sculpted, extractive conception of writing goes back to its roots in *graphein*, the Greek verb for writing, which recalls an original en-graving act of writing, which is an extractive, rather than additive process. Clearly Pound's involvement with visual artists such as Wyndham Lewis and Gaudier-Brzeska, and their shared impression of the Chinese character as a pictogram whose primitive form

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[37] Sieburth, pp 141-172. As Sieburth has noted, Pound generally defines the image, vortex or ideogram as either *icon* ('sign that stands for something because it resembles it') or *indices* (signs that possess a real connection with the object). He rejects the symbol since these depend on mental association, habit, or social convention (much like his idea of logopoeia), rather than resemblance or contiguity. This in line with an Emersonian approach to language and has the effect of removing people from the activity of signification, installing nature in place of specifically historical conditions of linguistic production. For Pound, there becomes a natural connection between sign and thing and the ideogram: a material embodiment of the thing that it stands for; an etymological reservoir of semantic energy, a "treasury of stable wisdom an arsenal of live thought." (pp. 155- 156) See also: "As Hyde [*The Gift,* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012), p.262] succinctly puts is, since "symbolization in either exchange or congnition requires that the symbol be detached from its concrete embodiment and then 'plays the gap' between symbol and object, between abstract money and embodied wealth." Much of Pound's economic thinking gravitates around this gap, this aporia, opened up by the discontinuity of the symbolic (money) and the real ('natural', tangible wealth." (p.158, Sieburth)

[38] It is relativist and is a quality also shared with Borges and Benjamin. All reject a totalising approach and resist grand narratives and overarching theories. It's hard to see which comes first, if it is translation that generates this approach or whether it's part of a modernist philosophy that informs their approach to translation? Possibly the latter.

contained the essence of its meaning was also very influential in the development of this theory:

> The vorticist sculptor Gaudier Brzeska sat in my room before he went off to war. He was able to read the Chinese radicals and many compound signs almost at pleasure. He was used to consider all life and nature in forms of planes and of bounding lines. Nevertheless he had spent only a fortnight in the museum studying the Chinese characters. He was amazed at the stupidity of lexicographers who could not discern for all their apparent learning the pictorial values which were to him perfectly obvious and apparent.[39]

Fenollosa's pictographic reading of Chinese characters, which prompted Pound's famous description of Gaudier-Brzeska's miraculous ability to read Chinese in one of his footnotes to Fenollosa's essay, has since been shown to be a misconceived and over-exaggerated aspect of the language, resulting in what has been described by some Sinologists as a "small mass of confusion" and a "totally irresponsible attitude toward the Chinese language":

> The pictorial significance of many of these forms is a matter of debate that has been somewhat clarified in recent decades through the archaeological discoveries of inscribed shells and bones dating from as early as 1400 B.C. Apart from these, chief reliance has been placed on an etymological dictionary compiled around 100 A.D., in which 9353 characters were listed and analyzed with respect to their original shapes and meanings. Contrary to impressions current among westerners, only 364, or 3.9 percent of the characters, could at that time be traced to a pictorial origin.[40]

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[39] Pound uses this example in a footnote to back up Fenollosa's theory of the Chinese character. Fenollosa, 1920, pp. 30-31

[40] For further critique of Pound and Fenollosa's approach to Chinese script see George A. Kennedy, 'Ernest Fenollosa, Pound and the Chinese Character', in: 'The Selected Works of George A Kennedy', originally printed in *Yale Literary Magazine*, 126: 5 (December 1958), 24-36. See also, Kern, Hern & Kenner

There seems to be a general consensus in current thinking that the contemporary Chinese character may contain the seeds of an initial image drawn from nature in much the same way as the shape of some letters and the etymology of Western words traces their development back to an original metaphor rooted in something concrete, but scholars have shown that Chinese people usually read their script much as Westerners read words on the page as phonemes and morphemes (as units of sound and sense), from which overall meaning is assembled and derived.

However there's an interesting and productive dynamic at play here. Scholarly research and philology would reasonably contradict the conclusions that Pound and Fenollosa reach about the Chinese language. Fenollosa's professed method acknowledges that it doesn't prioritise these accepted definitions or methods of reading and that their notion of accuracy and fidelity is gauged against different criteria. His purpose is other: "Sinologues should remember that the purpose of poetical translation is the poetry, not the verbal definitions in dictionaries". This seems to demand carte blanche for his "mis-reading" of the language with respect to judgements based on these different objective criteria that remain at the basis of a constant stream of criticism subsequently levelled at Pound and Fenollosa's method. And while the influence of the poetic approach remains undeniable, and the repercussions of their mis-readings or mis-translations for creative production continue unabated, these objections from the linguistic sphere continue to challenge it. Thus the scholarly debate is fed by and embodies the tensions between tradition and the creative licence of innovation. In view of this it seems necessary to reiterate that the objective validity or otherwise of Fenollosa's hypothesis is not really the issue in this discussion, since Pound's primary concern was with the aptness of Fenollosa's understanding of the Chinese language as a method he could use for his poetic project. This may well stem from a wilful and Orientalist mis-translation of Chinese poetry, but it is undeniably in this respect that Pound really had found what he needed in the method of reading and translating from Chinese that Fenollosa had advocated. As Rebecca Beasley points out: "There was much in Fenollosa's essay that was already familiar to Pound. As Robert Kern

succinctly remarks, "Fenollosa's discovery of Chinese as a natural or ordinary language, a linguistic mode that is not 'fossil' but *living* poetry, is less a 'discovery' than a projection of Emersonian linguistic assumptions upon a highly exotic script."[41]

Thus Emerson's ideas were filtered through Fenollosa and fitted with Pound's project to rejuvenate poetry and give immediate and unmediated access to the things of the world through poetry, thus ensuring that a Romantic aspect persisted at the heart of Pound's modernist project in the idea of the bond between the spirit of nature and the human soul. This was a vision that saw man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as the mirror of the qualities or forces of nature.

> [..] the poet is the Namer or Language-maker, naming things sometimes after their appearance, sometimes after their essence, and giving to everyone its own name and not another's, thereby rejoicing the intellect, which delights in detachment or boundary. The poets made all the words, and therefore language is the archives of history, and, if we must say it, a sort of tomb of the muses. For, though the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency, because for the moment it symbolised the world to the first speaker and hearer. The etymologist finds the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture. Language is fossil poetry. [42]

Pound's poet becomes the language-maker. His rediscovery of China as the new Greece and the misinterpretation of Chinese as a natural and poetic language provided the foundation for this poetic renaissance.[43] When, in his pursuit of this new renaissance inspired by Chinese culture,

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[41] See: Kern, 1996,p?.
[42] Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Poet', 1844 (p. 271)
[43] "In the first decades of this century, Chinese poetry was a powerful weapon against Victorian form, and thus it was brought over into English in forms resembling free verse, that it helped to invent. Rhyme and accentual metre were quietly dropped from the equation because – unlike Chinese use of parallelism, caesura, minimalism, implication and clarity of image – they weren't useful in the battle for a new poetic form" (Barnstone, Tony, The Poem Behind, p.74 quoted in Williams, 'Modernist Scandals: Ezra Pound's Translations of 'the' Chinese Poem',. p.154

the ideas that Pound was exploring through Vorticism developed into the Ideogrammatic method, this too derived from the concepts of the Chinese character as a word-image of a thing. And also, as becomes apparent in the quotation below, from a method and practice of translation whereby the word is turned over and over, picked apart and viewed from different angles, until a sense disrupts the habitual, registers, fits, communicates:

> The ideogrammatic method consists of presenting one facet and then another until at some point one gets off the dead and desensitized surface of the reader's mind, on to a part that will register.[44]

Pound, translation and the emergence of the Image

From his investigation and experience of writing and translating poetry, Pound identified and defined three aspects of poetry:

> *Melopoeia*: wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning.

> *Phanopoeia*, which is a casting of images upon the visual imagination

> *Logopoeia*, 'the dance of the intellect among words', that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of context we *expect* to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play. It holds the aesthetic content which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation and cannot possibly be contained in plastic or in music. It is the latest come, and perhaps most tricky and undependable mode.[45]

In layperson's terms and as the name suggests, Melopoeia describes the musical qualities or cadence of a poem, which might include and exploit

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[44] Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938 p.51 The Ideogram is also a form of Platonic Cratylism: it is based on the idea that there is a natural connection between sign and thing: i.e., the ideogram materially embodies that which it stands for.
[45] Pound, 'How to Read', p. 25

rhythm, rhyme, metre, assonance and alliteration. Phanopoeia would be the symbolic essence or image contained in a word. Logopoeia is the process by which words are charged with meaning, and this would extend to include idiosyncratic, associative, allusive, contextual, or culturally specific connotations of words. In terms of translation or carrying across, Pound was clear as to how these aspects of poetry might be approached, and their translatability:

> The *melopoeia* can be appreciated by a foreigner with a sensitive ear, even though he be ignorant of the language in which the poem is written. It is practically impossible to transfer or translate it from one language into another, save perhaps by divine accident, and for half a line at a time.
>
> *Phanopoeia* can, on the other hand, be translated almost, or wholly, intact. When it is good enough, it is practically impossible for the translator to destroy it save by very crass bungling, and the neglect of perfectly well-known and formulative rules.
>
> *Logopoeia* does not translate; though the attitude of mind it expresses may pass through a paraphrase. Or one might say, you can *not* translate it 'locally', but having determined the original author's state of mind, you may or may not be able to find a derivative or an equivalent.[46]

His terminology follows an order of precedence from sound to image to word and conceptually: in returning to the Greek concept of *poiesis* Pound goes back to an idea that he uses to link *techne* with poiesis, the human act

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[46] Pound, 'How to Read', p. 25 He elaborated on these three categories in his famous didactic essay 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste': "Let the candidate fill his mind with the finest cadences he can discover, preferably in a foreign language [This is for rhythm, his vocabulary must of course be found in his native tongue], so that the meaning of the words maybe less likely to divert his attention from the movement" - The Part of your poetry which strikes the imaginative eye of the reader will lose nothing by translation into a foreign tongue; that which appeals to the ear can reach only those who take it in the original" - Translation is likewise good training, if you find that your original matter "wobbles" when you try to rewrite it. The meaning of a poem to be translated can not "wobble" (Ezra Pound, 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste', *Poetry, a Magazine of Verse*, 1:6 (1913), 200-206

of making with the generative production of nature. As we saw above this is in sympathy with Fenollosa and Emerson's 'romantic' ideas of the relation between poetry and nature, whereby poetry is part of nature's generative-productive process. If poiesis is the generation of nature, Pound sees techne, its human counterpart – the production of art, or the idea of art as construction – as still retaining a relationship with nature, since it partakes in nature's generative-productive process. Techne therefore opposes – because it is more than – mimesis; thus the work of the poet is not to imitate nature but to produce art. The poet becomes the maker of sound, word and image. For Pound this idea of techne is at the heart of his idea of art as construction and as a form of 'intelligence that realises itself in doing and making' – an intelligence of making that is also a knowing. This starts from an understanding that if poetry and art are human constructions then they must be subject to human rules, which inevitably derive from and reflect those governing nature.

> Therefore, if poetry and art are human constructions, then insofar as the rules of this construction are human rules, they must reflect those presiding over nature. If to engage in 'logopoiea' is to 'charge language with meaning' then language will be saturated with nature (as we know it through scientific knowledge); it will be carried back to that unity of word and thing which according to Pound, Aristotelian metaphysics obstructs. The Chinese have demonstrated in their language the excellence of 'phanopoiea' but the West must adopt a different course: it must realize a logopoiea that absorbs the quality of the Chinese ideograms in a nonideogrammic language. [47]

To regain the Chinese unity with phanopoiea, the Western poet had to engage in a process of 'logopoiea', to charge language with meaning through concentrating on the image. As the only aspect of poetry that could be translated, phanopoeia, or 'the casting of images upon the visual

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[47] Ezra Pound, *Machine Art and Other Writings: the Lost Thought of the Italian Years: Essays*, ed. Maria Luisa Ardizzone (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p.24,

imagination' provided the focus for Pound's poetic project, and is behind his definition of the image as

> [...] that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time ... It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art. It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.[48]

Pound's concept of the image as "itself the speech, the image is the word beyond formulated language" retains the quality of something that hovers just beyond, like the Benjaminian aura, that calls for translation: it resides outside the confines of the word in the slippage encountered in carrying across and transference. As such, Pound's concept of Image holds within it a tension between mimesis and poiesis, between the word as symbol or sign and also as presentation or agent of change that brings something into being. Rather than merely represent or fix the image in a mimetic act – since this was what he thought that words brought about in their description or location of the thing – Pound wanted to find a way to present the image in his poetry: for words to hold the image, gathering like the shade in the spaces between them, and that would make space for its '*presencing*'. To do this without falling into mere representation, or just describing things in terms of something else, seemed to demand immediacy – the removal of mediation, direct suddenness, as a shock might jolt the reader out of habitual preconceptions and accreted layers of cultural residue to make them see something new. So in order to write poetry, which created and cast images on the visual imagination, Pound drew up the following rules:

> 1) Direct treatment of the 'thing', whether subjective or objective
>
> 2) To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation

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[48] Pound, 'A Few Don'ts'

3) As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.[49]

This method was an antidote to what Pound perceived as the degenerate, florid verse of the Victorian poets and the adoption of set structures, or rigid rhyme schemes, which were not in sympathy with the object in question. Form should derive from the thing, sense or subject matter, rather than be subject to it. These rules are evident in one of Pound's earliest and most famous Imagist poems, first published in 1913:

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:

Petals on a wet, black bough.

There is nothing superfluous in the spare, concentrated use of language, The title, which also functions as a locator – setting it now, in the metro, in Paris - makes up a third of the poem and forms part of it. The ambiguity in the first and second lines casts a shadow of doubt as to which is the figure and which is the ground. Are the faces seen and compared to petals on a wet, black bough or are both being seen? In other words, what is being observed and what is the image it is generating, or are both being seen concurrently? The elements are joined and compressed in a con-fusion of subject with object and poet with reader, which immerses, removing any sense of distance or of an outside. As Richard Sieburth has noted, Pound's

[. . .] abandonment of his early troubadour manner in late 1912 for the modernist poetics of Imagism [...] represented a fundamental attempt to get his poetry off the gold standard, to defetishize the signifier, as it were, to establish a poetics whose economy would be based on the direct exchange between subject and object, language and reality, word and world. The poetry he was after [....] would try to 'record the precise instant

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[49] Pound's rules for writing Imagist poems written in 1912, as reported by F.S. Flint in *Poetry*,1913. A Retrospect, in: *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, p.3

when a thing outward and objective transforms itself or darts into a thing inward and subjective.[50]

Syntax, the temporal ordering of language, sets up the perception of time in the poem and again it is compressed in order to present a here and now, which is both present and also timeless. It is modern, located in the metropolitan urbanity of the crowded metro, and also eternal, since the descent to the underground is contemporary, but it also *blood brought to ghosts* and evokes an ancient, endless descent to the classical underworld of Homer, Virgil and Dante, where petals on a wet black bough recall the souls of the dead. When first published by Harriet Monroe, Pound instructed it to be laid out as follows:

The apparition   of these faces in the crowd :

Petals   on a wet, black   bough .

Some subsequent typesetters have closed the gaps, not seeing the significance of the spacing, but, as Hugh Kenner points out, Pound's original splitting establishes different phases of perception, making the succession of poetic images echo a visual experience whereby each one represents a thing whose relation to the other sets up and articulates the interrelations between things in the world. The punctuation, the pause, the space between and the final closure are made as significant as each separate image or pictogram. It seems to draw on Japanese images and verse models, as in the haiku, and alludes to the way the Western eye might approach Chinese or Japanese script, moving from one character or pictogram after another in sequence or arbitrarily, each image interconnecting with the others and compounding them. This perception of Chinese writing allows for a juxtapositional reading rather than the more typically Western linear sequential transition from one phase to another, and is in keeping with a modern, fragmented perception of time and history.

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[50] Sieburth p. 146

In Pound's account of the genesis of the poem he describes getting out of a metro train in Paris at Concorde station and seeing "first a beautiful face and then another and another and then a child's face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what they had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion." He persisted, searching for words to express the moment and later found its expression, or image in splashes of colour. He wrote a thirty-line poem, which he destroyed; then, later on, another shorter one, which he also destroyed. Finally a year later it took shape in the condensed haiku form. The rich layering of allusion and implication created by condensing the poem was achieved through this process of compressing Pound's original discarded and destroyed poems down into a single image poem: "Emotion seizing upon some external scene or action carries it intact into the mind: and that vortex purges it of all save the essential or dominant or dramatic qualities, and it emerges like the external original."[51]

This process of destruction and construction is entirely in keeping with a translational process from which the image, the phanopoeia, the only aspect which can survive, emerges. "A poetics of im-mediacy, Imagism seeks to close the gap between word and object, poet and reader, poem and 'the real', and it does this by postulating the possibility of a language so pellucid, so unencumbered by rhetoric or figure as to become the virtually transparent medium for the direct and radiant revelation of the 'thing'".[52]

Pound's poetic project sought authenticity by closing the gap, compressing the space of mediation and inauthenticity between the subject and object. Japanese and Chinese poetry served as models for this practice of compression that he was introduced to through Victorian Orientalism and drawn to in reaction to cluttered Victorian verse. It reflects a similar concern with the perceived immediacy in the craft-based abstraction of pattern and form from nature and the movement away from

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[51] Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson,(New York, NY: New Directions, 1973), p.374
[52] Sieburth, p. 150

ornate Victorian vases to the simplicity of the Sung dynasty vessel that we see in Bernard Leach's work.

Yanagi and Leach: Pattern as Image

Just as Pound had taken on and appropriated Fenollosa's ideas, it is clear from Leach's writings, talks and interviews that his ideas on pattern were influenced by Yanagi Soetsu's thinking, as set out in his essay 'Pattern' (written in 1952), which Leach translated for his edition of Yanagi's collected writings, *The Unknown Craftsman: a Japanese Insight into Beauty*[53]. This radical understanding of pattern is inextricable from Yanagi's theorisation of Mingei or folk craft, since it makes the case for pattern – an anonymous, repetitive and traditional aspect of craft-based practice often considered merely mechanical and decorative – to be valued as abstraction and as image and to unsettle orthodox hierarchies between art and craft.

In setting out the relationship of pattern to nature, Soetsu draws on ideas concerning man's relationship to nature that resonate with Jena Romanticism, Transcendentalism and Zen Buddhism, and the influential philosophers Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki and Kitaro Nishida.[54] These influences were drawn together into a fusion of Eastern and Western philosophy and mysticism, of Zen Buddhism, Scientific Rationalism, Theosophy, Transcendentalism and German Romanticism:

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[53]Yanagi Soetsu, *The Unknown Craftsman: a Japanese Insight into Beauty*, tr. Bernard Leach (Tokyo; London: Kodansha International, 1972)

[54] The influence of Zen Buddhism on the Mingei movement is widely acknowledged, as is its influence on a tradition of studio pottery in the west, both through Leach's translation of Yanagi's writings and the promotion of his concept of craft pottery practice and aesthetic. The major proponents of Zen in Japan and to the West were Kitaro Nishida and Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki. Yanagi and Suzuki had been fellow students at the Peers' School, so were acquainted. Suzuki had written his thesis, "Jiriki to Tariki" (Self Power and Other Power) by the time Yanagi had developed Buddhist aesthetics after the Second World War. He also wrote: *Pure Land School* (1911); *Shukyo Keiken no Jijitsu* (the Fact of Religious Experience, 1943), *Nihonteki Reisei* (Japanese Spirituality, 1944), *Myokonin* (1948). Kitaro Nishida: "The Kantian definition of the sense of beauty as a pleasure detached from the ego was paraphrased by the Buddhist term *muga* (no-self) in Nishida's article in 1900, 'Bi no "Setsumei"' (An Explanation of Beauty)." "The focus of his book *Zen no Kenkyu* (An Inquiry into the Good, 1911), is on *junsui keiken* (pure experience) on which truth, virtue and beauty are based. *Junsui keiken* is a direct and intuitive experience which happens instantaneously before the notion of subject and object or emotion and logic are clearly divided. (this is in keeping with the Zen Buddhist aim to eliminate dualism) "Geijutsu to Dotoku" (Art and Morality, 1923: suggested truth, goodness and beauty lie in the highest state of mind *muga*, which is the meeting point for art and morality. (Yuko Kikuchi,*Japanese Modernism and* Mingei *Theory*, p.6-7, 2006).

Romantic and Transcendentalist influences drew Buddhism into the orbit of hope for a reenchantment of the disenchanted, industrialised and materialist west with help from the supposedly more spiritual East.[55]

One of the significant impacts Romanticism has on Buddhist modernism comes form its cosmological metaphysics. Thus we see in Schleiermacher an understanding of the spiritual as an intuition, or feeling of the infinite: ".... the immediate consciousness of temporal things in and through the Eternal" This experience of "the Whole" or "God" does not occur through the intellect or reason but through a pre-reflective awareness that precedes the division between subject and object."[56]

In Friedrich W. J Schelling's idealist philosophy,

> [...he] sought to understand nature not as a collection of objects determined solely by necessary laws but as an active and productive power governing its own evolution from unconsciousness to consciousness. Against the prevailing Newtonian view of nature as a mechanism, he offered one that likened nature to an organism. The organismic whole of nature consists of two interdependent poles: the products - the objective side of nature, constantly flowing and changing like eddies in a stream - and the productivity itself, the creative, subjective side, which can never be an object. Subject and object, therefore are not thoroughly separate entities, as Kant and Descartes had argued, but different poles of the vast interrelated whole of being. Objects are not independent of the subject and the usual immersion of the ego in objects binds the subject to its own primordial positing of objects. Moreover, because the subject and object are not ontologically divided, human beings can know nature in this unified sense, not through empirical judgements but through an 'inner love and familiarity of your

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[55] David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 77.

[56] Ibid., p.78 .

own mind with nature's liveliness .... [and] quiet, deep reaching composure of the mind.[57]

Parallels are apparent in the discussions of experience, of oneness with a living cosmos, intuition, non-dualism and interconnectedness, which coincide with Buddhist concepts such as *Chokkan* (direct insight), *soku* (the relationship in which the particular implies and relates with Unity), *funi* (non-duality), *bishu mibun* (liberated form the duality of beauty and ugliness), *jirikido* (Way of Self Power: self-reliance) and *tarikido* (way of Other Power, reliance on and external power or grace). Interestingly, in D. T. Suzuki's work the conceptual borrowing was not symptomatic of a practice that appropriated Western sources in order to try to pass them off as Zen; rather,

> He placed elements on a scaffolding constructed of a variety of western philosophical ideas in order to translate selected Zen ideas into that discourse. Sensing affinities between Zen and the Romantic Transcendentalist vein of western metaphysics, Suzuki deployed its terminology to frame the issue of humanity and nature, allowing Zen to claim the broad outlines of its metaphysic and then presenting Zen themes to bring it to what he considered its fullest expression.[58]

In Yanagi's similarly hybrid[59] project the Zen doctrine of the removal of duality (good-evil, true-false, beautiful-ugly, self-other, life-death, conscious-unconscious) formed the basis for his Mingei aesthetic and the criteria of beauty which inform Mingei:

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[57] Ibid., pp 77-78
[58] Ibid., p.125
[59] As Yuko Kikuchi has pointed out, Yanagi - the primary source influencing Leach's ideas on craft - also negotiated a hybrid product by means of: "a process of invoking mediations between two discursive cultural entities and appropriation from one to the other" (East and Western influences were fused in Mingei) "Ruskin, Morris, Tolstoy as critics of modern industrial capitalism became popular triggering Japanese social criticism, & movements. As in England and other nations undergoing similar processes & search for alternative indigenous modernity & national cultural identity. Thus the 'art of the people, 'art and beauty of life' & 'peasant art' were among most important concepts of Japanese modernisation. This allowed for the creation of Japanese tradition by combining Occidental anti-historical, anti-modern, socialist ideas with Japanese vernacular agrarian myth" (Yuko Kikuchi, *Japanese Modernisation and* Mingei *Theory: Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism'* (London: Routledge, 2004), p??

1. "beauty of handcrafts" (Shukōgei no Bi)
2. "beauty of intimacy" (Shitashisa no Bi)
3. "beauty of use/function" (Yō/Kinō no Bi)
4. "beauty of health" (Kenkō no Bi)
5. "beauty of naturalness" (Shizen no Bi)
6. "beauty of simplicity" (Tanjun no Bi)
7. "beauty of tradition" (Dentō no Bi)
8. "beauty of irregularity" (Kisū no Bi)
9. "beauty of inexpressiveness" (Ren no Bi)
10. "beauty of plurality" (Ta no Bi)
11. "beauty of sincerity and honest toil" (Seijitsu na Rōdō no Bi)
12. "beauty of selflessness and anonymity" (Mushin/Mumei no Bi)[60]

Thus a true artist

> [. . .] is not one who chooses beauty in order to eliminate ugliness, he is not one who dwells in a world that distinguishes between the beautiful and the ugly, but rather he is one who has entered the realm where strife between the two cannot exist.[61]

Yanagi began to lay the ground for the connection (or interconnectedness) between humanity and nature through craft and pattern in the opening paragraph of his essay:

> To divine the significance of pattern is the same as to understand beauty itself. [...] The relationship between beauty in crafts and pattern is particularly profound.[62]

As beauty, pattern has to negotiate the area between objectivity and subjectivity, the universal and the particular, and there is a sense in which Yanagi's concept of pattern emerges out of an ongoing and evolving process of negotiation between subject and object that favours the use of intuition and sensibility over rational order, presupposing a perspectival

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[60] Kikuchi, *Japanese Modernism and* Mingei *Theory*, p. 53
[61] Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman*, p. 135.

[62] Ibid.

quality. This would also be in keeping with the relationship of genius to schema and to Goethe's thought of nature and metamorphosis and of the world growing though a continual process of external and internal strife. Thus it comes from the natural world, but could not exist without human interaction with it. In defining how the natural object in essence differs from the pattern derived from it, Yanagi Soetsu writes:

> The pattern is a product of nature. The pattern is this plus a human viewpoint. The original plant is still 'raw', nothing more than the given material. The viewpoint is what gives it content. Without a viewpoint, seeing is no different from not seeing. [...] All patterns are products of a viewpoint. For that reason, patterns are not reproductions of nature, but new creations.[63]

Pattern, like the image for Pound, becomes more than a mimetic or symbolic representation of the object. For Yanagi and Leach it is also "... a 'vision' of what is reflected by the intuition"[64], a product of the imagination, which both represents and holds the living object within itself. This idea of a language of pattern as a vital symbolic system resonates with Pound and Fenollosa's conception of Chinese as a poetic language closer to nature than Western script since an image of the object it names is still discernable in the character. Thus, like the character, stripped of all non-essentials and devoid of clutter, a pattern is a condensed image, or

> . . . picture of the essence of an object, an object's very life; its beauty is of that life. In fact, it would be truer to say that its beauty is that life staring the pattern maker in the face.[65]

Yanagi's concept of pattern, as something intuited which takes form in the negotiated, translational space between subject and object, allows it to transcend nature and to exceed and surpass the natural object in beauty and content, since "If we see nature as beautiful, then we are, in a sense, seeing it in patterns. Pattern is the crystallization of beauty. To understand

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[63] Ibid., p.113
[64] Ibid., p.114
[65] Ibid., p.114.

beauty and to understand pattern are aspects of the same thing. [...] A pattern is not merely exaggeration, but an enhancing of what is true."

As the essay develops, the concentrated force of pattern begins to overwhelm and replace the object until, evocative of Klee's idea of the artist as the agent that makes visible, rather than presenting, the thing to us, pattern becomes a way of drawing out the invisible or touching on the ineffable as "a vivid representation of what the thing could never be." As such it achieves authenticity, as a "verity that transcends realism",[66] and becomes the power of beauty able to determine how nature and the object are seen, or how beauty is perceived. Here Yanagi, would seem to be following Hegel's idea of beauty in art as higher than beauty in nature, since "the beauty of art is born of the spirit and born again"[67] This idea of pattern as art, as beauty, as more true than reality, privileges it, allowing it to touch upon the infinite. Moreover, since Yanagi's concept of pattern does not classify, contain or explain but remains open, it is an inexhaustible source of imagination, generating endless interpretation.

In his essay Yanagi takes pattern, like poetry, back into the sphere of structure, of symmetry, numbers, order and laws, which must be obeyed if beauty is to be realised, and, as a way into abstraction or the spiritual, pattern becomes a means of reconciling nature and spirit, sense and reason, finite and infinite:

> The philosophical Concept of the beautiful, to indicate its true nature at least in a primary way, must contain, reconciled within itself, both the extremes which have been mentioned [the ideal and the empirical] because it unites metaphysical universality with real particularity.[68]

Yanagi identified a time before the separation of painting from pattern, and suggested that painting was also subject to law, and is also pattern, but that since the age of individualism painting had come to avoid pattern

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[66] Ibid., p.115
[67] G.W. F. Hegel (1835), *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol, 1 trans. T.M, Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press,, 1975) .p. 22
[68] Hegel, (1835), *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol 1,, trans. T.M, Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press,, 1975) p. 22.

and privilege realistic representation. The separation did not arise out of the intrinsic quality of the activity – from the practice of pattern-making or painting, – since "Most beauty is related to laws that transcend the individual"; for Yanagi these are one and the same:

> In pattern man gets a view of a mighty world transcending man. In pattern we touch on the mystery of beauty. It is a strange thing that nobody seems to have stated boldly that pattern and beauty are identical. To make something beautiful and to create a pattern are not two different things. I dare to prophesy that although people's eyes are closed at the present, this profound truth will eventually be realized.[69]

A sticking point in Yanagi's concept of beauty, art and pattern lay in the status of the figure of the pattern maker that moved, mediated, or translated between the natural world and a human-made response to it. Yanagi's and Leach's projects both struggled to a greater or lesser extent with the visibility or invisibility of this translator. For Leach the tension between these dualities – the division between the individual and the common, recognition and anonymity, reward and disinterest and pride and selflessness – came out acutely in the uneasy relationship between market and artist. How could a bridge between "innocent", disinterested (or outsider) art and the market not result in its destruction by ushering in the self-consciousness inherent to the commercialisation of craft? How in the contemporary context could the humility of the artist be prized and lauded in a way that let humility remain unconscious of its self?

> The problem, as I see it, is how the artist, whether he be a craftsman or not, can achieve in himself a release and balance of his neutral capacities so as to digest the stimuli with which modern life inescapably presents him. [. . .] he has the whole world to draw upon. He can no longer depend on any single

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[69] Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman*, p.118.

established right way of doing things, which we call tradition. He has to stand upon his own two feet alone.[70]

For Yanagi, while both aspects were required he thought that the separation of fine art from craft had grown out of the emphasis on subjectivity over universality, resulting in individualism and the need for signature. The Zen concepts and the relationship of self to other power were central to his theory as a way of addressing a perceived imbalance in the relationship between the individual and common, or universal. Self-power is the power of the individual: it is symptomatic of attachment and signature, and of the self-conscious artist that relies on themself and cultivates their own ability, or genius:

> We call these modern times the Age of Signatures or the Age of Attribution. This is the age when artists are acknowledged as heroes in the craft world [...] the need for a hero is merely one of the phenomena in the age of individualism. [....] Signing one's name on one's product is not wrong, but from the viewpoint of Oriental religion, it reveals the act of attachment. An artist signs to advertise himself through his work. But are there any circumstances when the artist entirely forgets himself and makes his work shine brilliantly, when his work speaks for him instead of propping him up?[71]

The other power that counterbalanced the emphasis on signature as advertisement was found in tradition, in the accumulation of experience and wisdom of generations, in the common and shared, and in the practice of the anonymous artisan or craftsperson. For Yanagi and Leach this power was able to transcend the individual, and therefore,

> To the craftsman tradition is both the saviour and the benefactor. When he follows it, the distinction between talented and untalented individuals all but disappears; any craftsman can unfailingly produce a beautiful work of art. But if he loses

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[70] Bernard Leach, *Kenzan and his Tradition: the Lives and Times of Koetsu, Sotatsu, Korin and Kenzan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p.40 (my ellipsis).

[71] Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman*, pp. 222-223.

sight of the long tradition behind him, his work can only be that of the bumbling incompetent.[72]

These two concepts, self-power and given-other-power, were used by Yanagi as the philosophical underpinning of the Mingei movement. The reassertion of the importance of other power through craft provided a way for Yanagi to find a counterbalance to the self-conscious and commercialised branding of art which he perceived to have taken hold in the modern individualist era and to combat the proliferation of anonymous mechanised forms of mass production, which were replacing traditional communal craft practices. What was at stake in Yanagi's thesis remains politically, economically and institutionally controversial, since it suggested that the elevation of certain forms of art to the sphere of the Fine entailed a rejection of the common in favour of the Fine marketable and authored object which resulted in the failure to value, and the rejection of, the common, used, inexpensive, anonymous, accessible and reproducible art of the people. Yanagi located this form of art – that was not extraneous, or superfluous to it, but that entered into and became part of the life of people – within Craft, since it was

> […] of and for the great mass of people and are made in great quantity for daily life. Expensive fine crafts for the few are not of the true character of craftsmanship, which, being for everyman, are appropriately decorated with the patterns of everyman. It is natural that craft objects should be associated with patterns that are also, in a sense, communal. Painting today is prized far more than pattern, but the time will come again when this position will be reversed and beauty that transcends the individual will come to be accorded more importance.[73]

Bernard Leach understood pattern as its older sense, as "patron" – the archetype, original or model to be copied or imitated, rather than the decoration it had come to be. This understanding emphasised origin and the importance of genealogy, or line of descent, in relation to it.

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[72] Ibid., p. 135-136.
[73] Ibid., p.117..

Similarities between Leach and Yanagi's idea of pattern and Pound's concept of the image begin to emerge. Like Pound's idea of image, pattern had to be drawn from the observation of nature. Similarly, it was more than a copy or representation since it involved a process of refinement, paring away unnecessary line until only the essential remained, becoming an image of that which is not seen. Thus it was both true to nature and an artifice: it came from nature, but it was the part of it that was not like nature, that passed into the imagination. As such, pattern resided in the eye of the imagination and, like image-making, was a poetic act.

In the passage from nature to fracture Leach invested authenticity, or fidelity to an origin, in the capacity of the artist as subject and as image-maker. He claimed that he and his friend Kenkichi Tomimoto were the only original, contemporary pattern-makers, since as artists and craftsmen they had developed an aesthetic sensibility or insight through practice, drawing and extracting pattern from nature and objects. Like Pound's translating of poetry and inventive turning around of the errant etymology of *trobaire*, Leach seemed to see pattern-making as a mobile travelling practice. He likened it to a dance, or musical composition, that came from the court and went to the country, where it became folk art, but also as a dance that started in the country and went to the court, where it was taken up and adapted by an educated composer. In his conception of it, pattern travelled between fine art and folk craft, between authored and anonymous work and individual and communal practice; but it always retained a hierarchy, sliding on the continuum between high and low, authored and anonymous art. So, according to Leach artist potters like Shoji Hamada never tired of repeating their patterns, because like a signature they belonged to them and their work was recognisable from its pattern. Others who still used or repeated found or traditional patterns in their practice were the inheritors and custodians of tradition, and of a dying practice. They learned in a practical way through making, obeying the rules of design that ensured the standard would be perpetuated and would keep alive patterns that had been handed down through generations, as a haptic history. The personhood of the maker, their trace,

slipped in through this repetitive process in the slight irregularities, in the incidence of variation caused by a human form of technical reproduction.

When writing about or discussing pattern Leach would often cite his first encounter with Masu Minagawa, the teapot maker and pattern painter from Mashiko, when he drew with her in 1935:

> Minagawa had cards with stencilled red outlines of her familiar Mashiko tea-pots and at my suggestion drew the patterns of an era elsewhere lost - lightly and with amazing swiftness and impersonal beauty of traditional touch. [...] I copied her once or twice, but, despite her praise, failed to get that beautiful, nonchalant, almost accidental, calligraphy, the quality of which she was almost unconscious of, and for which she has acquired fame...[74]

The figure of Minagawa[75] fitted Leach's concept of pattern-maker, pattern and their relationship to craft perfectly. His vision of her was as a rough-mouthed, illiterate old woman, a carrier of tradition, trained through practice, who since childhood had painted her patterns on pots – up to a thousand a day, repeating the same thirty-odd patterns she had learned from her father over and over again until they flowed unselfconsciously from her dog-hair brushes. Leach didn't think that women or artisans found the endless repetition of pattern boring, because it wasn't meaningless mechanical labour for them. As in stitching, or embroidery, there was endless variety of technique in the way the brush might be used. So Leach's image of the uncorrupted figure of Minagawa exemplified absorption in work and the need for and power of repetition to develop mastery, not just of the physical act but also of the state of mind, emptied

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[74] Leach, *Beyond East and West*, p. 176. my ellipsis.

[75] Minagawa is a controversial figure and Leach's description and account of meeting her – which from a contemporary Western viewpoint would seem to advocate child labour and sanction exploitation – has been cited by commentators as another symptom of Leach's failure to understand the reality of working people, his tendency to over-romanticise the humble, uneducated, anonymous craftsperson seeking no other reward than fulfilment through work, content to labour long hours at repetitive, back-breaking tasks for a pittance, and also of his uncritical acceptance of Yanagi's Mingei ethos. This is a valid critique and an aspect that cannot be ignored, but here I concentrate on the episode's relevance to Leach's ideas of pattern, to the relationship of image to pattern and on the overlap between Pound's and Leach's concepts.

and unselfconscious, that is needed to achieve beauty in the repetitive and repeated object. Leach wrote that she was "… quite unconscious of the merit of the designs she painted and her knowledge of the original subject matter of the patterns she used was limited to their traditional names."

According to Leach's anecdote, she assumed her knowledge was so basic, so simple and obvious, that Leach, as an educated man, must already know and be able to paint the patterns for her, probably better. In *A Potter's Book* this encounter is cited to support or exemplify Yanagi's contention "that in comparison with such painting [Minagawa's patterns] the work of trained artists is sophisticated, and that craftsmen of to-day need to recover a state where there is no strain between intuition, reason, and action."[76]

Leach's perception of Minagawa here stems from a perspective articulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose

> emphasis on nature and natural is inseparable from critique of society. For him, the alignment with impulses of nature entails an austerity in the face of increasing desires, emerging consumerism, and trifling pleasures of the age; he warns against the corrupting effects of wealth and excessive leisure, as well as stifling social conformity imposed by society. His perspective entails the theme taken up by other romantics and important to modernist interpretation of Asian religions: the idealisation of the peasant or premodern 'primitive' man. For Rousseau, the development out of a state of nature is equivalent to the 'fall from wisdom and happiness into vanity and misery. Therefore it erects a tension between civilized, rational, modern life and the simple agrarian, untroubled life of peasants and savages.[77]

Thus, latterly, when Leach talked or wrote of Minagawa, the teapot maker, the exemplar and last traditional pattern painter, he would also point out that she was humble, but not humble, that she knew she had skill. She knew when her work looked right and took pride in her ability

[76]Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book,*(1940) (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 105 (my italics).
[77]McMahan, p. 78.

to do something others couldn't. In later life, as a result of the Mingei movement and Hamada's efforts, Minagawa had been honoured by the Emperor of Japan, who had sought out one of her teapots, had come to visit her and written a poem to her. She had become a celebrity and had entered the sphere of the self-conscious. Market forces would inevitably find a way of assimilating and exploiting new sources of production, and for craft this would often mean that the hand made would be a luxury item and the authored piece would be given a higher price and status. For Leach, who had largely accepted Yanagi's theoretical argument for Mingei as a practitioner, operating in a market that placed a premium on authored works, the problem was whether the artist in the West could ever be humble enough to forgo this and accept the same anonymity as the machine: whether they could reproduce pattern in an age of signature and reason, and if the humility and unselfconsciousness that had fostered pattern and the common could be retained. Leach had

> [...] a reserve about his [*Yanagi's*] condemnation of the self-centredness of so much individualist art. Without question there is a depth of truth in what he says on both scores, but perhaps because I am an individual, or artist-craftsman, myself, I think that individualism itself is a necessary stage in an evolutionary progression and not to be negated out of hand. I agree with him fully that the individual has to transcend individualism and enter a world of unity where self and non-self meet, and that this transformation has rarely been achieved.[28]

Leach understood and operated in a world of signature: as an artist he expected recognition and was comfortable with it. Ultimately, as we see below, this insistence on the significance of the subject, and of signature, contributed to Leach's failure to make a conceptual leap and fully appreciate the potential that Pound had recognised in the man-made machine (the equivalent of the algorithm in the digital age) to work unselfconsciously and anonymously to create art that was available to all. Leach opted for a compromise practice that operated in between the two

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[28] Leach, *Kenzan and his Tradition*, p. 41 (my ellipsis).

ways. It drew upon the tradition of the Unknown Craftsman, but retained the individuality of authorship that catered for a luxury art-object, collector's market. This meant that in many ways in relation to his signature pieces Leach could only retain function and anonymity as an aesthetic, like the iron-bound chest protecting the Korean moon jar: he held onto it as scaffold for his crafted-art practice. And like a quotation it ring-fenced an alien untranslatable that he admired but couldn't quite transfer into his own particular context.

Leach and Standard Ware

After William Morris and John Ruskin's Arts and Crafts movement, initiated in the 1880s in response to the impact of the industrial revolution, the European context that Leach returned to from Japan in 1920 with Yanagi's politically charged hybrid vision of craft was not dissimilar. The division between art and craft was also perceived to have resulted in a hierarchy between the noble arts and the popular, or common, arts. In the industrial age, as in our contemporary digital one, this became symptomatic of a divisive and marked lack of parity between incomes and classes: between the manual worker and the manager, between blue- and white-collar labour.

> Rapid mechanical development has not lessened but increased the drudgery of the world; money-making has not, as our political economists prophesized, made the many rich, but has precipitated the masses into the most abject poverty the world has ever seen, while free trade and universal markets have not inaugurated an era of peace and goodwill among nations, but have plunged society into endless wars[79]

Confronted with what he saw as broken tradition and a culture in the rapid process of change, Leach would often rail against the wave of money, egotism and materialism that threatened his concept of the work

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[79] Arthur J. Penty, *The Restoration of the Gild System* (London: Swan Sonnenschien and Co. Ltd, 1906), p. 91

of craft. He would blame the pervasive effect on society of the demands and conditions of industry for attempts to preserve craft that resulted in the production of self-conscious individual artist craftsmen or a mothballed, reservation-style re-enactment of lost or dying traditions:

> […] the history of all nations with a developing industrialism shows that the unconscious, intuitive craftsman breaks down under the strain of transition from hand and tool to industrial machinery. His horse-sense and creative vigour, his capacity to assimilate new methods and new ideas became perverted. Only the artist and craftsman of unusual perception and strength of character stands a chance of selecting what is best from the welter of ideas which rolls in upon him to-day. As soon as the craftsman becomes individual and detached from his tradition he stands on the same footing as the artist.[80]

The issue of skill became complicated in this debate, since making, or fabrication, was the work of the lesser orders – of the worker. As a bodily or manual form of labour, rather than a cerebral or conceptual activity, it was held to occupy a less elevated plane. Within this the fine artist could occupy the position of cerebral amateur, or manually unskilled dilettante, whose idea assumed more importance than its realisation:

> Art, ceasing to be the vehicle of expression for the whole people, now becomes a play-thing for the connoisseur and the *dilettante*, hidden away in galleries and museums, while Life, having lost the power of refined expression, crystallizes into conventions and becomes ugly in all its manifestations.[81]

But this is a rather simplified interpretation of what was and continues to be at stake, since notions of what art is, what skill is, and what the role of the machine might be in relation to this, are far more complex and subtle. For example, craft as envisaged by Leach always entailed a problematic and paradoxical insistence on the humility and anonymity of the maker,

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[80] Leach, *A Potter's Book*
[81] Penty, *The Restoration of the Gild System*, p. 53.

valuing the hand-made over the machine-made, while simultaneously fetishising the signature or mark of the maker and employing lower-tech, but undeniably mechanical, means of reproduction. Moreover, it failed to acknowledge the potential of human interaction with more sophisticated forms of reproduction. The power of automation to free the worker, or wage slave, from the drudgery of empty labour further complicated this debate, since it made mechanisation an instrument of liberation rather than enslavement. In the early 1900s in Britain the intellectuals Arthur J Penty and Alfred Richard Orage had advocated Guild Socialism (a reworking of the medieval guild system of master craftsmen) as a way of placing art at the centre of society and providing workers with more individuality, imagination and freedom, since they could control and own the means of production, gain satisfaction through exercising their craft and direct the course of their activity. For Penty, who was critical of industrial capitalism and of the profit motive in commercialism, which led to: "disengaged and disempowered workers, debased material goods and an impoverished public", the guilds could also be used to restore spiritual values to work.

Penty saw art's real power as coming from commonality, from the fact of being produced by the "whole people" for all people. This kind of art could tap into living tradition, continually revitalising an aesthetic grammar that was a communal possession, rather than something for the craftsman to dispense. This impulse was in sympathy with Pound's concept of poetry (and art) as freely circulating cultural capital, and with the philosophy of Mingei that Leach brought back to England and disseminated. Like Yanagi, Leach had come to see folk art as the source of a common tradition, since "The art forms of a community are the crystallizations of its culture (which may indeed be a very different thing from its civilization), and pottery traditions are no exception to the rule."[82]

As such, it provided "the chief means of defence against the materialism of industry and its insensibility to beauty." For Leach it was also a last

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[82] Leach, *A Potter's Book*, p.14

bastion against what he considered the debasement of form and beauty in current practices for the design and production of mass-produced ware:

> . . . we meet everywhere with bad forms and banal, debased, pretentious decoration - qualities that are perhaps most conspicuous in 'fancy vases', flower pots and other ornamental pieces in which we find a crudity of colour combined with cheapness and inappropriateness of decoration and tawdriness of form that must be seen to be believed.[83]

Leach did not work in isolation; rather, his adoption of the Mingei craft tradition and his advocacy of Sung and Oriental Ceramics to counteract this – as the standard to which ceramics should aspire – had significant European precursors.

Charles Holme's article in *The Studio* (1901) 'The Potter's Art: Object Lessons from the Far East', published over a decade before Leach returned to Japan, anticipated many of the opinions on ceramics that Leach would expound on his return to England, such as the use of natural materials and low-level indigenous technology such as that found in peasant culture, a new appreciation based on craft practice and the rejection of nineteenth-century European ceramics as florid and over decorated, much like its verse. Similarly, Roger Fry's Omega Workshops (1913-1919) aimed to challenge the traditional boundaries separating fine from applied arts, Western from non-Western and civilised from primitive art. Fry's famous 1914 essay 'The Art of Pottery in England' had already cited Tang ceramics as possessing the strong sense of form that he sought from contemporary painting and sculpture:

> Take as an example [. . .] a bottle from the site of Old Sarum. This is so like specimens of Chinese ware of the Tang Dynasty, both in form and glaze, that it might almost be mistaken for one at first glance. It has not quite the subtle perfection of rhythm in the contour, and the decoration is rather rougher and less

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[83] Ibid., p. 3

carefully meditated. But to be able to compare it all with some of the greatest ceramics in existence is to show how exquisite a sense of structural design the English craftsmen once possessed.[84]

In the inter-war years, ceramics emerged as a fine art form with the work of artists like William Staite Murray, who had begun to promote pottery as an art equal to painting and on a par with advanced sculpture and modern music. However, this latter aspect of ceramics did not embrace the functional, or democratic, aspect of it to the extent that Leach's did:

A potter on his wheel is doing two things at the same time: he is making hollow wares to stand upon a level surface for the common usage of the home, and he is exploring space. His endeavour is determined in one respect by use, but in other ways by a never-ending search for perfection of form. Between the subtle opposition and interplay of centrifugal and gravitational force, between straight and curve (ultimately the sphere and cylinder, the hints of which can be seen between the foot and lip of every pot), are hidden all the potter's experience of beauty. Under his hands the clay responds to emotion and thought from a long past, to his own intuition of the lovely and the true, accurately recording the stages of his own inward development. The pot is the man: his virtues and his vices are shown therein - no disguise is possible.[85]

According to Leach's vision of the potter crafting ethical functional ware, the potential for authenticity or aura resided in the subject and was invested in the object. It gathered through practice, in the interaction of the individual with matter and form, through processes and traditions of making, and, like the work of art, lay in the slippage between. This is evident in his attitude to the work he valued and that he collected "for its

[84] Roger Fry, 'The Art of Pottery in England', in: *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. & with introductory essays by Christopher Reed (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 202-206.

[85] `Bernard Leach, *The Potter's Challenge* (London: Souvenir, 1951), p. 48

relationships of pure form; or for its manner or handwriting and suggestion of source of emotional content."[86] And for the part of their aesthetic value or beauty which lay in the trace they held of the soul and nature of the potter, who embodied the continuity of tradition, the marks made by his hands and tools, the incidence of touch and the accidents of firing. Bernard Leach's vision of potting contributed to the conception of the useful pot as painting or poem and of the potter, or artisan, as a maker of functional ware, but also as painter, or sculptor.

Shoji Hamada's and Yanagi Soetsu's visits to Leach in England towards the end of the 1920s brought the fruits of an earlier period of mutual influence and interaction shared during Leach's time in Japan. This was their fully formed theoretical basis for Mingei, a movement for the craft and art of the people that Leach's experience of Western art and ideas had been instrumental in promoting and that Hamada and Yanagi, with Kanjiro Kawai, had been continuing to develop since Leach's departure. The theory of Mingei provided theoretical backing to Leach's project in that it valued and saw beauty in everyday objects,[87] and its aim was to facilitate a revaluation of popular craft in the context of the industrialisation and mechanisation of commodity production.

While in Japan in 1911 Leach had already been attracted to the idea of an Arts and Crafts-type enterprise which would enable him to be an artist and also to make money:

> I am always thinking of a plan for the combined necessary making of a living and the pursuit of art. My present idea is the formation of a group somewhat on William Morris lines by Takamura, Tomi, self and a few others, Sculpture, porcelain, lacquer, etc., to be exhibited in our own gallery.[88]

In England Leach struggled to make a living from his Cornish pottery venture, since his work did not immediately find the receptive audience it

[86] Ibid,. p.47.
[87] The most famous example of this being the famous Kizaemon tea-bowl, which had been a humble throw-away Korean rice bowl.
[88] see p. 57, Leach, *Beyond East and West*.

had had in Japan and he found it difficult to place himself in the ceramic art market. [89] He had experimented with products such as tiles, Raku workshops and some functional ware aimed at passing tourists to try to make ends meet, but income from sales of Leach's work in Japan remained essential to the pottery's survival. The Japanese collectors' market he was accustomed to wanted the Western functional ware: the tea and coffee sets, slip or galena ware endorsed by Yanagi as "born-pottery, not made-pottery". They were less interested in the ceremonial tea bowls or one-off "Eastern" styled high-fired ceramics that Leach also wanted to make.

The arrival of this fully formed theory of Mingei was fortuitous in that it opened up a new area of functional production pottery for Leach's failing pottery studio to develop into. As Emmanuel Cooper and Oliver Watson have concurred, financial motivation was one of the primary reasons behind Leach's decision to develop a regular range of tableware. Leach's Standard Ware was marketed to department stores and shops and made available through a catalogue, by mail order. This range of 'sound hand-made pottery in the English slipware tradition to suit those of limited income, who while loving beautiful things, also desire that they may be used for utilitarian purposes'[1] was first shown at the Three Shields Gallery, Holland Street, London in March 1927 and enthusiastically received.

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[89] When Leach returned to England to set up his pottery in St Ives he had been given a start-up loan of £2,500 and guaranteed revenue funding to cover his salary for three years by Frances Horne, a wealthy philanthropist and dealer in Far Eastern commodities. Horne had set up the St Ives Guild of Handicrafts in 1919 to "stimulate and encourage the creation of handmade objects for use in the home, or for personal requirements" ('St Ives Handicraft Guild', *St Ives Times*, 16 May 1919, p.?)

Figure 3. Image of Leach Pottery Standard Ware (1946), from Catalogue insert showing jugs, plates, mugs, bowls and serving dishes. Reproduced from Emanuel Cooper, Bernard Leach: Life and Work: Yale, 2003, p. 206.

Faced with pressing financial necessity and the prospect of privation Leach's endeavour to reconcile the two strands of his practice – authored and anonymous, self- and other-powered – had led to the implementation of an idealistic, earnest enterprise and, for me, some of his most interesting and pressingly relevant work. As a project this foray into affordable art for people lacked the irony of art about functional art, but was pragmatic art, made to be used and appreciated through our interaction with it. The idea and project of Standard Ware embodied Leach's ongoing challenge to the alienated content of commodity production. "The important question is how in our disintegrating times individual potters are to discover their particular kind of truth, in other words, their highest standard, and further, by what means it can be passed on to other artist-potters to the end that humanistic work of true merit, especially for domestic use, may be produced."[90]

In his romantic critique of the hegemony of industrial capitalism there was also an attempt to find a middle way between what Leach saw as the opposing qualities of machine and hand production. As we see below, his contrast of these two methods reproduces the spirit of the binary

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[90] Leach, *A Potter's Book* p.15,

distinctions he had previously drawn between East and West, and the dualism which professed he longed to unite.

West:---	East:---
Male	Female
Body	Soul
Reason	Intuition
Action	Rest
Outer	Inner
Violence	Restraint
Personal Religion	Impersonal religion [sic]
Objective Art	Subjective Art
Individualism	Communism[91]

In his own mind, however, Leach had established a clear separation between potter-artists who produce work using their own hands to carry out from beginning to end all, or nearly all, the processes of production and the finished result of the fragmented operations of industrialised manufacture or mass production. For Leach the craftsman's art was both intuitive and humanistic (it involved one hand, one brain), whereas the designer's work was rational, abstract and tectonic. In the former, designer and craftsman become one and its design and execution result from an undivided personality, a unity of head and hand. In the latter, designer and fabricator remain separate: one makes drawings or prototypes for others to execute, and in the process of delegation the integrity of the subject, their personality and imagination, become fragmented and piecemeal. There is no space for continuity, or for haptic or tacit knowledge learnt through making to refine and interact with the conceptual, analytical processes of design. It is the work of an engineer or constructor rather than an artist. And for Leach the crux of this matter lies in seeing good handcraftsmanship as: "directly subject to the prime source

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[91] McMahan has suggested that "It was from Romantics like Herder and Schlegel [..] that we got the binary image of 'the West' as rational, materialistic, masculine, active and technological and 'the East' as intuitive, spiritual, feminine, passive, and natural - a vast over generalisation that would provide a scaffolding for the construction of modernist incarnations of Asian traditions." (McMahan, p. 77)

of human activity, whereas machine crafts, even at their best, are activated at one remove - by the intellect."[92]

The need for immediacy, for intimacy and authenticity, seemed to reside in the subject, to be supplied by the bridging of human touch and by a singularity that the workings of a machine were not able to produce. For Leach, this was what his "artist craftsman", as distinct from the factory designer, could supply:

> Almost alone amongst workmen does he exercise the responsibility of making things for full human use - objects which are projections of men - alive in themselves.[93]

Leach thought in comparison to this that the inferiority of mass-produced ware was due not so much to the manner of its production as to the failure of the manufacturer to take an interest in good design. This want of artistic initiative resulted in a general lowering of taste under conditions of competitive industrialism:

> In the field of ceramics the responsibility for the all-pervading bad taste of the last century and the very probably ninety per cent bad taste of to-day lies mainly with machine production and the accompanying indifference to aesthetic considerations of individual industrialists and their influence on the sensibility of the public. [94]

Although Leach's pronouncements suggest that part of him would always remain instinctively, romantically anti-machine, since "The products of the [power driven machines] can never possess the same intimate qualities as the [art of the craftsman]"[95] under the influence of contemporaries in England such as Henry Bergen,[96] who advised him on his publication *A*

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[92] Leach, *A Potter's Book*, p. 2.
[93] Ibid., p.15
[94] Ibid., p.12

[95] Ibid., p. 2.
[96] See Leach and Bergen's correspondence from 1936-40. From his letters to Leach we see that Bergen robustly defends the mass production of pottery against what he sees as Leach's unfair criticism of it: " Leach must not sneer – "--- the factories --- are bound to produce what they can sell, otherwise they can't exist, but if the Royal Worcester works is still turning out naturalistic atrocities it is also employing some very good people whose designs are of quite a different character. A factory is there primarily to make money, &

Potter's Book he grew to appreciate how each method of production might have its own aesthetic significance and that both could be good and bad:

> Concentration upon mechanical production and utilitarian and functional qualities is to-day necessary and justified, and as already said there is no reason to suppose that factory-made utilitarian wares may not by reason of their precision, their pleasing lines and perfection of technique, added to complete adaptation to use, have a great beauty of their own. [97]

Leach, writing in *A Potter's Book*, seems to indicate a shift towards Herbert Read's more avant-garde position that understands that "Whenever the final product of the machine is designed or determined by anyone sensitive to formal values, that product can and does become an abstract work of art in the subtler sense of the term". [98]

However, in his translation from East to West, Leach's emphasis on fidelity to an origin – to an idea of authenticity and proximity to nature and the "natural" that gave rise to the Mingei craft tradition – made him

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this will be so always, as it is now in Russia under a Socialist government" Mass-production is here, for good or ill, & Leach must not confuse his nostalgia for "the little workshop in China & Korea & Japan" with the reality of the virtues of mass-produced tableware – "much more practicable in use than any peasant ware." B.L.'s job is to write about pottery, not social reform. "Remember that the Sung pots you and I admire were made for the rich and not the poor & that the poor (nine tenths of the population at that time) possessed practically nothing. --- But my point is that fine things are fine & mean labour & other costs & can never be plentiful. The market is easily saturated." B.L. must not confuse the ornamental with the utilitarian. H.B. wishes to keep the factory and the studio potter separate; B.L. obviously disagrees, and in this particular letter (7 Aug. 1937) is free with marginal comments on H.B.'s remarks. Their great disagreement on the point of studio pottery versus mass production rumbles on: the latter employs hordes of people, and it is useless to talk of its "demolition & reconstruction"; modern capitalistic methods cannot just cease, even in Russia; "stripped of its romanticism, primitive production is misery"; the fault of modern mass-produced pottery lies in design, and B.L.'s book should be a manual, not a polemic; "--- it is absolutely mad to attack industry. Industry did not drive out handwork" which perished because of economic inefficiency alone: much present handwork is bad – much, for example, of the work of Kawai and Funaki is bad, and even Yanagi's craft movement in Japan produces bad things. H.B. deplores the "intolerable arrogance" of studio potters – people at the V. & A. and elsewhere have even named Leach and Murray as being guilty; not all craftsmen are artists as B.L. thinks --- H.B. rates only 20% of exhibitors at the Brygos Gallery as having talent, & he finds that he "can't go Yanagi's sob stuff any more – it is too sentimental in spite of the fact that there is much truth in it."

[97] Leach, *A Potter's Book*, p.5.
[98] Herbert Read, *Art and Industry: the Principles of Industrial Design, Harcourt, Brace and Co. New York, 1934* p.37

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less open to the potential of his new context, a contemporary context that had begun to explore machine art in the automated age and the creative possibilities involved in art, and the subject's interaction with technology and science. Leach seemed unable to appreciate that singularity could exist, even less persist in relation to technology.

Like Leach, Pound had a conception of aesthetics in which beauty coincided with function, and proposed that we might "[…] find a thing beautiful in proportion to its aptitude to a function." Similarly, in "On the Aesthetics of the Machine" (1924) Fernand Léger had emphasized the position of the craftsman's work with the artists and criticised the Renaissance's devaluation of the mechanical arts and the imposition of a division between the fine and applied arts.

In Pound's discussion of machine art (1927-30) he reactivated the division between art and beauty that had characterised the Greek and medieval worlds, recovering art for the category of techne. His thesis seems to be written in light of Aristotle's idea of art as techne where techne implies that art is not an object but a rational activity of making that takes into account the kind of knowledge that makes this activity possible, thereby destroying the idea of art as imitation, or representation. Thus, rather than reproduce Ruskin and Morris's work, he updated it, making the new craftsman the engineer, transferring into the motor the meaning of art as techne, as a kind of activity shared by craftsman and artist. Art thus encompassed a meaning more closely resembling the medieval concept of art 'as an ensemble of knowledges (sciences) used by man.' and as a useful and practical activity involving intuitive judgement in interaction with reason[99]

It put forward a critique of the subjective in art by "attaching one of the primary tenets of industrialism – to produce a work – to aesthetics," and establishes a new basis for the criterion of beauty in the light of the machine: if the mechanical parts of the machine "and the foci of their action" show that they have been made by "thought over thought", the

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[99] Maria Luisa Ardizzone. 'Introduction', in Pound, *Machine Art and Other Writings. The Lost Thought of the Italian Years,* Ezra Pound, p.20

motor is the product of a long activity of research of intelligence. The motor therefore is the artificial intelligence that updates the work of the craftsman. Because the motor's concentrated intelligence is the result of research, observation and calculation, the machine relates the field of aesthetics to a type of knowledge proper to science, operational and useful in so far as it functions.

"We find a thing beautiful in proportion to its aptitude to a function."[100]

For Pound, techne is the kind of

> intelligence that realises itself in doing and making, aesthetics is pragmatic because of its being related to a concept of art that is an intelligence of making that is also a knowing. As such it is related to the problem of knowledge[101].

While the potter's work involved a similar form of interaction between human and machine, albeit lower tech and on a smaller scale than industrial mechanised production, Leach maintained that a significant distinction between the two remained in the relegation of "actual making not merely to other hands than those of the designer, but to power-driven machines." He made a qualitative distinction between the realisation of a human being's ideas by another person over that carried out by a machine. Thus the products of machines were limited in that they could never posses the same intimate qualities of as those of the crafts, but "to deny them the possibility of excellence of design in terms of what mechanical reproduction can do is both blind and obstinate." Leach's vision placed the craftsman at the centre as mediator. Possessing the skilled and learned facility to assimilate and synthesise, they epitomised singularity, or that part of humanity that machines, as yet, were not able to replicate. Leach's craftsperson became the translator that machines would not yet be able to replace.

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[100] Pound, *Machine Art and Other Writings. The Lost Thought of the Italian Years*, p.69
[101] Ardizzone. 'Introduction' in Pound, *Machine Art and Other Writings. The Lost Thought of the Italian Years*, p.35

Influences from alien cultures either upon art or industry must pass through an organic assimilation before they can become part and parcel of our growth. This happens moreover, only when they supply an inherent need, and is usually inaugurated by the enthusiasm and profound conviction of men who have themselves succeeded in making the synthesis.[102]

For Leach, craft and the craftsperson, as embodied tradition, had the capacity to provide a necessary counterbalance to the corrosive effect of a more contemporary, abstracted and commodity-based market on ideas and on creativity.

Until the beginning of the industrial era (analogous) processes of synthesis had always been at work amongst ourselves, but since that time the cultural background has lost much of its assimilating force, and the ideas we have adopted and used have been moulded into conformity with a conception of life in which imagination has been subordinated to invention and beauty to the requirements of trade. In our time technique, the means to an end has become an end in itself, and has thus justified Chinese criticism of us as a civilization 'outside in'.[103]

A reply to this came in the form of a 'small is beautiful' response to mechanisation: a community-based ethos that emphasised the importance of the human over the machine, a common foundation and the aesthetic and psycho-social aspects of practice over and above the profit principle of a commercial enterprise.

The necessity for a psychological and aesthetic common foundation in any workshop group of craftsmen cannot be exaggerated, if the resulting crafts are to have any vitality. That vitality is the expression of the spirit and culture of the workers. In factories the principle objectives are bound to be sales and dividends and aesthetic considerations must remain secondary. The class of goods may be high, and the

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[102] Leach, *A Potter's Book*, p.14.
[103] Ibid.

management considerate and even humanitarian, but neither the creative side of the lives of the workers nor the character of their products as human expressions of perfection can be given the same degree of freedom which we rightly expect in hand work. The essential activity in a factory is the mass-production of the sheer necessities of life and the function of the hand worker on the other hand is more generally human.[104]

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[104] Ibid. p.11

CHAPTER 3

TRANSLATION AS PRACTICE

Peripheral Centrality - Jorge Luis Borges on Translation and Briony Fer's Curation of Eva Hesse's "Studiowork"

In an exhibition of Eva Hesse's "Studiowork", curated by Briony Fer in 2010, Fer focused not on the major works but on the "invisible" studio work of the famous sculptor-painter. In doing so Fer placed the object as studio work, work-without-end, at the centre of a material-based, process-led, experimental, haptic practice to which play – in all senses of the word – was integral. Often the experimental process, which the "resolved" work contains, but obscures, is overlooked and emphasis placed on the finished object or product. It is germane, therefore, to look at the way in which Hesse's objects have been "translated" by Fer in the catalogue, exhibition and conferences, and how this could offer another way of considering the nature and location of the artwork.

Fer's primary concern seems to be with the significant insignificance and provisional nature of the studio sub-object and its resistance to classification and categorisation, and to reposition it as central to Hesse's "major" works. I want to discuss this in the light of the work of Jorge Luis Borges, who similarly used his thinking on the invisible, peripheral work of translation to shape his theory of literature. His idea of the reader as writer, of the text as a work in progress, as a draft of a draft of a draft, brought about a shift in optic that challenged ideas of primacy and canon and decentred the text as finished object, opening it up to the possibility of infinite interpretation.

Borges & Translation

Borges was raised bilingually in English and Spanish, and was proficient in French and German; he began translating and writing on translation from the 1920s. For a surprisingly long time this aspect of Borges' writing and thinking remained invisible and minor, neglected by academics and critics within literary theory and translation studies. However, as Efrain Kristal and Sergio Waisman have shown quite recently, translation as a practice and a way of thinking was central to his writing, informed his literary theory and remained a concern throughout his life.

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Borges' ideas on translation did not alter significantly after the 1930s. However, in many respects they were radical and ahead of their time, and in many ways the field of translation studies is beginning to catch up with him. In broad terms Borges thought that writing is translation and translation is writing, and is famous for stating provocatively that an original could be "unfaithful" to its translation. His thinking stemmed from the premise that the purpose of translation was not to transfer a text from one language into another, but to transform one text into another. It was a "movement across" that removed the ancestral ghosts that haunt translation, allowing for a translation to be better than an original. In part this was because Borges, like George Steiner, thought that the differences or compatibilities between languages that become evident in translation can reveal aspects of a work that are hidden by the language in which it was first written. This connects Borges with Walter Benjamin and Ezra Pound, who similarly thought that each language was open to the connotations and visions articulated in other languages. They shared the notion of all languages being somehow present in a language, and brought out within the process of translation that which is also latent in Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist approach to translation.[1]

Borges' thinking on translation was also influenced at an early stage by Jena Romantic thought through the writing of Novalis, some of whose ideas could be summed up most concisely in a statement he made in a letter to Schlegel on the subject: "To translate is to produce literature, just as the writing of one's own work is – and it is more difficult, more rare, in

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[1] See Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator': "In all language and linguistic creations there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated; depending on the context in which it appears, it is something that symbolizes or something symbolized. It is the former only in the finite products of language, the latter in the evolving of the languages of themselves. And that which seeks to represent, to produce itself in the evolving of languages, is that very nucleus of pure language. Though concealed and fragmentary, it is an active force in life as the symbolized thing itself, whereas it inhabits linguistic creations only in symbolized form. [.....] While that ultimate essence, pure language, in the various tongues is tied only to linguistic elements and their changes, in linguistic creations it is weighted with heavy, alien meaning. To relieve it of this, to turn the symbolizing into the symbolized, to regain pure language fully formed in the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation."Benjamin Selected Writings, Vol. 1, p. 261.

the end all literature is translation[2]." So it would seem to follow that if a translator conjures with words, then so too does a poet, and if there is art in one then so there is in the other. Novalis held that a translator could only show they had understood a writer when they were able to act in the spirit of the writer and, without detriment to the writer's individuality, translate their work and make changes. A translator could therefore improve on the original and express the ideas or ideal of the work more successfully.

Novalis' belief that words have singular meanings, connotations and arbitrary associations that become subject to change through interpretation also remained a constant in Borges' thinking. In his 1932 essay 'Some Versions of Homer', Borges discussed translation in light of the idea that the passage of time makes it increasingly difficult to determine the connotations and arbitrary associations of a written language that has come down to us from a distant past. He asked what fidelity might really mean when we have no direct knowledge of authorial intent or of the original conditions of the text's coming into existence and reception. Borges thought that the artist, like all humans, accumulated experiences with time. "By force of omission and emphasis, of memory and forgetfulness, time combines some of those experiences and thus it elaborates on the work of art."[3] In this way the effect of time might alter, distort and obscure the meanings, connotations and arbitrary associations of words to such a degree as to make repeated translations and translations of translations necessary. For Borges, this view of language – shared with the Romantics and with Steiner – as time- and context-bound, whereby a word never means the same thing twice, makes translation in some form or another an element of any work:

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[2] Letter translated by André Lefevere in Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzeig (Amersterdam: Van Gorcum 1977), p.65. (in Novalis, Dichter über ihre Dichtungen. p.182)

[3] See Efrain Kristal, *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Nashville, TS: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002):
This is the central theme of *Funes el Memorioso*. A man gifted with an infinite memory, but his inability to forget the slightest detail, denies him any ability to order, classify or abstract. And is also pivotal in the theory of translation developed in Borges: *Pierre Menard autor del Quijote*.

When we read or hear any language-statement from the past, be it Leviticus or last year's best-seller, we translate. Reader, actor, editor are translators of language out of time. The schematic model of translation is one in which a message from a source-language passes into a receptor-language via a transformational process. The barrier is the obvious fact that one language differs from the other; that an interpretative transfer, sometimes, albeit misleadingly, described as encoding and decoding, must occur so that the message "gets through". Exactly the same model – and this is what is rarely stressed – is operative within a single language. But here the barrier or distance between source and receptor is time[4]

Borges would continue to espouse Novalis' view that the translator could reshape and improve an original, and that beauty was not inevitably lost in translation. However, as Borges developed as a writer he ascribed less and less to Novalis' ideas concerning the individuality of the poet and the notion that the translator was in any sense beholden to the spirit of the author, or to a particular idea or essence inherent to the work. In '*Las dos maneras de traducir*' (Two ways to translate), written in 1926, Borges expressed an early concern with the interplay of the Classical and Romantic notions of the author, as he perceived them at that time:

I suppose that there are two types of translation. One involves literality, and the other periphrasis. The first corresponds to the Romantic mind-set, and the second one to the Classicists. I would like to reason through this affirmation to diminish its paradoxical air. Classicists are interested in the work of art, but never the artist. They believe in absolute perfection and they seek it. They disdain localisms, rarities, and contingencies.... Conversely Romantics ... never look for the work of art, they look for the man. And the man, (as we all know) is neither timeless nor an archetype, he is John Smith not Joe Bloggs, he is

[4] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975) 3rd. ed. (London; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 28-29

shaped by a climate, by a body, his origins and ancestry, by having done something, or not done something, by a present, by a past, by a future and even by his own death. Take care not to disturb a single one of the words ever he wrote! [5]

When he wrote this essay I don't think that Borges particularly favoured the Classical approach over the Romantic one. As we have seen, aspects of both systems would remain constants in this thinking on translation throughout his life. However, Borges' later comments and writings suggest that, in terms of authorship, the balance shifted in favour of the Classical approach. The concept of the reader as writer, and of art as a "common project" became increasingly significant in Borges' thinking from the 1930s onwards. In this, Borges' attitude to writing and authorship shares common ground with ideas later expressed by Roland Barthes in his essay 'The Death of the Author':

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. Similar to Bouvard and Pecuchet, those eternal copyists, at once sublime and comic and whose profound ridiculousness indicates precisely the truth of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. [6]

Borges' involvement with translation was tripartite – practical, applied and abstract – and one aspect could not really be considered in isolation, because each had an impact upon the others. He translated, used translation in his creative writing and wrote and lectured on translation.

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[5] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Las dos maneras de traducir', *La Prensa*, 1 August 1926, reprinted in Jorge Luis Borges, *Textos Recobertos, 1919-1930* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1997), pp. 256-259, (my translation)

[6] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in: *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-148

He did not set out his ideas in a formal treatise on the theory of translation, and it seems clear to me that to do so would have been antithetical to his ideas on writing and translation, since his was an anti-theoretical theory of translation. Instead, he would, discuss his ideas on translation in passing, informally: in interviews and lectures, such as his famous lecture series 'The Craft of Verse' at Harvard University in 1967, in the form of short essays, '*Las dos maneras de traducir*' (1926), 'Some Versions of Homer' (1932), 'The Translators of the One Thousand and One Nights' (1935), and 'The Enigma of Edward Fitzgerald' (1952). In these talks and texts he generally preferred to sketch the outline of his ideas rather than go into great depth, and would focus on particular details, instances or concrete examples in order to compare translations he considered either more or less successful .

It is probably in these writings that the tensions or interplay of his ideas on translation are exposed, since it is here that we are best able to see the interaction between the relativist and the objectivist, the Romantic and the Classicist, in Borges' approach. In the discipline of translation studies the common practice of making unavoidable changes in order to convey the sense of the original has been routinely referred to as a strategy of compromise and compensation. This terminology, which assumes an objective truth, bears the negative connotations of an insurance policy; it accepts an inevitable loss or damage which in turn establishes the grounds for a claim that a translation, or transaction, may be dishonest or inferior to an original. It puts the translator at a disadvantage and subjugates their work to the higher authority of the original, solely on the basis of chronological precedence. Borges the relativist rejects this notion of fidelity and of accurate or inaccurate translations according to these hierarchical and institutional criteria. As he writes in 'The Homeric Versions',

> To assume every recombination of elements is necessarily inferior
> to its original form is to assume that a draft 9 is necessarily inferior

to draft H – for, there can only be drafts. The concept of the 'definitive text' corresponds to religion or exhaustion.[7]

His thesis is that an original text, redolent with possibility and potential, success and failure, is a product not of a superior entity, but of an equally flawed human being, in an equally, but differently, flawed language. As such it acquires a provisional status and can be treated like a draft, or a work in progress. It becomes part of a common project, similar to T.S. Eliot's conception, as developed in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in which the "old speaks through the new and the new reorients the significance of the old":

> The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted and this conformity between the old and the new. [8]

However, Borges was of the opinion that a certain cadence, the coincidence of a particular metre, rhythm, pace, assonance or alliteration, with the chance connotations and associations of particular word combinations, could attain a "verbal perfection" which others failed to achieve. On this basis he would criticise some translations, whether faithful or free, literal or libertine, on the grounds that they did not meet his aesthetic standards. The common ground between these conflicting tensions and the cornerstone of his thinking on translation lay in his long-held conviction that an original work should not in principle take precedence over a translation in terms of the literary merits of each text. This created a meritocracy rather than an aristocracy, yet tension resided

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[7] Borges, The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986, Penguin 1999, p. 69, Translated by Esther Allen. ("Presuponer que toda recombinación de elementos es obligatoriamente inferior a su original, es presuponer que el borrador 9 es obligatoriamente inferior al borrador H –ya que no puede haber sino borradores. El concepto de texto definitivo no corresponde sino a la religión o al cansancio")

[8] T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), in: *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber 1980), p.15

in the failure to discuss or define the criteria used for judging "verbal perfection". Borges only discusses these on an individual case-by-case basis, skirting the issue of whether they could be assumed to be universal or were in fact subjective and particular to him. Needless to say, this issue, this refusal to engage with or define a general structure or criteria for judging, remains a sticking point for translation studies, and for theorists and teachers of translation it has yet to be breached, much less reconciled.

Borges doubted that a theory of translation were possible or indeed of any practical use, because he thought that the questions that a general theory of translation would be required to pose and to solve seemed as abstract or non-existent as platonic archetypes. For him, problems of translation were practical problems, which could only be addressed in relation to particular texts: a paragraph, a phrase, a verse. In an interview in the 1980s he said:

> General problems do not exist. The problem of translation ... the only problem of translation is how to translate a particular utterance. We should take a verse or a paragraph and look at how it might be translated. While there is no problem with regard to the way people should translate, problems do arise with respect to this particular line or that one, this paragraph or another. I don't think there is any point to the rest of it. I don't think a general theory of translation is necessary, it might be amusing, and there is no reason why we shouldn't entertain ourselves with one. However when it comes to translating, we deal with very real, concrete problems.[9]

This anti-theory theory is in line with Borges' ludic wariness with regard to systems in general, and I don't think that Borges' rejection of a "general theory of translation" is a resistance to theory per se, but rather to an idea of theory as a generalising, overarching, universalising structure. His shift

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[9] Sergio Pastormerlo, "Borges y la traducción", *Borges Studies Online*. J. L. Borges Center for Studies & Documentation, 14/04/01
(http://www.borges.pitt.edu/bsol/pastorm1.php) May 2017.

in focus from the general to the particular is not inherently anti-theoretical. I think that his emphasis on the particular instance comes partly from his experience and practice of translation. In the course of writing this I translated some of Borges essays, as a way of helping me to read and understand them, or maybe just so that I could assimilate them into my own thinking. As I worked I was confronted with choices, which could have led to easy, pre-existing solutions recorded in dictionaries and glossaries, to the need to make decisions, to contingencies, but also to not-knowledge. In this respect Heidegger's distinction between choice and decision is quite helpful here: "What is decision at all? Not choice. Choosing always involves only what is pregiven and can be taken or rejected. Decision here means grounding and creating, disposing in advance and beyond oneself."

I would suggest that Borges' emphasis on the particular engages with the problem of choosing and deciding and with the bringing into presence, or act of revealing and concealing, which can take place in good translation. In his Norton lectures[10] Borges famously described common, everyday nouns as dead metaphors, as metaphors which through use and oblivion have lost the immediacy and poetic force present in their first utterance. He gave the example of the word "threat", which he suggested is now a rather tired, overused word for the abstract notion of an imminent danger. Originally the Old Norse word had described something very physical and tangible, a crowd of angry, armed, encroaching threatening Norsemen. For Borges – sharing Pound's and Emerson's concept of image, naming and language – the role of the poet and of the translator is not to embalm, but to bring dead metaphors back to life. It is a practice in which images hover within and behind words.

Beatriz Sarlo has commented that Borges' writing reverses the order, placing the periphery at the centre.[11] Following on from this you could say

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[10] Jorge Luis Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, ed. Calin-Andrei Mihailescu (The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1967-1968) *(*Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000)
[11] Beatriz Sarlo, <u>*Borges, Un escritor en las orillas*</u> (Borges: A Writer at the Periphery) (London: Verso, 1993)

that his thinking on translation starts from an opposite point to the one a translation theorist might choose. That rather than use his thinking on literature to construct a theory of translation, Borges uses translation to develop his thinking on literature, the role of the author and the reader, of belief and the formation of literary judgement. And in doing so it questions the "fit" of these structures, because it elects to work between them.

Borges: Writer – Translator - Critic

Throughout his life Borges worked "invisibly" as a translator, translating into Spanish the works of poets and authors such as Walt Whitman, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Henri Michaux and William Faulkner, among others. In the 1970s he famously and controversially collaborated with an American translator, Norman Thomas di Giovanni, on new translations of his own work into English. He did so on the understanding that his "originals" would not be treated as "sacred texts" but rather as drafts. On their publication there was predictable outrage at the result of the collaboration, and the vilification of di Giovanni, by some of the more conservative commentators who demanded fidelity to Borges' original style. However, some critics thought that Borges had not in fact been duped by a second-rate, substandard translator, riding roughshod over the delicate prose of an innocent, vulnerable, creative genius, but rather that Borges had used this opportunity to rewrite his stories replacing his overwrought prose of the 1940s with the clearer, sparse style he developed in the 1970s. In fact Borges claimed that he was so pleased with the result of this collaboration that any future translation of *The Book of Imaginary Beings* should be made from the English version, rather than his Spanish "original".

In his writing Borges persistently blurred the boundaries between what could be labelled writing and translation. He would habitually employ translation as a device. He might, in the Cervantine tradition, destabilise notions of authorship by narrating through the figure of a translator,

intercalate translations into "original" stories, pass translations off as his own "original" work, build a story out of the translation of another and copy or plagiarise. I hope Borges would have been horrified by the commercial and vested interests which are able to maintain stasis and stagnation over translations of his work, and suggest that his take on plagiarism was more idealistic, and in the spirit of a "creative commons" approach, than cynical. Borges professed that the work was always more important than the writer, that: "an artist cares about the perfectibility of the work, and not the fact that it may have originated from himself or from others." I don't think it would have bothered Borges that his concept of translation might be a justification for plagiarism – "If the work improves, why not? Why not make it a collective project?" – since Borges always held that "our concept of plagiarism is, without a doubt, less literary than commercial" and that plagiarism was rather a "form of tradition" than a transgression or theft.

In his stories '*La biblioteca de Babel'*, '*Funes el memorioso'* and '*Pierre Menard autor del Quijote'*[12], translation as praxis and process, as a way of thinking and writing, is interwoven, enmeshed and embedded into the fabric of the text, into its subject matter, subtext, theme and structure. To call it a literary device or trope would fall short of communicating the extent and depth of its significance, since the text is soaked to its bones in translation: indeed, its bones are translation.

Steiner described '*Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote'*, published in 1939, as: "Arguably .... the most acute, most concentrated commentary anyone has offered on the business of translation." According to Borges, it was the first work of fiction that he wrote. This may or may not be true, as Borges is notoriously slippery. However, it is significant that throughout his life he would always refer to this as his first story and as the story that began his career as a writer of fiction, since it is a story that makes visible the invisible work of translation and makes this peripheral work its centre. In terms of form it is ambiguous. It is a fiction that adopts the register and academic conventions of a literary review and is a tribute to Pierre

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[12] Pierre Mendard, Author of the Quixote, The Library of Babel, Funes, His Memory, Fictions, (Translated by Andrew Hurley, Penguin, London, 2000.

Menard, a recently deceased and relatively obscure minor French symbolist. Borges, the narrator, friend and admirer, discusses first the visible and then the invisible work that Pierre Menard produced during his lifetime. Borges uses the terms "visible" and "invisible" to describe and ultimately to challenge notions of what is traditionally considered to be primary, original and authored work and translation, which is considered as secondary, derivative and anonymous. The visible work, which Borges lists chronologically, has been dutifully researched, cross-referenced and corroborated, yet the data succinctly draws a picture of an incorporeal, marginal character that exists only vestigially, in language, in the obscure remnants of his "minor" writings.

> a) A Symbolist sonnet, which appeared twice (with variations) in the Journal *La Conque* (March and October issues, 1899)
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> b) A monograph discussing the possibility of constructing a poetic vocabulary of concepts, which would be neither synonyms nor paraphrases of those constituting our everyday language, "but ideal objects created according to convention and in essence to satisfy poetic needs'. (Nîmes, 1901)
>
> c) A monograph on "some connections and affinities" in the thought of Descartes, Leibniz and John Wilkins (Nîmes, 1903)
>
> d) A monograph on the *Characteristica Universalis* of Liebniz. (Nîmes, 1904)
>
> e) A technical article on the possibility of improving the game of chess by eliminating one of the rook's pawns. Menard proposes, recommends, discusses and ultimately rejects this proposal.
>
> f) A monograph on the *Ars Magna Generalis* of Raymond Llull (Nîmes, 1906)
>
> g) A translation, with prologue and notes, of, Ruy López de Segura's *Libro de la invención liberal y arte del juego de axedrez.* (Paris, 1907)
>
> h) Drafts of a monograph on the Symbolist logic of George Boole.
>
> i) An investigation into the essential metric rules of French prose, illustrated with examples from Saint-Simon. (*Revue des Langues Romanes*, Montpellier, October 1909)

j) A response to Luc Durtain (who denied the existence of such rules) illustrated with examples from Luc Durtain. *(Revue des Langues Romanes*, Montpellier, December 1909)

k) The manuscript of a translation of Quevedo's *Aguja de navegar cultos*, entitled *La Boussole des précieux*.

l) A preface to the catalogue of an exhibition of lithographs by Carolus Hourcade (Nîmes, 1914)

m) The work *Les problèmes d'un problème* (Paris, 1917) which discusses, in chronological order, the solutions to the illustrious problem of Achilles and the tortoise. To date, two editions of this book have appeared; the second bears as an epigraph Leibniz's recommendation: *"Ne craignez point, monsieur, la tortue"* and revises the chapters dedicated to Russell and to Descartes.

n) A tenacious analysis of the "syntactical customs" of Toulet (N.R.F., March, 1921). Menard – I recall – declared that to censure and to praise are sentimental operations which have noting to do with criticism.

o) A transposition of Paul Valéry's *Cimitière marin,* into alexandrines. (N.R.F. January, 1928)

p) An invective against Paul Valéry, in Jacques Reboul's *Hojas para la supresión de la realidad.* (This invective is, we might add parenthetically, the opposite of his true opinion of Valéry. The latter understood it as such and the longstanding friendship of the two was placed in jeopardy).

q) A "definition" of the Countess de Bagnoregio in the "victorious volume" – the locution is by Gabriele d"Annunzio, another of its collaborators – published annually by this lady counteract the inevitable falsifications of journalists and present "to the world and to Italy" an authentic image of her person, so often exposed (for very reason of her beauty and behaviour) to mistaken or hasty interpretations.

r) A cycle of admirable sonnets for the Baroness de Bacourt (1934).

s) A manuscript of verses which owe their efficacy to their punctuation." [13]

Visible Work

Nearly every aspect included in the citations of Menard's "visible" work sets up direct or indirect references to issues of language and translation and prefigures his "invisible work", his translation or partial re-writing of Cervantes' *Don Quijote*[14]. The first item on the list, the Symbolist sonnet, alludes both to issues of variation between versions and to time, which are central to translation and to Menard's project of a partial recreation of *Don Quijote*. In other items that he wrote on chess, the second of which is also a translation, the allusion is to an interest in the idea of symbolic systems governed by rules. Changing the rules of chess could also be seen as a metaphor for questioning the universal structural and semantic rules of language, thus raising issues of meaning and understanding in language systems. These works are linked thematically to the items on the formal structures of poetry and prose and those on grammar, which question whether such rules can be established and applied and discuss the implication of these rules on writing and the possibility of translating particular, or more subjective, idiosyncratic elements.

The real author merges with the fictional author and translator in an inter-textual interplay in the items which describe Menard's works on Leibniz' *Characterisica Universalis*, Raymond Llull's *Ars Magna Generalis*, John Wilkins, and also in item "(b) - a monograph on the possibility of creating a poetic vocabulary of concepts that are not the synonyms or paraphrase of common language, but ideal objects created through convention and essentially designed for poetic needs", and in item "(h) The drafts of a monograph on George Boole's symbolic logic". Borges was fascinated by the work of these thinkers and he repeatedly discussed their ideas in essays, monographs and short stories. These items refer to projects of the

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[13] Borges, Fictions, p.34

[14] For a detailed and comprehensive discussion of this see Sergio Waisman, *Borges and Translation: The Irreverence of the Periphery* (Plainsboro, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2005), pp. 96-102,

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to recapture the perfect understanding and correspondence between word and object in the language of Adam and repair the damage of Babel by creating a universal, ideogrammatic language system, or *ars signorum*. These projects and their repercussions have been comprehensively discussed in Umberto Eco's *The Search for the Perfect Language,* but Borges' – and Menard's – interest in them is rather in terms of their relationship to writing and translation and to the aesthetic potential of these models: "Borges sees such systems – precisely because they point at the irresolvable and irreversible condition of the multiplicity of languages – as idealising language machines, as sources for the poetic production of narrative."[15]

This is, in many ways like Derrida's project of deconstruction in *Des Tours de Babel*, where potentiality results from the fragmentation and partiality created at Babel.

> The 'tower of Babel' does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompletion, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system, and architectonics. What the multiplicity of idioms comes to limit is not only a 'true' translation, a transparent and adequate interexpression, it is also a structural order, a coherence of construct. There is then (let us translate) something like an internal limit to formalization, an incompleteness of the constructure.[16]

Likewise, for Borges the difference created by Babel, the fundamental need for translation, is a creative potential, which makes misunderstanding, mistranslation, and therefore writing, possible. The futile systems created by Llull and Wilkins to remove difference, the idealising man-made, universal languages, or "useless" language

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[15] Jacques Derrida, 'Des tours de Babel', in: *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, Volume I, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth G. Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 1-48

[16] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel'.Difference in Translation. Cornell University Press, London, 1985, Translated by Joseph F Graham, p. 165

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machines, become schematic, structural models that interact with particularity and partiality to facilitate the process of writing and translating. As Borges says in his essay 'Ramón Llull's Thinking Machine' (1937):

> As an instrument of philosophical investigation, the thinking machine is absurd. It would not be absurd, however, as a literary and poetic device. (Discerningly, Fritz Mauthner notes - *Wörterbuch der Philosophie I, 284* – that a rhyming dictionary is a kind of thinking machine.) The poet who requires an adjective to modify 'tiger' proceeds in a manner identical to the machine. He tries them out until he finds one that is sufficiently startling. 'Black tiger' could be a tiger in the night; 'red tiger,' all tigers, for its connotation of blood.[17]

The extent of Borges' propensity for subversion in his use of these absurd schema is evident in his essay 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins', where he likens the categories of a famously amusing taxonomy from "a certain Chinese Encyclopaedia" to the inconsistencies in Wilkins' language.

> These ambiguities, redundancies, and deficiencies recall those attributed by Dr. Franz Kuhn to a certain Chinese Encyclopaedia called the *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge.* In its distant pages it is written that animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken a water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.[18]

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[17] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Ramon Llull's Thinking Machine' ,in: *The Total Library: Non Fiction 1922-1986*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (London: Penguin, London, 2001), p. 159

[18] Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins', in: *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986*, pp.229-232,

As Foucault points out, Borges' list confronts us not just with the strangeness of unusual juxtapositions, or the stark impossibility of thinking that it destroys the common ground on which such encounters are possible[19]. It shows that although language can spread these objects before us it can only do so in an unthinkable space and that the absurdity of the list removes:

> .... the famous 'operating table' (...) and I use that word 'table' in two superimposed senses: the nickel-plated, rubbery table swathed in white, glittering beneath a glass sun devouring all shadow – the table where, for an instant, perhaps forever, the umbrella encounters the sewing machine, and also a table, a *tabula*, that enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and their differences – the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected space.[20]

Within the virtual worlds of representation that languages create, order, tables, lists, classifications, man-made systems and taxonomies become schema to be played with, and Borges' fiction feeds off the limits that these systems establish, exposing them for what they are and pulling the ground from underneath them. His interest in these machines is ludic, and while the play amuses it is also quite serious. His engagement with logic and with systems is playful rather in the sense that Georges Didi-Huberman uses the word and for Borges it is translation that operates or plays in the spaces it creates between the parts of these "thinking" machines.

> The 'world' of images does not reject the world of logic, quite the contrary. But it plays with it, which is to say, among other things, that it creates spaces there – in the sense that we speak of 'play' between the parts of a machine - spaces from which it

[19] Ibid.
[20] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), p. xix

draws its power, which offers itself there as the 'power of the negative'. [21]

Invisible Work

Pierre Menard's main project, his "invisible" project, is to write, word for word, Cervantes' *Don Quijote* at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is anachronistic, and three hundred years later, in a world much altered by historical events, one of which was the publication of the *Quijote* itself, it seems an absurd, ambitious and impossible task. For his intra-lingual translation Menard rejects mere transcription or copying as an option. He attempts total immersion, tries to become Cervantes, to live, think, speak and act exactly as he would have in order to write *Don Quijote*. However, after some attempts, Menard discards this as too easy, since "Being, somehow, Cervantes and arriving thereby at the the *Quixote* that looked to Menard, less challenging (and therefore less interesting) than continuing to be Pierre Menard and coming to the Quixote *through the experiences of Pierre Menard*." [22] According to Borges the result is a masterpiece, which surpasses all of his "visible" work in its brilliance.

> I shall now turn to the other: the subterranean, the interminably heroic production - the *oeuvre nonpareil,* the *oeuvre* that must remain - for such are our human limitations! Unfinished. This work, perhaps the most significant writing of our time, consists of the ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of Part I of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of Chapter XXII. [23]

Convention would suggest that in the shadow of the towering edifice of Cervantes' classic, Menard's flimsy, fragmentary effort seems absurd. It points to the impossibility of translation and of re-creating an original. But

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[21] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the End of a Certain History of Art* (1995) (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), p. 142.

[22] Jorge Luis Borges, Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote, p. 37-38.

[23] Paso ahora a la otra: la subterranean, la interminable heróica, la impar. También !ay de las posibilidades del hombre!, la *inconclusa*. Esa obra, tal vez la más significativa de nuestro tiempo, consta de los capítulos noveno y trigésimo octavo de la primera parte del *Don Quijote* y de un fragmento del capítulo del veintidós" Jorge Luis Borges, Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote, p. 36

for Borges, its incompleteness, its infidelity, are why it is such a success. Borges thought that notions of faithfulness to an original were ill founded and misconceived: "The announced objective of veracity turns the translator into a liar, for, in order to maintain the strangeness of what she translates, she finds herself obliged to thicken the local colour, to make what is crude coarser, to make the sweet sickly and to emphasise every thing until it becomes a lie."[24] So the strength of Menard's translation lies in its infidelity, in what it chooses to include and in what it leaves out. Compared to Cervantes' version,

> Menard's fragmentary Quijote is more subtle than Cervantes'. The latter, in a clumsy fashion, opposes to the fictions of chivalry the tawdry provincial reality of his country; Menard selects as his "reality" the land of Carmen during the century of Lepanto and Lope de Vega. What a series of *espagnolades* that selection would have suggested to Maurice Barrès or Dr. Rodríguez Larreta! Menard eludes them with complete naturalness. In his work there are no gypsy flourishes or conquistadores or mystics or Philip the Seconds or *autos da fé*. He neglects or eliminates local colour. This disdain condemns *Salammbô* with no possibility of appeal.[25]

The fragment is irreverent; it shatters and dislocates the Golden Age original in time and space, from sixteenth-century Spain to Argentina via modern France. It has infinitely more potential than the original whole, since the omissions and re-contextualisation of the selected fragments contribute to their meaning. In Chapter 9, Part 1, which Menard re-writes completely, the effect of the passage of time and of Menard's selection and re-presentation of the original on the narrator's interpretation of it is made explicit. Borges quotes first Cervantes' and then Menard's version of a comment on history:

[24] Borges. Las Dos Maneras de Traducir, (Two Ways to Translate) first published in La Prensa 1 August 1926, Argentina, p. 259 Textos recobrados, 1919-1930, Buenos Aires, Emecé, 1997, pp.256-259. (my translation)

[25] Jorge Luis Borges, Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote, p. 39-40

> Truth, whose mother is history, who is the rival of time, repository of deeds, witness of the past, example and lesson for the present, warning for the future. (Cervantes)

> Truth, whose mother is history, who is the rival of time, repository of deeds, witness of the past, example and lesson for the present, warning for the future. (Menard)

Borges tells us that while the two may seem identical, in fact the versions could not be more different. He argues that for Cervantes, "this enumeration is a mere rhetorical eulogy of history." However, for Menard to write this in the light of historical events is quite shocking:

> History, *mother* of truth; the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an investigation of reality, but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what took place; it is what we think took place. The final clauses – *example and lesson for the present, warning for the future* - are shamelessly pragmatic[26]

When we read this we need to keep in mind how different the act of replication is from the act of repetition in art. A 'repetitive' artist or poet may make a 'new' work, but it will probably just recycle/repeat themes, tropes, and forms that are all too familiar. On the other hand, replication, as carried out by Menard, is a form of *delay*. If the artist takes an earlier work seriously enough to re-present it, inevitably in revised form since revision is inherent in the mere act of replication, the reader / viewer is challenged to reconsider it.

In *Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote*, repetition, delay and anachronism expose the multi-layered, temporal nature of translation and make visible the many versions which co-exist within the whole. Borges' text makes it possible to read: in light of Cervantes' Chapter 9, Part 1, which discusses Spanish-Moorish relations and their effect on perceptions of history and on the nature of authorship, in light of the derivational nature of Cervantes' original text, which is itself a professed translation of an

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[26] Jorge Luis Borges, Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote, p. 41.

original manuscript authored by the shadowy figure of Cide Hamete Benengeli, in light of Pierre Menard's twentieth-century selection, omission, writing and re-contextualisation after a lapse of three hundred years and also in light of Borges' story, which interprets them in relation to each other.

There is also a sense in which Borges always works with the interrelatedness of the three practices of translation/writing, criticism and reading, and that he sees plagiarism as an inherent part of these activities: a sense that while the role of the critic is to write out their readings, what the critic might really want to do is not to comment on, but to rewrite, the text: not to write about the text, but to write in the text. And that the critic is in fact a repressed translator, obliged to ration the delights of quotation and denied the pleasures of commingling their voice with that of their object. On the other hand, for Borges, the translator, like Menard, is the fortunate critic who is genuinely able to write their readings; they write what they read how they read it.

Juan Cruz is translating Don Quijote... (Again) **2005.**
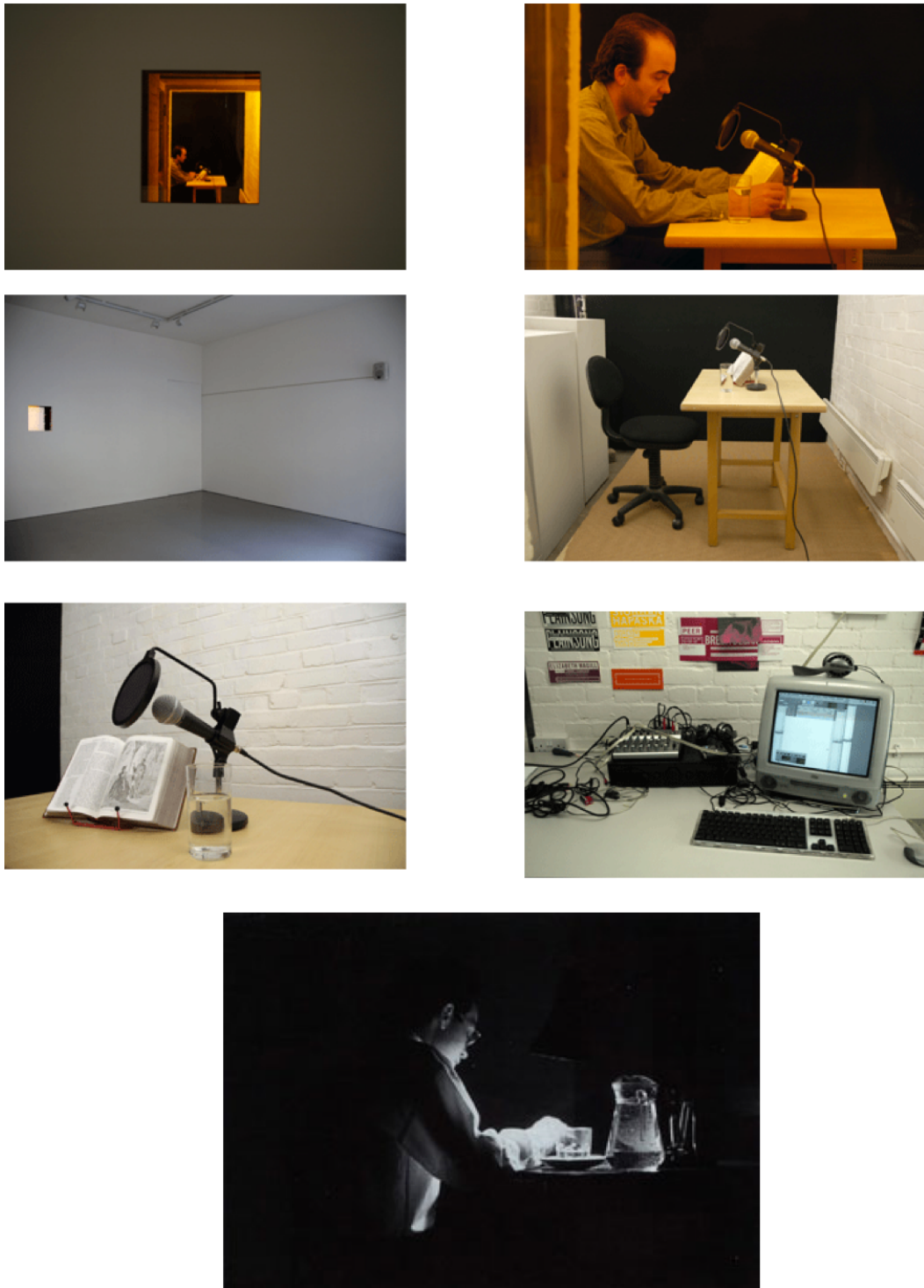
Figure 4. Installation Images of *Juan Cruz is Translating Don Quijote (Again)* 16 September - 5 November, 2005, Peer Gallery, London.

Transcript from: *Juan Cruz is translating Don Quijote (Again)*

"Chapter six. On what happened to Don Quijote with his niece and his mistress in one of the most important chapters of the whole story.

Um, while Sancho Panza and his wife Teresa Cascajo um…… er…. maintained the ……. er…… the impertinent conversation which we've just heard……. er, umm … the… niece and the er mistress of Don Quijote, they were not idle…….. who were um …………… er with a thousand …….. signals…….. um ….. suggesting that their uncle and   master wanted to go out for a third time and er …….. return to the exercise of his …… for them um ….. ill thinking er…….. knighthood …….um, they, they, they tried in every way they could to ermm….separate him from such a bad er thought, but it was all er…. preaching in the desert and er, um, trying to make um ….. er…… work out of cold steel. er………. With all this er ….. amongst many other reasonings er …. that happened to him er, his wife said to him …….. the mistress said to him …. sniff …… um "In truth er…… er …… my Lord that if your Grace does not um…. er ……. confirm his flat feet and er …… stays at home er and doesn't stop wandering around the mountains and the valleys like a pained soul um …. looking for those things that they call adventures er and which I call misfortunes um, I will er, I must complain in my voice and my screams to God and the King that they should remedy it". To which Don Quijote replied …. er "Mistress what God will respond to your complaints I already know, I don't know, nor what his majesty will reply either and I only know that if it were me I would ………. that if it were me I would excuse myself from responding to such an infinity of er memorable impertinences and as …… is is given each day, for one of the greatest ermmm….. jobs that Kings have among er many others is, is, that they are obliged to er listen to all and respond to all … and so, I wouldn't want that my affairs should weigh heavily on them. To which his mistress said, "Tell us Sir in the court of His Majesty are there no knights?" "Yes' replied Don Quijote, and many ……. and it's because ……. er ……. and the reason they're there is to adorn the greatness of the Princes and…….. so his royal Majesty can show off with all of them … "Well wouldn't your Grace," she replied, er …. be one of the ones who could serve the King and his master by being in the Court?"[27]

[27] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, translated by Edith Grossman (London: Secker & Warburg, 2003), pp. 491-492. If you compare this with the recently published translation of *Don Quixote* by Edith Grossman then you get a clearer idea of the different the intentions of both translators/artists.

As the title suggests, this was not Juan Cruz's first attempt. The task of the translator entails working from something that resists completion. The first had taken place ten years earlier, in 1995, at a desk in the darkened basement of the Instituto Cervantes in London, when Cruz managed to complete a third of the book. In some respects it is an audacious act; in others it is entirely apt. Written in the Golden Age, Cervantes' Don Quijote is the iconic hero of a seminal text with which many feel familiar, but fewer have read. It has been translated (repeatedly), adapted, abridged, interpreted, made into films, plays, ballets, cartoons and children's books. It has been illustrated in drawings and paintings, which have been transferred onto mugs, fridge magnets and pencil cases and made into cuddly toys and duvet covers.

Don Quijote is a novel about literature, which discusses literature and the emergence of a truth stranger than fiction at the interface of reality and fiction. As one permeates and disrupts the other the novel manifests the interplay between, and the effect of, a multifaceted, perspectival reality on fiction or narrative as the product of, and limited by, an individual imagination. Acknowledged as the precursor to the modern novel, it is intersected by intercalated stories within stories and narrators narrating

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"Chapter IV. Regarding what transpired between Don Quixote and his niece and housekeeper, which is one of the most important chapters in the entire history.

While Sancho Panza and his wife, Teresa Cascajo, were having the incongruous talk that has just been related, Don Quixote's niece and housekeeper were not idle; a thousand indications had let them to infer that their uncle and master wished to leave for the third time and return to the practice of what was, to their minds, his calamitous chivalry, and they attempted by all means possible to dissuade him from so wicked a thought, but it was all preaching in the desert and hammering on cold iron. Even so, in one of the many exchanges they had with him, the housekeeper said:

"The truth is, Senor, that if your grace doesn't keep your feet firmly on the ground, and stay quietly in your house, and stop wandering around the mountains and the valleys like a soul in torment looking for things that are called adventures but that I call misfortunes, then I'll have to cry and complain to God and the king and ask them for a remedy."

To which Don Quixote responded:

"Housekeeper, I do not know how God will respond to your complaints, or His Majesty, either; I only know that if I were king, I should excuse myself from responding to the countless importunate requests presented to me each day; one of the greatest burdens borne by kings among so many others, is the obligation to listen to all petitions and respond to them; consequently, I should not want my affairs to trouble him in any way."

To which the housekeeper said:

"Tell us, Senor, aren't there knights in His Majesty's court?"

"Yes," responded Don Quixote, "quite a few, and it is fitting that there should be, as an adornment to the greatness of princes and to display the statliness of kings."

"Well, then, couldn't your grace," she replied, "be one of those who stay put to serve their king and lord in court?"

narrators. So, according to Cervantes' prologue he is not the author, but the translator, or stepfather, of a novel written by the shadowy figure of Cide Hamete Benegeli. This device was a common conceit used by Cervantes' contemporaries, but as used by Cervantes, with multiple narrators, it facets the novel and challenges notions of authorship. This feature is reminiscent of the 'Thousand and One Nights' which, as another errant work of literature, grew and grew, gathering more stories as it travelled from Hindustan to Persia, from Persia to Arabia, from Arabia to Egypt. In fourteenth-century Egypt, after the text had become set, copyists supplemented it again with new stories. Antoine de Galland later enriched the original with new tales of his own invention or from the oral tradition (Aladdin, for example) and Richard Burton included his own, personal interpolations when he translated it into English.

In an installation (or durational performance over a period of two months) at the Peer gallery in 2005 Juan Cruz performed an oral translation of Cervantes' *Don Quijote*.[28] His voice was mediated, relayed via a speaker into the gallery, creating distance and delay between audience and performer. The translation took place in a room behind the main gallery space and could be viewed through a small window. The window framed the artist, focusing in on a scene of absorbed activity rather like watching a projected image of an artist at work through a camera obscura. The setting was reminiscent of a priest's or prison cell, a translator's booth or broadcasting studio, and looking into it gave the viewer a feeling of voyeuristic unease. The lighting and orange film over the glass recalled paintings by Velazquez and his use of "windows to introduce sacred imagery into genre subjects"[29] The scene created a sense of the artist as an entity defined absolutely by their activity, as a cipher or vicarious presence for something absent.

This is a feature of artistic activity that interests Cruz, who has also taken series of photographs of public figures and their interpreters speaking in public together. The picture that develops over time is one of rapt absorption, and an emptying of the interpreter's idiosyncratic physical

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[28] A section of this can be heard at: www.peeruk.org/audio/Quixote.mp3

[29] Rachel Withers, 'Juan Cruz, PEER'. *Independent on Sunday*, 6 November 2005.

gestures. As they take in and then translate the other's words their bodies begin to shadow, then embody, the mannerisms of the public figure. The implication is that physical proximity over time seems to aid mutual understanding, that distance and separation in the form of an interpreter's booth or telephone increase the potential for incomprehension and imperfection.

Ian Hunt has identified "the sense of imperfect delivery, of imperfect transmission of ideas"[30] as a key element of Cruz's work. As the transcript of the installation or performance shows, this work is not about the possibility or goal of absolute equivalence or a perfect translation for its time. For another work Cruz undertook the translation of Miguel de Unamuno's philosophical novel _Niebla_ (Fog). He found this project much less successful and satisfying: the final outcome of a published text or product involved changed expectations and required more of the refinements of publishing, such as editing, revision and proofreading, obscuring and covering the traces of aporia inherent to the task, tainting and detracting from his real aims for the work.

For his _Don Quijote_ there were no dictionaries, references, cribs, or editors to help prepare for or polish the performance. The translation was performed. The text was conveyed from one place to another via its vocalisation. It was delivered ad hoc, with the same painful groping for sense, bumping into words and glancing off meanings that is characteristic of unseen translation classes. The hesitancy, ums and errs, repetition and self-correction, the mistakes and long pauses, gaps and empty spaces all display the process of an intellectual engagement of fumbling for understanding and of fractured language such that the performance creates a physical aspect to the conceptual space around language.

It reminds me of my child practising or sight-reading a piece of music: the notes played slowly with pauses and intakes of breath one after the other as the eye reads the music and the hands feel for the keys. Then, as

[30] Ian Hunt, _Juan Cruz: the Kettle's Yard and Girton College Artist Fellow 1999-2000_ (Cambridge: Kettle's Yard Gallery, 1999).

patterns form and are recognised as such, the play speeds up over familiar groupings or sequences of notes. Sometimes the translation into sound is easy, too easy, it's been done before – muscle memory and habit take over; it's a stock phrase with an equivalent idiom that springs to mind. The names flow, accented in fluent Spanish, and for a moment the part of Juan Cruz that is speaking is the Spanish part that was born there. The part that is at ease pronouncing the familiar foreign words that don't need to be taken apart in the interval between reading it in his head and uttering it as words in English. But it's only half of him, and the bilingual hovers between exile and belonging. Then it falls into another register, a Golden Age flourish of chivalric language, a tricky key change, and he stops, he can't quite hit the notes in the right order, he tries again, botches it and moves on to the next sentence. Sensitivity of interpretation and expressiveness begin to emerge much later when the music begins to be felt, after the mechanical repetition of the notes has been achieved. But that isn't what this work is about.

Juan Cruz's work allows one to draw parallels between translation and observational drawing, between verbal and visual responses and interactions with a given. Drawing (like carving) involves extraction, a movement in time and through space in the process of creation. Unlike painting, which is often carried out from preparatory sketches, obliterating initial outlines, marks and mistakes beneath the layers of paint covering the surface of the finished product, drawing evidences the process of thinking through and carving out. Structures are gradually, dynamically drawn out as marks and rough outlines delineate boundaries in space, rubbing out, re-working lines to narrow in, build up and refine. As Norman Bryson has written, the line has "innumerable guises – neo-classical, romantic, modernist, opulent, austere, agonized, comical, diaristic, fanstasmic." [31] So, like writing and words, drawing is affected by style, historical and cultural conventions and analytical structures, which affect reading and interpretation. As it has traditionally been taught in the

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[31] Norman Bryson, 'A Walk for a Walk's Sake', in: *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act*, ed, Catherine de Zegher (London; New York: Tate Publishing;The Drawing Centre, 2003), pp. 149 – 158.

Academy, "…. drawing is also a discipline, a system of agreed notations taught by rule: The entire weight of received schemata mediates between the original source, bathed in light, and the final outcome, lines on paper."[32] Drawing as an extractive process subject to the weight of schemata exposes the blank sheet or canvas as a cultural artefact. The artist always starts from something.

This is what I think Juan Cruz's installation/performance conveys: just as _Don Quijote_ is a novel about fiction relative to reality, this work is a translation about translation relative to art. In deconstructing and performing the process of translation, in trying to illustrate the imperfect transmission of some thing to some where else and a mind labouring under the weight of knowledge, of structure and convention he shows that "the relationship of the translation to the original is not in the manifest relationship of two works but rather in the 'hidden relationship of languages to one another."[33] It is not about equivalence, or faithful representation according to conventions, but rather the release of a poetic energy which occurs at the point of contact between them. What had been considered peripheral becomes central. Art ceases to be about the product, located in the finished object, but becomes the endeavour, the unending active practice: the performance, or staging, of studio work.

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[32] Ibid., p. 155

[33] Samuel Weber, _Benjamin's –abilities_ (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 69

Eva Hesse: Studiowork, translated by Briony Fer

Redacted:

Figure 5 Mel Bochner, *Perspective Insert (Collapsed Centre),* 1967, gelatin silver print mounted on aluminium. Board. Fer, Briony, *Eva Hesse Studiowork*, The Fruitemarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Yale University Press, 2010, p. 73..

I now want to discuss Briony Fer's exhibition *Eva Hesse: Studiowork*, held at Camden Arts Centre in 2010, in the light of Borges' thinking on translation and Juan Cruz's durational performance. In this sense, then, I want to think of it as the project of a critic–historian-curator, using ekphrasis or translation to refocus writing on first order questions: to use the object as a model for their thought and write what they read how they read it; to focus on the artwork itself as a kind of theoretical proposition, and to place the pieces before, rather than behind, the known object or the theoretical and historical tools, which can often dictate the writing of art history, and to open it up to uncertainty and not knowing. In doing this I want to keep in mind the following aspects of Borges' thinking on, and use of, translation as factors which I suggest are also operative in Briony Fer's project: the reader as writer, and thus the provisional nature of the text, as draft, as time-dependent and contingent; Borges' anti-theory form of theory and emphasis on the particular over the general, on engagement with the processes and problems of choosing and deciding and the relation of this to play and to not knowing; the role of translation as traditionally peripheral, as sub-text to subvert order, systems and schema. I also want to bear in mind Cruz's staging of the artist as translator, where practice is shown to involve failure, the trial and error inherent to the groping for meaning in the half-light of imperfect transmission, and which discusses the location of art in the endeavour of unending active practice in relation to the performance, or staging, of studio work

I think I need to make it clear at this point that I am not claiming that Briony Fer has been directly influenced by Cruz or by Borges and his ideas on translation. Although she frequently refers to Borges in her writing, I suspect it is rather the case that his work predates the projects of some of the poststructural and deconstructive influences on Briony Fer's thinking, and of figures like Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes; that his work struck a chord with their projects and they were influenced by him and his Romantic predecessors in some respects.

Briony Fer has studied and written on the major works of the artist Eva Hesse for many years. She is an expert on the art scene of the 1950s and '60s, and has written extensively on the subject in her books *On Abstract Art* and *The Infinite Line*[34] and on the impact of this era in art history and its repercussions on current art practices. This exhibition is the result of years of work and experience, and it asks difficult questions. Fer's work is tripartite. She has curated a travelling exhibition of a collection of "studio leavings", models or "test pieces", that she re-names "studiowork", and which were left in Hesse's studio after her untimely death in 1970. She has also written authoritatively about them in an extensively illustrated catalogue and organised conferences around the exhibitions. The catalogue, written with a worrying concern, in a self-reflexive, gnawing, whittling, questioning style, opens writing up to the provisional quality of the objects. The writing and conferences created a forum to discuss the idea and relevance of studiowork and the sub-object to studio practice today, and to question the significance of these "studiowork-sub-objects", as something in themselves, co-existent with the work they carry out and the role of experimentation within art-making.

Her focus is on Hesse's "invisible" work. These objects, we are told, are the last pieces to be incorporated into her body of work, and this is the first attempt to discuss them as objects in their own right. The pieces were removed from Eva Hesse's studio after her death by her sister, Helen Charash, and carefully stored, first by Charash and then in the archive at

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[34] On Abstract Art, Briony Fer, Yale, London, 1997. The Infinite Line, re-making art after modernism, Yale, London, 2004.

Berkeley. Inevitably this fact lends them a double-edged quality of a relic or memorial to the departed: it shrouds them in an aura created by celebrity, which can at times border on the fetishistic, and can colour readings of them. This is problematic, because it can make it either too easy to dismiss them or too easy to venerate them, when I think that the questions that they raise and Fer's expressed motivation for bringing them to the fore at this point in time are more complex. To some extent their significance resides in a negative quality, in the fact that they were not thrown away. Abandoned by agency, these works have been left in the liminal world of the studio by chance events that removed the artist as arbiter. In an age when those who would mediate between artists and the market and money want to pin down what the impact of the work will be, and who will consume it, these are contingent works that would seem to challenge easy classification or valuation: neither presented to the world by the gallery as resolved objects, as objects in their own right, as "products" that could be made to fit something, somewhere, nor rejected, they hover in a holding place somewhere between the dustbin and museum display.

Lists and Systems

Briony Fer opens the catalogue with two facsimiles of documents which look like lists. The first is a receipt-inventory, with a date of 1979, for "THIRTY (30) SCULPTURES BY ARTIST EVA HESSE TITLED 'TEST PIECES'" donated by Helen Charash to Berkeley University Art Museum. The receipt records the act of donation to the museum when these objects left private, affective, or sentimental possession and became part of a system. The receipt-inventory duly lists, catalogues, describes and values each item for insurance purposes. Apart from one entry – 13 units at $900 each – the $600 valuation is uniform and indiscriminate. The sparse descriptions feel perfunctory and archival. They do not depict an item: rather, they detail materials used – plaster, varnish, plastic tubing, rubber cords, latex, cheesecloth, paper, cloth, fibreglass – and they give the dimensions and quantity of units; now and again they name a form: hemisphere, cylinder, irregular discs, irregular shapes. It is the language of index cards, and I imagine that Hesse's other major works could

equally be described – untitled – in similar bald terms. It prompts the question of why some works have been assimilated into Hesse's body of work while others have not. The words on this receipt fail us in this respect. Subsequent to the typing of the list some small red lines have been made next to seven items. The lines, single, double or triple, are horizontal and parallel but there is no indication of why this human intervention took place; for the moment it remains an anonymous, mysterious code. The list is significant because it initiates the process of assimilation, and for me the doubt hovering around Fer's project – and which may also be part of it – is whether her translation of these works merely serves to incorporate them into the system under the aegis of contemporary practices of artists like Gabriel Orozco or Ana Maria Maiolino, or whether it manages to do more?

The second "list" is typed on headed notepaper from Berkeley University Art Museum. At the end it states that it is a "transcript of a meeting between Sol LeWitt, Carol Androccio, Connie Lewallen and Elise Goldstein at the University Art Museum, Berkeley, November 17, 1981", but the transcript takes the form of typed-up notes with clarifications. In the meeting with LeWitt, a close friend of the deceased artist, objects or items that we can only know as numbers are discussed. The succinct responses of LeWitt are recorded in direct or indirect speech, and we can only guess at the rest. He makes judgements about the pieces on the basis of his friendship, knowledge and experience of the artist and her work:

> I think in the beginning she was just fooling around
>
> little experiments,
> latex wad   - definitely not a piece
>   - other things UAM has are definitely pieces in themselves,
> 95 -   not a piece
> 291 -   this is really stuff from the studio rather than pieces as such
> 56 –   probably done in 1966
> 60,64,52 – She had ideas of doing things in piles – large and small. If these
>   were to be a pile, they'd be in a stack like pancakes.
> Sometimes she experimented with materials with no end (product) in
> sight,

Some (of these objects) became parts of other pieces, - 59.

57 –   That's how she made molds

Looks like wax should come out.

I don't think these are finished pieces.

56 -   yes, this is a piece.

67 & 75   -   molds for pieces

191 -   Had wire – pasted mesh on – unfinished construction – not piece

58   Good chance should have hung because others done with rubber
          tubing were installed with tubes hanging (like Ishtar)

62 & 66 – not pieces

72 –   yes, related to Area or

59 -   probably did other things with pins and they were removed
          inmost cases (agrees that isn't related to Tori)

Latex pieces that have become brittle might be recast; if not done how will
people know what they looked like (i.e. her intention) "I know she didn't
want things to look deteriorated.

It is a curious text. It is an attempt to establish authorial intent over ten
years after the death of the author, and yet that authority remains elusive.
Sometimes the vicarious agent is certain: "definitely not a piece"; "Yes,
this is a piece", and about others he is less sure, there is an element of
second-guessing and his comments are conditional: "sometimes"; "if they
were"; "good chance, (….)". You begin to question the basis of his criteria
for selection. But Briony Fer doesn't want to create certainty, or to try to
make these objects fit into a system. She is aware that this would be the
least interesting path to pursue. To give work authorial intent may merely
impose artificial limits on it, and she doesn't want to turn them into
objects of knowledge as finished, explained pieces of work, or to enter into
a game of second-guessing. Intention is also dangerous because it brings
into play authorial function, or the effect of the "proper name" of the
artist. As we know, this is problematic because it may make the project
seem like an attempt to drain the last dregs of her studio by the industry's
almost inexhaustible capacity to accommodate and incorporate. It runs
the risk that these recalcitrant objects become swallowed up, absorbed into
the "body" of work and lose their quality of "intruder", or irritant to the
immune system of the branded corpus. I think that some of those impulses

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are clearly latent in the questions prompting the quotations from the transcript above. Like Borges' interest in Menard's heroic, interminable, incomplete, invisible work, Briony Fer is interested in these objects because she thinks they have the capacity to challenge the way we think about art and artistic process, the way we read art, and the way we write about art.

> Their recalcitrance is a reason to take them more rather than less seriously, precisely because they require us to figure out a way of thinking about them and what they mean to us (rather than simply what they *mean*). (.......) There is something threatening in the prospect of there being no product to speak of that could conceivably be classified as complete. The unsettling sense of an incomplete project resonates with our own contemporary situation. The force of these connections to the condition of art today makes me want to ask why that is. If they are just minor bits and pieces then why do they seem to be at the heart of Hesse's work and why and how to they speak to us?[35]

Briony Fer's reading of this work starts with the particular: working through individual examples the emphasis is placed on the objects, on trying to find the words to describe them, on writing from them. I imagine her searching the dictionary or thesaurus – Borgesian thinking machines – much as Hesse would have done, engaged in a process of trial and error, of juxtapositions and contingencies, weighing words against each other in the balance, comparing other critics' translations and making decisions to eliminate or retain. Involved in the *"long experimental game of chance played with omissions and emphasis"* of translation, like the invisible work of studiowork.

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[35] Briony Fer, *Eva Hesse Studiowork* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 15

Figure 6. Eva Hesse, *Studiowork* (Installation shot), Camden Arts Centre, 2010, Andy Keate.

The writing and discussion around the exhibition also manage to create a space for non-verbal dialogues between objects and practices. This is necessarily multi-layered, and in the catalogue and the conferences we read through the work to a historical and contemporary contextualisation of it. The significance of repetition and series, of the body and of play in the work is discussed in relation to the practices of Hesse's contemporaries, to Louise Bourgeois, Yayoi Kusama and Ruth Vollmer, through Abstract Expressionist artists to the Minimalists, to Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, Robert Smithson and Claes Oldenberg. Locating it through the bodily aspect, the open-ended, incomplete, experimental, "relational" quality of the studiowork, to the practices of the Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Lygia Pape also draws out the broader implications of its resistance to finish and categorisation. In 1969 Lygia Clark wrote:

> At the very moment when the artist digests the object, he is digested by society which has already found him a title and a

bureaucratic function: he will be the future engineer of leisure, an activity that has no effect whatsoever on the equilibrium of social structures.[36]

I am not suggesting with this that there was an equivalent explicit revolutionary intent to Eva Hesse's studiowork. Rather I'd suggest that this translation of the work by Briony Fer, this selection and re-siting of it in relation to these artists, posits the studio and the experimental work-without-end that goes on in it as central to artistic practice and to thinking about how new art, the "really new" unsettling art that T.S. Eliot described earlier, comes into the world. This work's continuing relevance is brought out in its comparison with the contemporary practices of the artists Gabriel Orozco and Ana Maria Maiolino, whose practices combine Eva Hesse's style of "studioworking", a hand-making, repetitive, experimental, provisional way of working with a contemporary, international, multimedia artistic practice, using fabricators and technology.

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Figure 7 Lygia Clark working in her studio, 1967-68, Briony Fer, p. 186.

Borges once said that the difference between poetry and prose lies not in a substantive difference but in the expectations that the reader brings to them. This also applies to Fer's translation. The main risk this exhibition took was to expose itself to the reader's expectations when entering a contemporary art gallery, which are not the same as those when entering a studio. There was a historical precedent for showing these works: they did leak out of the studio during Eva Hesse's lifetime, and she gave them away – but giving away and selling are very different operations. She

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[36] Lygia Clark, "L'homme structure vivante d'une architecture biologique et celulaire," in *Robho*, n. 5-6, París, 1971 (a facsimile of the journal has been published in Suely Rolnik and Corinne Diserens (eds), *Lygia Clark, de l'oeuvre à l'événement: Nous sommes le moule, à vous de donner o souffle*, cat., (Nantes: Musée de Beaux-Arts de Nantes, 2005). Brazilian version: *Lygia Clark, da obra ao acontecimento: Somos o molde, a você cabe o sopro*, (São Paulo: Pinacoteca del Estado de São Paulo, 2006). The text is available in Spanish in a re-edition entitled "El cuerpo es la casa: sexualidad, invasión del 'territorio' individual," in Manuel J. Borja Villel and Nuria Enguita Mayo (eds), *Lygia Clark,* cat., (Barcelona: Fondació Antoni Tàpies, 1997), pp. 247-248

allowed them to be photographed in her studio and she showed some of the pieces in exhibitions at galleries. She displayed them at the Fishburn Gallery, framed and arranged in a glass pastry case, like the one she had seen Sol LeWitt use to store the studio pieces that she had given him. The problems of translation here are of freedom or fidelity to an original context. Do you try to recreate the context of the artist's studio so that, mausoleum-like, Brancusi-studio-like, faithful to every last detail in a black-and-white photograph, the pieces function as an anachronistic re-presentation, rendered as a museum piece? Do you let them continue to exist as vestige, as a photograph, as they do in the catalogue? Or do you select and present them in a modern gallery, allowing them be viewed as pieces through a contemporary lens? Each method would have implications for their provisional, "outsider" status.

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Figure 8. .   Gabriel Orozco, *Working Table*, 2005, Briony Fer, p. 189

Gabriel Orozco's *Working Tables* project, ongoing since the 1980s, provides a contemporary reference which works with Briony Fer's reading of Hesse's studiowork. The result of years of collecting, of open-ended experiments, trials and failures, incomplete and insignificant on their own but together, as an assemblage of intriguing objects, the leftovers of the leftovers, providing evidence of an artistic process, or studiowork without 'end'. Similar minimal white "tables" were used for the exhibition *Eva Hesse Studiowork* to show the pieces out of chronological or thematic sequence. The decision to display the pieces in this way just as they are, rather than in an historical context as part of an elaborate re-enactment, asks for close, slow looking and scrutiny of the studiowork of and for itself. Orozco's display seems to suggest that his "test pieces" shouldn't be viewed in isolation, that their provisional quality calls for a collaged crowding with other pieces and for the residue of process and the studio in the form of the "work" table ghosted in the plinth to support them. Fer's show adopted this strategy, and it went some way towards resisting aspects of "looking at the overlooked" and the spotlight of its theorising

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scrutiny, which could merely create a form of theoretical wadding for the work, filling in the fissures its experimental quality forces open.

Figure 9. *Eva Hesse Studiowork* (Installation shot), Camden Arts Centre, Andy Keate, 2010

But the vitrines work against this, as they set up a barrier and, like the pastry cases, they create an institutional frame. Mignon Nixon was critical of the 2003 Eva Hesse retrospective at Tate for the way it displayed Hesse's work behind glass, pointing out that "an open cube set on the floor is not adequately represented by a closed cube set on a platform", and for this reason, in her opinion, the display and museum setting framed Hesse as an historically significant artist (subject to protective museum constraints) rather than as an experimental young artist in the "studio milieu".[37] As a practitioner I understand the impulse: in my practice I experiment all the time with materials and processes and sometimes, for some reason, people want the experiments, so I let them have them as gifts, in groups in cases, in collections and sequences, but the

[37] See Mignon Nixon's critique of the Tate retrospective, 'Eva Hesse Retrospective: A Note on Milieu', *October*, 104 (Spring 2003), 149-156.

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open-ended experimental aspect is always somehow removed, and there is a subtle shift in optic as the glass turns them into specimen. In the process the framing begins to dictate the work and definitions attach themselves to it.

Figure 10 Eva Hesse Studiowork (Installation shot), Camden Arts Centre, Andy Keate, 2010.

Maybe the glass casings are unavoidable? Vested interests require protective measures to prevent damage or theft of property, just as they require elaborate protective packaging for its transportation. But I think that's why they are wrong for the presentation of work like this, Work that should harbour contagion, challenge classification and commoditisation, that experiments and plays, is somehow neutralised, made merely curious under a crystalline cabinet.

I want to revisit Borges, his use of translation to 'play' with systems and categories, Foucault's discussion of tables as the "mute ground upon which it is possible for entities to be juxtaposed" and the role of heterogeneity in relation to this. I think Fer's translation of Hesse's invisible work wants to operate in a similar way to Borges' repositioning

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of translation in relation to literature. It asks for an activity that has been treated as secondary or peripheral to be placed at the centre of "finished", "major" work, and in doing so to shift the balance. As in Cruz's work, placing translation and the demand for translation, or translatability, at the centre sites resistance to assimilation and to finish, of 'product' at the core of artistic practice. And, like translation, this work operates in the disorder of heterogeneity

> Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also the less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the fabula: heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilise the lyricism of our sentences. [38]

Mel Bochner's photograph of the table in Eva Hesse's apartment fixes for a moment the flux of activity contained within the low white table, with the black grid painted on it by her friend Sol LeWitt. The things show no respect for the confines of the grid, they spill over squares, straddle boundaries and obscure partitions. Hand-made irregular forms disrupt the straight lines and grids are layered over other grids – the periodic table on the invitation to Carl Andre's exhibition, the brochure to Ruth Vollmer's show.

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Figure 11. Table in Eva Hesse's apartment. Part of an unfinished artists' working tables project, Mel Bochner, 1968-69, Briony Fer, p. 48.

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[38] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.xix.

Sandwiched between the grid and the things upon it is one further layer: words and pictures, each one chosen as if to stand for still other stages in the transformation from thing to art.[39]

Its disregard for lines and confines has the energy and confusion that more closely resembles a planning drawing for the layout of *When Attitudes Become Form*, the exhibition that Hesse took part in at the ICA in London in 1967. There is an interconnectedness and openness to other artists and their practices – which Orozco says is part of his working tables, which want to show creativity as a constant processing and process as a shifting accumulation that must just go on and on and on – which is present in Briony Fer's book and associated symposia, but less so in the *Studiowork* show.

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Figure 12. Sketch for When Attitudes Become Form, at the ICA in 1967, reproduced from Briony Fer, The Infinite Line (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.When Attitudes becomes form at the ICA London 1969, Tate Archive London. Reproduced on p.184 *The Infinite Line*

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[39] Anne Wagner, 'Another Hesse' (1996), in Mignon Nixon (ed.), *Eva Hesse* (October Files) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p.88.

CHAPTER 4

TRANSLATION AND SENSE

Cannibalistic Translation in the work of Adriana Varejão, Augusto and Haroldo de Campos

Through the practices of Brazilian poets, translators and theorists Augusto and Haroldo de Campos and painter Adriana Varejão, this chapter explores the way that Brazilian theorists and artists have drawn on the Baroque, cannibalism and translation to shape an affirmative Brazilian cultural identity that would seem well suited to negotiating the current global traffic in contemporary art and ideas. It looks, in particular, at how Adriana Varejão's practice could be read as one which develops the theory and practice of the de Campos brothers, actively translating aspects of colonialism and the Baroque in a cannibalistic way, and in doing so develops, evolves and represents these ideas to reflect on and critique the postcolonial condition.

As I think Adriana Varejão's work shows, it is hard to investigate any of these aspects – the Baroque, translation or cannibalism – in isolation from each other. These concepts, whose instability generates a form of dynamic interdependence, are enmeshed within the Brazilian experience of colonialism and the shared features, or points of correspondence, intrinsic and essential to the Baroque, cannibalism and translation make them relevant to the contemporary, interrelational context. In relation to Brazil, all three are products of the encounter: the term 'cannibalism' derives from the inception of colonialism, Columbus' voyages of discovery and first meetings with indigenous people. Similarly, the Baroque[1] was imported into Central and South America from Europe, and both of these exchanges involved and gave rise to acts of translation. As Howard Caygill has observed,

> ..... the Baroque style is not a settled or sedentary concept, comfortably enjoying its conceptual status: on the contrary, it is very volatile and unstable. The concept of the baroque is itself baroque, with its dynamic instability manifest in ritually incanted

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[1] See Haroldo de Campos' discussion of the Baroque in relation to Brazil: 'The Ex-Centric's Viewpoint: Tradition, Transcreation, Transculturation', trans. Bernard McGuirk, in Else R P Vieira & Bernard McGuirk, eds., *Haroldo de Campos in Conversation*: *In Memoriam 1929-2003* (London: Zoilus Press, 2009), pp. 237-247

genealogies and etymologies tracing the term to one of the more arcane syllogistic figures or an association with caprice and the bizarre, ... [2]

In this respect the Baroque shares characteristics of mutability and instability with translation: it is similarly translated and culturally determined and its practice is subject to interpretative theories of it. Mieke Bal notes this understanding of the Baroque and its relationship to translation when she writes that since Deleuze,

> We are left with the baroque as 'a theoretical notion that *implies* - literally that is visually in its folds - a mode of translation, an activity of *metaphoring* that resists the singular translation of one sign to another with the same meaning'[3]

The form of Baroque, cannibalistic translation advocated by the de Campos brothers would seem to draw on, or share, a conception of being in language in which these interdependent, interrelational aspects of it constitute an unstable whole similar to Lacan's Borromean rings, in which the three interlocking rings represent:

1 The Imaginary: the gaze, the fantasy, the mirror, ideal-ego and ego-ideal,
2 The Symbolic: signifiers, codes, languages, law.
3 The Real: the unsymbolisable, the gap in representation.

Within Haroldo and Augosto de Campos' similarly unstable, but creatively dynamic, theory of cannibalistic translation, the subject encountered and interacted with the object, ingesting, absorbing and re-producing it within an intermediate space of translation in which the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real encountered each other. As with Benjamin and Borges, the move that entailed foregrounding the potentiality contained within the space and act of translation over issues of fidelity and freedom destabilised the primacy or authority of the original. Thus it combined an anti-hierarchical impulse with an anti-

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[2] Howard Caygill, 'Ottoman Baroque: The Limits of Style', in: Helen Hills, ed., *Rethinking the Baroque* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp: 65-79 (p. 66).
[3] see Mieke Bal, *Ecstatic Aesthetics: Metaphoring Bernini* (Sydney, Australia: Artspace Visual Art Centre, 2000), p. 123

linear / anti-chronological approach to history that remains operative as a creative, evolving, empowering method resistant to hierarchical forms of translation based on the assumption of direct correlation and fidelity to an origin. It prioritises heterogeneity and rupture, the moment of instability within the encounter and thought processes – testing, probing, imagining and experimenting – over the impulse to define or fix identity. Haroldo de Campos described this as a need to consider the difference, to consider identity as a dialogical movement of difference, not as: 'the Platonic function of the origin and the homogenizing leveller of the same', but as the dis-character, instead of the character, the rupture instead of the linear course. Following Benjamin, his notion of Historiography is as:

> the seismic graph of fragmentation, rather than the tautological homologation of the homogeneous. A refusal of the gradual harmonious natural evolution, which gives rise to a new idea of tradition (anti-tradition) to be made operative as a counter-revolution, as a '*countercurrent*' opposed to the glorious, prestigious canon.[4]

Thus, as Else Vieira has noted in relation to de Campos,

> *Antropofagia* has developed into a very specific national experimentalism. It is a poetics of translation, an ideological operation as well as a critical discourse theorizing the relation between Brazil and external influences, increasingly moving away from essentialist confrontations towards a bilateral appropriation of sources and the contamination of colonial / hegemonic univocality. Disrupting dichotomous views of source and target, *Antropofagia* and its application to translation entail a double dialectical dimension with political ingredients; it unsettles the primacy of origin, recast both as donor and receiver of forms, thereby advancing the role of the receiver as a giver in its own right, and further pluralizing (in)fidelity.[5]

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[4] Harold de Campos, 'The Rule of Anthropophagy: Europe Under the Sign of Devoration', in *Haroldo de Campos in Conversation*, p. 217
[5] 'Ibid.

In keeping with these concerns the following chapter threads its way through, shuttling, moving forwards, doubling back and translating between, rather than attempting to fix or discuss subjects as discrete entities within a linear progression. My initial meander through the streets of Naples which follows suggests or alludes to, rather than spelling out, the themes, influences and subject matter which will be explored and developed further on in the chapter. Written by Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis during their stay in 1925, 'Naples[6]' wanders the streets. It draws out its narrative from the porosity of the city, from the anarchic interpenetration or trade between outer and inner, private and public. Through the labyrinthine quality of Benjamin's Naples, we are exposed to the city's relationship to the barbarism of the Camorra and to the mutability, impermanence and precariousness of civilisation. We encounter the Baroque, the ruin and fragment, figures that were central to Jena Romantic thought, that persist and continue to shape a modern sensibility as they inform a postcolonial, contemporary approach to art making.

My walk in the rain through Naples to the Chapel of San Severo and the Veiled Christ invokes the 'necessary' Catholicity of the city, a sense of decay, exhaustion and decadent contemporary exploitation of aura. Melding fiction with reality against a contemporary Baroque background it is fractured by its subsequent encounter with Benjamin and Lacis' text. In my mind, meanwhile, the strange experience of being in the city in the rain set up a subliminal relation to the apocalyptic cinematographic scenes in Ridley Scott's infamous *Blade Runner*:

> Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it? That's what it is to be a slave. [. .] I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in

[6] Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis, 'Naples', in: *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms: Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York:Schocken Books, 1978), 163-73.

the dark near the Tannhauser gate. All those moments will be lost in time. Like tears in rain. Time to die. [7]

Its relevance to this chapter lies in an understanding of the organism-machine-hybrid, or cyborg, as the ultimate creation of the Baroque, that challenges traditional boundaries, prompts the exploration of received ideas surrounding the creation of "the other" and the questions these provoke in relation to the nature of the self and of humanity to technology in an age of its mechanical reproducibility.[8] If one purpose of the Baroque was to show not the thought, but the human mind thinking – an interaction of sense, reason and memory and the structures that shape thought – the moment in which the truth is still imagined, then once this has been portrayed or captured by eco-technical replication, the question remains one of singularity, of the nature of humanity, or what – if anything – we assume to be elusively and exclusively human in this context. Or are we, as Jean-Luc Nancy has suggested,

> [...] the beginnings, in effect, of a mutation: man begins again by passing infinitely beyond man. (This is what "the death of god" has always meant , in every possible way). Man becomes what he is: the most terrifying and the most troubling technician as Sophocles called him twenty-five centuries ago, who de-natures and re-makes nature; who re-creates creation; who brings it out of nothing, and perhaps, leads it back to nothing. One capable of origin and end. [9]

The project of cannibalistic translation brings this to the fore in a Baroque enfolding and unfolding of the relationship of the sensual to the conceptual and technical. This is in turn a feature of Adriana Varejão's work in the contrast and containment entailed in folding and unfolding,

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[7] Roy Batty, penultimate, rooftop scene, *Blade Runner*, (1982) dir. Ridley Scott.

[8] See Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs,: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', *Socialist Review*, 80 (1985), 65-108: Haraway sees it as the ultimate challenge to Western culture, which she identifies as: 'The tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress, the tradition of appropriation of nature as a resource for the production of culture; the tradition of the reproduction of the self form the reflections of the other ... the territories of production, reproduction and the imagination.'

[9] Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Intrus,* trans Richard A Rand,Fordham University Press, New York, 2008,p. 170

containing and exposing fleshy guts, or vestigial traces of humanity within a gridded, tiled and digitised framework.

Naples

Figure 13. View of courtyard behind the Naples Museum of Antiquities, taken from the window facing a mosaic of a painting of the Battle of Issus - attributed to Apelles - found in the House of the Faun at Pompeii

We walk out of the Museum of Antiquities, founded during the Enlightenment by Charles III of Spain, and leave behind its dry, ordered galleries housing displaced mosaics, transplanted fragments of Roman wall paintings and relics, remnants of empire preserved from the lucrative and enduring fetish of Pompeii subsequent to the paroxysmal eruption of 79 AD. The sky lowers as we walk out from under the sheltering neo-classical portico and go down into the streets of Naples. Here the architecture, *civilized, private and ordered only in the great hotel and warehouse buildings* cedes to an *anarchical embroiled, village-like [...] centre into which large networks of streets were hacked years ago.*[10] Benjamin and Lacis saw potentiality in the instability left by the absence of clear delineation: *one*

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[10] Lacis and Benjamin, 'Naples', p.166

can scarcely discern where building is [..] in progress and where dilapidation has [...] set in. For nothing is concluded. Porosity results [...] above all, from the passion for improvisation, which demands that space and opportunity be at any price preserved.[11] Today the city I see feels worn down and unravelling after years of Berlusconi and his 'free-market', crony capitalism. Fiction, *fantastic reports by travellers have touched up the city. In reality* [and in my reality, as I walk through it] *it is gray: a gray-red, or ochre, a gray-white. And entirely gray against sky and sea.*[12] Scaffolding shores up the subsiding palatial façades of structures of state and gauzy mesh swathes cracked frontages veiling the filler and paint of an attempt to keep up appearances while slender, tender saplings sprout from crevices in the parapets.

Porosity is the inexhaustible law of the life of this city, reappearing everywhere.[13] Naples is an irregular, craggy, stacked city, soaked from the sea and sky. *Only a strip of shore runs level [..] at the base of the cliff [..and] where it touches the shore, caves have been hewn. [..] a door is seen here and there in the rock. If it is open one can see into large cellars, which are at the same time sleeping places and storehouses. Farther on steps lead down to the sea, to fishermen's taverns installed into natural grottoes. ... [...] As porous as this stone is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate [...] In everything they preserve the scope to become a theatre of new unforeseen constellations. The stamp of the definitive is avoided. No situation appears intended forever, no figure asserts its 'thus and not otherwise'.*[14]

Signals flash according to a programmed system, but significance seems to have been interrupted, misinterpreted or ignored and cars drive on, regardless of the rule of law, through crossings as we hesitate – stop-starting – on the pavement's edge, waiting for a gap in the oblivious traffic of a forward-focused flow. Like *the travelling citizen who gropes his way as far as Rome from one work of art to the next, as along a stockade,* [we begin to lose our] *nerve in Naples.*[15]

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[11] Ibid., p.165
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., p.168
[14] Ibid., p.166 My parentheses.
[15] Ibid.,p.164

The rain starts to fall in a steady, heavy stream and the streets empty. Only we remain: skirting the sides of buildings for shelter in a futile attempt to avoid the stone-saturating rain. Passing opportunistic, lone pedlars push buggies of cheap Chinese umbrellas that get skinned in the wind. Rivulets form and gush along uneven, pitted bitumen-patched cobbled streets, carrying debris in grimy surface water down to the gutters. It pools in hollows in the roads and around clogged drains, car-wheel-soaking passers by. We walk on, losing the thread of a sense of direction and the streets narrow. The cold rain rains down and so we shelter in a café with a shrine to Maradona, *an altar of coloured glossy paper on the wall*[16] to the hero of Napoli FC, 'Hand of God' (D10S) and icon. Only customers are allowed to photograph it, so we buy coffee.

Figure 14: *Shrine to Diego Maradona in a coffee bar, Naples, April, 2012*

Asking for the Cappella Sansevero de' Sangri I'm told that I've arrived, that the barista is the Veiled Christ and he stretches out his arms, cruciform, before the espresso machine. But it's further on. *No one orients*

[16] Ibid, p.167

himself by house numbers. Shops, wells, and churches are the reference points - and not always simple ones. For the typical Neapolitan church does not ostentatiously occupy a vast square, [...] It is hidden, built in; high domes are often to be seen only from a few places, and even then it is not easy to find one's way to them... [...] impossible to distinguish the mass of the church from that of the neighbouring secular buildings. The stranger passes it by.[17] As we grope our way in its general direction, following the gist of a stream of half-understood directions in Italian, the streets in the rain begin to feel unreal – almost – a cinematic recreation of a post-apocalyptic vision. The rain drenches macerating pore-spongy skin as clothes meld to flesh, and seeps down through flesh into stone. We are foot-soaked and bone-wet.

The chapel is at the end of an inauspicious alley, around a blank wall, on the corner of a donkey-cart-width street. It is privately owned and the tourist is charged an entrance fee. *The inconspicuous door, often only a curtain, is the secret gate for the initiate. A single step takes him from the jumble of dirty courtyards into the pure solitude of the tall, [...] church interior. His private existence is the baroque opening of a heightened public sphere. For here his private self is not taken up by the four walls, among wife and children, but by devotion or by despair.*[18]

It is dark and cold inside the Baroque masterpiece designed by renowned freemason, polymath, inventor and alchemist Raimondo di Sangro, the seventh Prince of Sansevero, who brought together some of the greatest Italian artists of the seventeenth century to realise his vision.

> Historically, says Jung, '[alchemy] was a work of reconciliation between two apparently incompatible opposites which, characteristically, were understood not merely as the natural hostility of the physical elements but at the same time as a moral conflict. Since the object of the endeavour was seen outside as well as inside, as both physical and psychic, the work extended as it were through the whole of nature, and its goal consisted in a

[17] Ibid, p.166 My parentheses.
[18] Ibid., p.166 My parenthesis.

symbol which had an empirical and at the same time a transcendental aspect.'[19]

Figure 15.   *Pudizia*, (1752) Antonio Corradini   p. 187

https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_Corradini#/media/File:Pudicizia,_Cappella_Sansevero.jpg

Figure 16. .   *Disinganno*, (1753-54) Francesco Queirolo p. 187

https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cappella_Sansevero#/media/File:Disinganno,_Cappella_Sansevero.jpg

Tombs of members of the di Sangro family line the walls between floor and ceiling and surround the Veiled Christ. Their statues form a complex iconography of virtues: Divine Love, Decorum, Disillusion, Self-control, Education, Liberality, Modesty, Sincerity, Sweetness of the Marital Yoke, Religious Zeal, that mark stages along the journey to self-knowledge and divine enlightenment. Two monuments dedicated by Raimondo de Sangro to his mother and father stand at either side of the main altarpiece: Antonio Corradini's *Pudizia* (Modesty - Veiled Truth) and Francesco Queirolo's *Disinganno* (Disillusion - Release from Deception). To the left is a pure and feminine revealing and concealing of the fold - *le pli.* To the right a masculine, enmeshing, knotted net of earthly passions and knowledge, undone and liberated by divine light and insight, symbolised and embodied by the flame on the forehead of the liberating Angel.

Beneath our feet a tiled surface covers the vestige of an intricate marble labyrinth that once formed the floor. Designed by Francesco Celebrano and the result of years of labour, a single, unbroken line of white marble threaded its way through a maze of hooked crosses and concentric squares, tracing the complex and arduous pathway that had to be followed in the pursuit of knowledge. The Sisyphean task of reading into

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[19] Francis Barker, Margaret Iversen, Peter Hulme, eds., *Cannibalism & the Colonial World* (Vol. 5, Cultural Margins) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 138

and following the line through the maze, knot, or fold would have led your feet into the building, and absorbed a mind in contemplation while Francesco Maria Russo's *Glory of Heaven* raised the eyes upwards to the vaulted ceiling, towards a trompe l'oeil image of an idea of transcendence. Tension in the fabric of the building is set up between earthly, empirical knowledge and divine, transcendental illumination:

> . . . the essence of the Baroque entails neither falling into, nor emerging from illusion, but rather realising something in illusion itself, of tying it to a spiritual presence that endows its spaces and fragments with collective unity. [20]

Today, rather than "moving along two infinities, as if infinity were composed of two stages or floors: the pleats of matter and folds in the soul",[21] our minds consciously navigate stress lines between the two and skim over a manufactured illusion of infinity, laid over broken continuity.

> The **Labyrinth** is the symbol of human consciousness, the metaphor of the mind coping with the undecidability of cognitive perception. This labyrinth is the site of cracks in the foundations of metaphysical knowledge that have challenged the architects of idealistic philosophy since Kant. Nietzsche uncovers the fossilized interpretive layers that cover the problem of the representational reliability of knowledge. Nietzsche's rejection of interpretive closure reaffirms a revolutionary reversal in the order of knowledge, a reversal already accredited by the early romantics. The understanding that joins Nietzsche with his Romantic forebears is the realisation that there is no minotaur of dictatorial truth at the center of the labyrinth but rather an energetic and restless inquiry consistent with the desire to face the flux of becoming.[22]

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[20] Deleuze, Gilles, *The Fold'*, trans. Jonathan Strauss, *Yale French Studies*, 80 (Baroque Topographies: Literature/History/Philosophy) (1991), 227-247, p. 124

[21] Ibid, p. 3
[22] Seyhan, Azade, *Representation and its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p. 140

Figure 17: Detail of maze in marble floor designed by Francesco Celebrano, mid 1760s to c. 1771, Capella Sansevero de' Sangri, Naples

The pleats of matter in the floor of the labyrinth succumbed to significant collapse in 1889. Today in the centre of the blue and yellow Neapolitan cotto replacement floor in front of the high altar lies the recumbent statue of the veiled Christ. Maybe, because I've been told what was intended, part of me feels that it would feel less like an exhibit, its evocation of the human embodiment of divinity and juxtaposition of death and eternity made more powerful by the obscurity of its original sepulchral location in the crypt. But its contemporary status as crowd-puller and face-saver – as used by the regional authority to re-launch the city's damaged image after an infamous rubbish emergency of 2008 – seems to require its presence centre stage.

So many superlatives and beautifully turned phrases have been used to describe this sculpture: Antonio Canova, so we are told, swore that he would have given ten years of his life to have created it. The Argentinean-French writer Hector Bianciotti described the *liquid transparency* of the marble shroud covering the crucified corpse as: "folded, unfolded, reabsorbed into the cavities of an imprisoned voice, slight as gauze on the relief of the veins." And for a while the quotation occupies the space made in my mind by the encounter with this work, which exceeds my capacity to represent it. Hollowing out my adjectives, exposing the inadequacy of adequate words I fall back toward the familiar and to information and the comfort of comparison.

Figure 18. *Detail of folds: The Veiled Christ, Guiseppe Sanmartino, 1753, Capella Sansevero, Naples*

Sculpted from a block of marble, the perfection of Giuseppe Sanmartino's realisation and the technical virtuosity it displays inspire incredulity and as I stand in front, behind the barrier, but bending down as close to it as I am allowed, the intended stylistic symbolism of the veil, presenting what it never ceases to hide, shrouding folds that envelop that which no longer exists, which is already missing, becomes more than just that. It assumes, then surpasses, the expressiveness of the folds of fabric in Bernini's *Ecstasy of St Teresa* [of Avila] and anticipates and embodies Deleuze's idea of folds of clothing, which

> acquire an autonomy and a fullness that are not simply decorative effects. They convey the intensity of a spiritual force exerted on the body, either to turn it upside down or to stand or raise it up over and again, but in every event to turn it inside out and to mould its inner surfaces.[23]

Brazilian Anthropophagy - Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropófago*

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[23] Quoted in Helen Hills, ed., *Rethinking the Baroque* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 30

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Hegel writes of the transition from internal to external, and from external to internal - the incorporation of external substance, and the expression of the internal: the "mouth has the dual function of initiating the transformation of food into an aspect of the living animal organism, and, in contrast to this interiorising of the outer, of completing the objectification of subjectivity, a process that occurs via the voice." It is in the voice that the spirit finds expression. Written words, if they are truly understood, must be incorporated and transformed into internal life - they must become voice. Hegel understands this assimilation [. . .] analogous to the ingestion of food. [24]

As a concept, anthropophagy, or the eating of other humans, is ancient and enduring. It features in creation myths in the figures of the Greek god Kronos, or Saturn, his Roman namesake, and the Cyclops, and in folklore and fairy tales where it is often, but not always, a characteristic of the feared, primitive, unknown and transgressive. In terms of its practice, archaeologists and anthropologists claim to have found prehistoric evidence for it in the remains of bones at Neanderthal and Paleolithic sites. Drawing on creation myths, Freud would cite the eating of the other in psychoanalytical terms as central to civilisation, to the separation of the subject from the object and to the creation of other through necessary parricide.

For Freud cannibalism is the basis of civilisation, which, in the myth of *Totem and Tabu*, originates in the murder and eating of the father by his sons. [. . .] In terms of infant development, during the first, oral phase, the infant has no idea of its own separation from the world: it is aware only of the mother's breast, which it does not see as a separate object, but, as it can be taken inside itself, as part of itself. The individual's original existence, the Golden Age of the infant, is thus described as a

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[24] Daniel Birnbaum, and Anders Olsson, *As a Weasel Sucks Eggs: an Essay on Melancholy and Cannibalism* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), p. 129.

cannibalistic experience of fluid boundaries between self and world, who are joined in a symbiotic oneness. [25]

For the purposes of our discussion, it is important to draw attention to this history and to note that the word 'cannibalism', which is generally used today, has a more recent history since it was coined and came into use with the discovery of the New World towards the end of the 15th century. It was first mentioned in Christopher Columbus' journals of discovery:

> *Canibales* was originally one of the forms of the ethnic name of the Caribes, a fierce nation of the West Indies who are recorded to have been anthropophagi, and from whom the name was subsequently extended as a descriptive term.[26]

In relation to Latin America it could be said that the term 'cannibals' resulted from a series of mistranslations. There is a telling irony in the fact that *Karibna,* the Carib word for a person, was taken first as the generic name for the indigenous population as a whole and then a subsequent misreading of ritualistic practices in relation to the storage of the bones of their dead in their homes soon gave rise to reports of cannibalism. While ritualistic sacrificial and cannibalistic practices[27] may well have formed part of the indigenous culture, misconceptions in relation to its widespread and indiscriminate use were probably encouraged by a fear of 'the other'. Through widely circulated reports and images, such as Theodore de Bry's famous engravings,[28] these perceptions gradually became representations implanted in the European psyche. Initial prejudices became expedient pretexts in response to the growing demand for slave labour sanctioned by an edict from Queen Isabella of Spain in 1503 stating that only people – such as cannibals – who were categorically

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[25] Maggie Kilgour, 'The Function of Cannibalism at the Present Time', in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, p. 244

[26] OED.

[27] Some people suggest there was evidence of endocannibalism practised by the Wari' people of the Amazon - a ritualistic, celebratory consumption of relatives after their death, out of honour, respect and love for them.

[28] Adriana Varejão draws on these in her *Proposal for a Catechesis: Death and Dismemberment* [1993] and *Entrance Figure* series of paintings [1997 - 2005].

less than people would be better off under slavery and could be used as such.

In view of this complex historical background, anthropologists such as William Arens[29] have radically called into question the existence of cannibals. He suggests that since evidence for cannibalism is so often unreliable and dependent upon hearsay, its general acceptance without necessary scrutiny might point to its more pragmatic use as a tool for constructing difference that creates an artificial separation of the civilised from the barbaric. This can in turn be used to justify the demonisation or subjugation or consumption of other cultures and establish the superiority of one over another. This discussion is significant, as it casts a doubt over assumptions which are often too easily made in relation to civilised and uncivilised practices, and makes way for an analysis of the effects of 'cannibalism-as-concept' in the encounter between western and non-western societies.

The process of encounter invariably involved a complex interplay between acculturative and transculturative impulses. Within processes of acculturation otherness has been neutralised, incorporated, absorbed or rejected by the receiving culture according to its own criteria of what is and is not civilised, or familiar to it. In translation through methods of calque, compromise and compensation in kind difference can be disguised, isolated as an exoticism constructing conceptual barriers around its exotic and savage otherness or seamlessly assimilated, civilised and educated into the acculturating impulse. It is important to note that this is not always part of an intentionally hostile act, but is evident even in notable, well-intentioned attempts, such as those made within the Catholic Church to counteract the dehumanisation and destruction of the indigenous people. The Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas, who famously wrote *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies,* believed that Amerindians had the potential for full civility, yet he still managed to construct an inferior collective identity for indigenous cultures. By

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[29] William Arens, *The Man-eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

"following the neo-Aristotelian distinction between slaves and children, he argued that the Amerindians were capable of assimilating European culture only under European guidance".[30]

As we see below, in his cannibalistic theory of translation Haroldo de Campos rejects the acculturating impulse, or the acquisition of one culture by another in favour of a more equal and creative practice akin to transculturation as developed by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s.[31] Transculturation as a way of describing the different phases of the process of transition from one culture into another emerged from Ortiz's analysis of the social and cultural effects of the production of tobacco and sugar in Cuba:

> I am of the opinion that the word *transculturation* better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture into another, because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of the previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation ..[32]

The question of who is doing the cannibalising, which arises in response to perceptions of inequality at the site of encounter, feeds into a postcolonial critique of western capitalism and of the impact – both historically and in its contemporary form of global capitalism – of this colonialism on assumptions of development and underdevelopment in societies and cultures.

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[30] see Claire Farago, 'Reframing the Baroque: On Idolatry and the Threshold of Humanity' in: Hills, ed., *Rethinking the Baroque*, p.113-122.

[31] Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1940) (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

[32] John Kraniauskas, 'Translation and the Work of Transculturation', in Naoki Sakai, Yukiko Hanawa, eds., *Specters of the West and the Politics of Translation* (Traces, Vol. 1) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2001), pp. 95-108 (p. 99).

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To draw on Marx's description of the parasitic practices of capital:,

> The prolongation of the working day, into the night, only acts as a palliative. It only slightly quenches the vampire thirst for the living blood of labour. Capitalist production therefore drives, by its inherent nature, towards the appropriation of labour throughout the whole of the 24 hours in the day. But since it is physically impossible to exploit the same individual labour-power constantly . . . capital has to overcome this physical obstacle. (Marx 1990: 367)

> We have observed the drive towards the extension of the working day, and the werewolf-like hunger for surplus labour, in an area where capital's monstrous outrages, unsurpassed, according to an English bourgeois economist, by the cruelties of the Spaniards to the American red-skins, caused it at last to be bound by the chains of legal regulations. (353)

> Alongside the independent producers, who carry on their handicrafts or their agriculture in the inherited, traditional way, there steps the usurer or merchant with his usurer's capital or merchant's capital, which feeds on them like a parasite. (645)[33]

An understandable, but sometimes over-simplified correspondence can be made between cannibalistic practices and those of omnivorous capitalism and its exploitation of 'underdeveloped' regions, natural resources and markets and creation of privation in the form of inaccessible excess. Between the contemporary practices of multinational conglomerates and imperial superpowers in the control of the one per cent, who extract riches, both material and intellectual, from the ninety-nine per cent. Thus capital feeds off 'underdeveloped' sectors and societies and grows fat on the proceeds while leaving them drained, impoverished and in a state of perpetual dependence and vulnerability. As shown in the popularity and profile of contemporary movements such as Occupy, among others, this is

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[33] Crystal Bartolovich, 'Consumerism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', in: *Cannibalism and the Colonial World,* p. 212 See also Jerry Phillips, 'Cannibalism qua Capitalism: the Metaphorics of Accumulation in Marx, Conrad, Shakespeare and Marlowe', in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World,* pp. 188-203.

a live issue that has repercussions for producers of cultural commodities – for art and artists, such as Adriana Varejão – who operate within a global market. The situation is a complex one, that I can't attempt to explore here in the depth that it requires, but in general terms the issue of the unequal distribution of power and control of resources as set out above was equally of concern to the Anthropophagic movement in Brazil, which aimed to use anthropophagy to revaluate and recalibrate this cultural, political and economic inequality. Addressing this perception of imbalance through culture, artistic production and thought, Ocatvio Paz noted that

> The notion of 'underdevelopment' is an offshoot of the idea of social and economic progress. Aside from the fact that I am very much averse to reducing the plurality of cultures and the very destiny of man to a single model, industrial society, I have serious doubts as to whether the relationship between economic prosperity and artistic experience is one of cause and effect. Cafavy, Borges, Unamuno and Reyes, cannot be labelled 'underdeveloped' writers, despite the marginal economic status of Greece, Spain and Latin America. Moreover, the rush to 'develop' reminds me of nothing so much as a frantic race to arrive at the gates of Hell ahead of everyone else.[34]

Avoidance of the potential for homogenisation inherent in the 'rush to develop' according to a single model required and assumed the resistance of difference, a 'differential practice articulated within a universal code'[35] inherent to translation. In his essay 'The Rule of Anthropophagy: Europe under the sign of Devoration', Haroldo de Campos described Oswald's Anthopophagy as:

> [...] the thought of a critical devoration of the universal cultural heritage, formulated not from the insipid, resigned perspective of the 'noble savage' (...) but from the point of view of the 'bad savage', devourer of whites - the cannibal. The latter view does

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[34] Octavio Paz, *Alternating Current*, trans. Helen R Lane (New York: Viking ,1973), p.19.
[35] De Campos, 'The Ex-centric Viewpoint: Tradition, Transcreation, Transculturation', p.238

not involve a submission (an indoctrination), but a transculturation or, better, a 'transvalorization': a critical view of History as a negative function (in Nietzsche's sense of the term), capable of appropriation and of expropriation, de-hierarchization, deconstruction.[36]

The early Brazilian Anthropophagic movement that de Campos draws on is considered to have begun during the Modern Art Week (Semana de Arte Moderna) in Rio in 1922 and continued with the subsequent publication of Oswald de Andrade's Anthropophagic Manifesto in 1928.

- Cannibalism alone unites us. Socially, Economically, Philosophically

- Tupi or not tupi, that is the question.

- I am only concerned with that which is not mine. Law of Man. Law of the Cannibal.

- It was because we never had grammars, nor collections of old plants. And we never knew what urban, suburban, frontier and continental were ...

- We want the Carib Revolution. Greater than the French Revolution. The unification of all productive revolts for the progress of humanity. Without us, Europe wouldn't even have its meagre declaration of the rights of man.

- But we have never permitted the birth of logic among us.

- The Spirit refuses to conceive a spirit without a body. Anthropomorphism. Need for the cannibalistic vaccine. To maintain our equilibrium, against meridian religions. And against outside inquisitions.

- We already had justice, the codification of vengeance. Science, the codification of Magic. Cannibalism. The permanent transformation..:[37]

[36] *Haroldo de Campos in Conversation*, p.215
[37] Oswald de Andrade, 'Anthropophagic Manifesto', *Journal of Anthropophagy*, São Paulo, 1 May, 1928, 38-39, trans. Leslie Barry, in: Leslie Barry, Introduction, 'Oswald de Andrade's Cannibalist Manifesto' (1991), in: Edwin Gentzler, ed., *Translation and Identity in the Americas: New Directions in Translation Theory*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 80.

As illustrated by some key examples of the tenets of the manifesto cited above, the aim of the movement[38] was to subvert colonial, cultural heritage, the imposition of systems, boundaries and laws, of the conceptual over the corporeal, to critique the exploitative, capitalist system and to forge a new alternative autochthonous model of national identity that engaged in dialogue with the West, but on its own terms.

> The MA (Manifesto Antropofago) challenged the dualities of civilized/barbarism, modern/primitive, and original/derivative, which had informed the construction of Brazilian culture since the days of the colony. In the Manifesto Antropofago, Oswald de Andrade subversively appropriated the colonizer's inscription of America as a savage territory which, once civilized, would be a necessarily muddy copy of Europe.[39]

It argued that Brazil should assert itself against Western postcolonial cultural (and economic) domination through the cannibalism indigenous to it, by consuming influences, digesting them and producing new, Brazilian work. As we saw earlier, the choice of the word anthropophagic was significant to an intention to redefine cannibalism and challenge dualities, bringing back into play a pre-Columbian, but also a Greek, understanding of the word that would interact with the connotations that it had accrued through the experience of colonialism. In this it shared aspects of Michel de Montaigne's perception of native cannibal society as more egalitarian, and thus less barbaric, than the civilised European:

> ... they have a way of speaking in their language to call men the half of one another [*the indigenous people, who had been brought to France and who spoke with Montaigne*] they had observed that there were amongst us men full and crammed with all manner of commodities, whilst, in the meantime, their halves were

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[38] For a discussion of the failure of the original project to bring about social change and the perceived degeneration of subsequent Brazilian anthropophagy into a merely cultural and aesthetic project which has abandoned its more radical project for social equality; see Sergio Luiz Prado Bellei, 'Brazilian Anthropophagy Revisited', in: *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, pp: 87-109,

[39] Barry, 'Oswald de Andrade's Cannibalist Manifesto'.

begging at their doors, lean and half-starved with hunger and poverty; and they thought it strange that these necessitous halves were able to suffer so great an inequality and injustice, and that they did not take the others by the throats, or set fire to their houses.[40]

By extension, it also differed from former approaches in that it used the cannibal in a way which neither demonised nor idealised it, but fused its pejorative and positive aspects facilitating the interrogation and exploitation of them. As the native song quoted by Montaigne below shows, cannibalism facilitated bringing together the consumption of self (endogenous) and other (exogenous) in a practice of endo- and exo-cannibalism to create an autonomous identity:

> . . . come all, and dine upon him, and welcome, for they shall eat their own fathers and grandfathers, whose flesh has served to feed and nourish him. These muscles [. . .] this flesh, these veins, are your own: poor silly souls as you are, you little think that the substance of your ancestors' limbs is here yet; notice what you eat, and you will find in it the taste of your own flesh.[41]

Within cannibalistic practice tradition and heritage become ingested and embodied in a process based not on a linear progressive model but on a cyclical, ruminative, regurgitant one that churns influences as it consumes and is consumed by them in the creation of something new. As De Campos notes:

> It was Machado de Assis (1839-1908) (...) who created the metaphor of the head as a 'ruminant's stomach', where 'all suggestions, after being mixed and ground up, get ready for anew mastication, a complicated 'chemism' in which it is no

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[40] Michel de Montaigne, Chapter XXX, 'Of Cannibals' (1580), in: *Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. Charles Cotton, ed. William Carew Hazlitt (London: Bell, 1877).
[41] Ibid.

longer possible to distinguish the assimilating organism from the stuff assimilated.[42]

Haroldo and Agosto de Campos - Cannibalistic Translation

In the 1960s the concrete poet, translator and theorist Haroldo de Campos (1929-2003) and his brother Augusto began to develop a theory of cannibalistic translation that was based on the ideas set out by Oswald de Andrade in his *Manifesto Antropófago* and those of other members of the Anthropophagist movement. These had in turn been influenced by modernism and had drawn upon similar ideas circulating between Europe and America within the Dadaist and other avant-garde movements in documents such as Francis Picabia's *Manifeste Cannibale* of the 1920s. As we saw above, the Brazilian movement did not just adopt a European use of cannibalism, which tended to exploit it as an exotic import and for its shock value. Theirs had a different dynamic in that it combined indigenous cannibalistic practices and traditions together with colonial and postcolonial historical and socio-religious elements. This difference is crucial, since it is founded on a transcultural, rather than acculturative, approach, as discussed above, and is exemplified in one of the iconic and often quoted propositions of Oswald de Andrade's famous manifesto of 1928:

"Tupi, or not Tupi that is the question."

This punning statement, operating on a number of levels, was an assertion of an original hybrid and unstable vision of Brazilian identity through an act of cannibalism. At the most obvious level it derives from and devours Shakespeare's *Hamlet* while alluding to the ritualistic cannibalistic practices of the Tupi indigenous culture of Brazil. Simultaneously, it draws a phonetic contrast between the commanding English 'b' of Shakespeare's "to be or not to be" and makes visible the silent, voiceless 'p' of the indigenous 'Tupi'. This difference, sounded out, makes audible the inequality in the relationship between the dominant, European voice and the aspirated, suppressed, voices of indigenous tribes of Brazil, which

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[42] *Haroldo de Campos in Conversation*, p.241.

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in turn quietly and irreverently disrupt Shakespeare's interrogation of being.

De Andrade's *Manifesto* remains hauntingly pertinent in its concerns. It sees the need to redefine concepts of success and happiness and questions most aspects of the prevailing, imported social order, such as: the assumed primacy of logic over magic, reason over sense, organised religion over animism, notions of progress as measured by growth, technology and the machine and the domination of patriarchal structures over matriarchal ones. Within this, the cannibal is valued as a way of absorbing – physically, materially and conceptually – qualities of the enemy, or of the sacred, and transforming them. It begins:

> with the carnal, moving through the sexual, arriving in friendship and camaraderie, and ending invariably in love and reverence (in its simultaneous irreverence). Cannibalism is viewed as indigenous, always juxtaposed against the 'plague of supposedly cultured and Christianised peoples.'[43]

Unlike European perceptions of cannibalism, which classify it as taboo and savage in opposition to civilised, sanitised practices exemplified in the symbolic white-out of Communion, in the Brazilian reworking of the concept of 'cultural cannibalism' the savage is not denounced or outlawed, but celebrated. Anthropophagy involves a critical ingestion of European and American culture and history, which is then reworked from a contemporary Brazilian perspective. As such it is neither negative nor deferential, but derives as it digests and assimilates, assuming the role of a sort of national unconscious in which the cannibal mind is still at work, in the masticating, digesting and rewriting of the outsider.

De Campos' ideas continue within this anthropophagic tradition of cultural cannibalism, but place translation and a linguistic model at its centre, fusing it with the Baroque and drawing on the deconstructive project of Derrida and poetics of Pound, Borges and Benjamin, among others. Haroldo de Campos' broader project involved using this idea to

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[43] Gentzler, *Translation and Identity in the Americas*, pp. 81-82

show how through the course of its literary history Brazilian writers had cannibalised and consumed European work through translation to create an autochthonous tradition.[44] One of the defining features of Brazilian culture was that "Ever since the Baroque, that is since ever, we cannot think of ourselves as a closed and finished identity, but rather as difference, as *overtness*, as a dialogic movement of the difference against the universal."[45] As a colonised country Brazil had been born into translation, it never been *in-fans,* that is to say, it had never been without language, but rather was born translating between indigenous and colonising languages and cultures.

> I will say that for us the Baroque is the non-origin, because it is a non-infancy. Our literatures, which emerged with the Baroque, had no infancy (infans: he who does not speak). They were never aphasic. They were born like adults (like certain mythological heroes), speaking an extremely elaborate international code: the Baroque rhetorical code (with late medieval and Renaissance traces,[...]) To articulate itself as a difference, in relationship to this panoply of universalia: this is our 'birth' as a literature, a sort of parthenogenesis without an ontological egg (we could say - the difference as origin or the egg of Columbus).[46]

De Campos's understanding reproduces and brings together a Romantic emphasis on language, an understanding of being within and being born into language with a Baroque sensibility, a sense of self as never finished, as *'a dialogic movement of the difference against the background of the universal'*[47] This seems to follow from Benjamin's conceptualisation of the relationship of Language As Such to the Languages of Man to the importance and potential of translation and a work's translatability. With this focus on translation and its essential quality, its method and processes become instrumental to the production and reproduction of culture. In

[44] 'See De Campos, The Ex-centric Viewpoint: Tradition, Transcreation, Transculturation'.
[45] *Ibid.,* p.228
[46] Ibid., p. 219

[47]Ibid.

accordance with de Campos' cannibalistic theory, translation is not a passive, uncritical medium by which to import and impose European culture, but becomes an artistic tool in the new devouring process. Cannibalistic translation is not just understood as capturing, dismembering, mutilating and devouring the original, or other, but rather in a sense that acknowledges the other within itself and shows respect for it. It becomes a symbolic act of taking back out of love, of absorbing the virtues of a body though a transfusion of blood and an empowering, nourishing act of affirmative play that draws on shared aspects of Benjaminian (and Derridean) ideas of translation which see it as a life force that ensures a text or object's survival, or living on.

> . . no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife - which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living - the original undergoes a change. Even words with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process ... [A] translation instead of resembling the meaning of the original must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.[48]

For de Campos this idea of translation, while important to the establishment of a Brazilian national identity, also became a key concept for understanding not only contemporary Brazilian literature but also European and American cultural production. Translation so defined was consistent with an affirmation of identity in the wake of the colonial experience in that it asserted a relation of universality to particularity that resisted hierarchies of provenance and destination by advocating equality at the point of encounter through an understanding of constant and mutual translation of something held in common. As the poet Octavio Paz observed:

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[48] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', pp. 256; 260

> For my part, I'm certain that in each age all poets write the same poem, but in different languages. There is no original text, all texts are translations of this poem, which is in turn, a translation. And all languages are translations of another language, which is also a translation.[49]

The rhetoric of this assertion affirms a particular, muscular understanding of a practice confident in its capacity to survive the brutality of the encounter and emerge fortified from it. One that understands that translation as anthropophagy is

> the answer to this ironic equation of the 'problem of origin', is a kind of brutalist *deconstructionism*: the critical devouring of the cultural legacy, carried out not from the submissive and reconciled perspective of the 'good savage', but from the challenging, aggressive point of view of the 'bad savage', devourer of foreign white people, cannibal.[50]

However, noting the potentially rootless, rhizomic character of this form of practice: its "*'devouring' perspective* [of the past and history] *as a 'succession of imaginary eras'[51], liable to be thought over by a 'spermatic memory', an erratic one, capable of replacing the logical links by surprising analogical connections.*"[52] Fredric Jameson has written that, in moving from the modern to the postmodern, what we are left with is that

> . . . pure and random play of signifiers which we call postmodernism, and which no longer produces monumental works of the modernist type, but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of pre-existent texts, the building blocks of older cultural and social

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[49] "*Por mi parte estoy convencido de que en cada epoca todos los poetas escriben, en distintas lenguas, el mismo poema. No hay un texto original, todos los textos son traducciones de ese poema que es, a su vez, una traduccion. Y todos los lenguages son traducciones de otro lenguaje, que es tambien una traduccion.*" Octavio Paz, *Los Signos en rotacio y otros ensayos*, (Madrid: Alianza, Editorial, 1971). p 67

[50] *Haroldo de Campos in Conversation*, p. 240.
[51] De Campos is referring to Jose Lezama Lima (Cuba, 1910-1976) and his idea expressed in *El Reino de la Imagen* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1981), of imaginary eras – moments within intertextual cultures, which provide the potentiality of image creation and to his idea of "Historical vision, the counterpoint or tissue bequeathed by the imago, by the image participating in history."
[52] *Haroldo de Campos in Conversation*, p. 240. My parenthesis

production, in some new and heightened bricolage; metabooks which cannibalise other books, metatexts which collate bits of other texts.[53]

There is a complicated dynamic at play behind Jameson's ambivalence. It underlies criticisms of de Campos' cannibalistic project which point to its focus on culture and failure to address or progress the significant political, economic and cultural change proposed in Andrade's original project.[54] Jameson's perception of a fall, or gradual dissipation intimated in the description of heightened bricolage through the deconstruction and reconstruction of monumental works, or free foundation-less building blocks of works of older cultural production stems in part from the suspicion, or sense of moral unease, that this form of potentially empowering cultural cannibalism also makes itself available to comparable cannibalistic practices of multinational capitalism. Thus there is a perceived risk in removing the protection contained within the structures that create an idea of origin and identity in that it exposes culture (artists and artistic production) and a fragmented globalised proletariat to the exploitative excesses of capital. This echoes a similar tension that lies between an understanding of translation as governed according to the demands of origin, tradition and identity and the consequent requirement for semantic order and a basic correspondence of signification and sense between the word and the thing that render it impossible yet necessary: a controlling, protectionist impulse that would make it art and yet denies it the possibility of becoming art. This is challenged by another understanding that would expose assumptions of originality and genesis as dependent upon a particular perception of the other in which an idea of the 'privilege of the original' that determines a form of correspondence is understood to be responsible for closing down potentiality. As Peter Osborne pointed out, this way of understanding translation reveals that

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[53] Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism: or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p.96
[54] Bellei, 'Brazilian Anthropophagy Revisted'

not only is the 'otherness of the other' a dialectical product of the encounter - that is, something to be inferred from the necessity for translation, rather than the preestablished ground for its inevitable failure - but the meaning of 'the original' cannot be supposed to reside wholly 'within' the original itself.[55]

This understanding which is evident in de Campos' cannibalistic theory draws on Benjamin's theory of translation and of translatability that makes the original dependent on translation, subverting the primacy of origin in proposing that

> [t]ranslatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential fro the works themselves that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability [...] Translations that are more than subject matter come into being when a work, in the course of its survival, has reached the age of its fame. [....] such translations do not so much serve the works as owe their existence to it. In them the life of the originals attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding.[56]

Thus, for De Campos Walter Benjamin's theory had inverted the relation of servitude which

> as a rule affects ingenuous conceptions of translation as a tribute to fidelity. Fidelity (so-called translation literal to meaning, or simply inverted, servile translation), conceptions according to which the translation is linked in an ancillary way to the transmission of the content of the original. Therefore in the Benjaminian perspective of 'pure language', the original is what in a certain way serves the translation, at the moment when it unburdens it from the task of transporting the unessential content of the message (...) and permits it to dedicate itself to an other enterprise of fidelity, the latter

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[55] Peter Osborne, 'Modernism as Translation', in: *Specters of the West and the Politics of Translation*, pp: 319-329 (p. 322),

[56] Benjamin, 'Task of the Translator', p.255

subverting superficially the pact of content, (...) for the 'fidelity to reproduction of form', which ruins that other, ingenuous and impulsive one, stigmatised by Walter Benjamin as a distinctive trace of bad translation: 'in exact transmission of inessential content'.[57]

For Severo Sarduy (Cuba, 1937-1993) the Baroque was also responsible for introducing proliferation and polyvalency that removed the idea of single origin or emitter. The figure of the Baroque was not circular, but elliptical, and as such the Baroque ellipse had two centres: "the suppressed term and the 'suppressing' term. In an ellipse there is always a term which is hidden, censured: and one which blossoms from the textural surface to serve as a *cachette* or a mask for the other."[58] Like the cannibalistic understanding of translation the Baroque facilitates the removal of an idea of the text, or work, as

> an expressive entity which stems form a centre and is decoded by another: the reader. Even in Sartre, the idea of language as practical-inert stems from this conception, since the author would be someone who uses that practical-inert entity to express something that is his own psychology, etc [...] there are no proprietors of language ... Plagiarism [...] is not only admissible, but advisable besides. One must totally suppress the idea of a central emitter of the voice.[59]

For Sarduy an understanding of the Baroque as an extreme form of proliferation – the creation of excess that resisted conventional forms of quantification and delineation – that expels all personal ideology and psychology, removes the figure of the author as central emitter, and facilitates the promotion of an idea of unauthored works, works without end or works in common. Similarly, when De Campos asserted that writing (verbal works of art) would increasingly mean rewriting,

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[57] , *Haroldo de Campos in Conversation,* p. 233.
[58] 'Severo Sarduy: Interview' Trans. Jane E. French, *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* (Summer 1972), 41- 45 (p. 42).

[59] Ibid., p.43.

masticating, re-chewing and digesting,[60] like Severo Sarduy's[61] evocation of Ouroboros, of a serpent consuming its tail, he devoured any sense of obligation or fidelity to origin or tradition, prioritising presentation of form over the representation of content. This is exemplified in his writing practice, which devours both itself and its sources, ingesting and digesting them through processes that involve translation, quotation, incorporation, plagiarism, criticism, adaption, interpretation, reinterpretation, repetition, deconstruction and collage. No longer dependent on continuity of origin and tradition, the security of information and of defined orders of knowledge, this approach to culture works within translation, whereby origin can no longer be understood as a genesis that evolves from a beginning, through a middle, towards an end, but rather as the transformative leap, Poundian vortex, whirlpool or stream of becoming.[62] This relationship to translation involves dependence on vestige or ruin, or on tracing elements symptomatic of a sense of loss and an incomplete, fragmentary nature that becomes inherent when the particular interacts with the universal. This becomes manifest in well-worn contemporary approaches to art practice involving provisional, contingent processes of: researching, editing, anthologising, collating, rehearsing, staging, performing and curating.

However, as Else Vieira has noted,

> .. in the space of 'trans' is a more conspicuously anthropophagic metaphor that moves translation beyond the dichotomy source/target and sites original and translation in a third dimension, where each is both a donor and a receiver - a dual trajectory that, again, points to the specificity of the digestive metaphor in Brazilian culture.[63]

Thus, as more than a form of rational, intellectual, or counter-intuitive manoeuvring involved in a deconstructive linguistic or conceptual

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[60], *Haroldo De Campos in Conversation*, p. 231.
[61] In the Baroque end and beginning are interchangeable: see Severo Sarduy, *Barroco,* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1974), p.18.
[62] *Haroldo De Campos in Conversation*, p. 237.
[63] *Haroldo De Campos in Conversation*, p. 19.

exercise, Cannibalistic translation, or transcreation, reasserts the human – through the ingestion, or act of taking the other, outsider or stranger within oneself – as a material and bodily aspect that is felt and sensed, and that feels and senses in the act of creation.

> All enjoyment, all taking in and assimilation, is eating, or rather: eating is nothing other than assimilation. All spiritual pleasure can be expressed through eating. In friendship, one really eats of the friend, or feeds on him. It is a genuine trope to substitute the body for the spirit - and, at a commemorative dinner for a friend, to enjoy, with bold, supersensual imagination, his flesh in every bite, and his blood in every gulp. This certainly seems barbaric to the pithless taste of our time - but who forces us to think of precisely the raw, rotting flesh and blood? The physical assimilation is mysterious enough to be a beautiful image of the spiritual meaning - and are blood and flesh really so loathsome and ignoble? In truth, there is more here than gold and diamonds, and the time is soon at hand when we will have a higher conception of the organic body. Who knows how sublime a symbol blood is? It is precisely that which is disgusting in the organic components that points to something very lofty in them. We recoil from them, as if from ghosts, and sense with childish terror a mysterious world in this mix, perhaps an old acquaintance. [64]

Varejão: Tessellation and translation

The similarities between de Campos and Varejão's practices – the influence of anthropophagy, the Baroque and a translational method – are easy to outline, and have been acknowledged and asserted as part of the artist's work and practice:

> I'm interested in the historical, anthropological and symbolic aspect of anthropophagy. Anthropophagy is present in all of my works whenever several issues are

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[64] Novalis, *Werke, Tagbucher und Briefe* (Vol 2), p.409)

involved: cultural absorption, dismemberment, deconstruction, transculturalism, the devouring power of eroticism ... Modernity in Brazil is based on this notion of anthropophagy, on the capacity to incorporate foreign ideas and transform them into your own…[65]

The method underlying Varejão's practice and its relation to anthropophagy assumes the inevitability of cultural interchange, the resulting hybridity, and the impossibility of returning to an original unadulterated state. It feeds off art, swallows, absorbs and reworks culture and influences that have become part of Brazilian identity, reaching out through time, thought and space from the contemporary hybrid, Brazilian, cultural present to Eastern (Chinese), indigenous and European cultures. It mines the Baroque aesthetic that was imported to the continent by the Portuguese at the beginning of the 17th century, exemplified at Ouro Preto in Minas Gerais and refined through Sarduy's neo-Baroque reinterpretation of it. Technically it translates between disciplines, media and dimensions, from ceramics, photography, architecture, books and scrolls to maps, and from imagined virtual, computer-generated digital realities into pencil on paper, or paint on canvas.

Varejão's work is an iconological operation through which images extracted from the history of art - where they were sculptures, monuments, chinaware, engravings, maps and ex-votos printed in books, shift to the condition of painting, their filter and denominator. The method, insistently, is to render the migration of images. The artist does not paint an angel, but, rather, the tile on which the angel is impressed.[66]

Figure 19.

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[65] Adriana Varejão, interview by Hélène Kelmachter, in: *Adriana Varejão: Chambre d'echo =Echo Chamber* [exh. cat.], ed. Philippe Sollers, Paulo Herkenhoff (Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain/Actes Sud, 2004), p. 95.

[66] Paulo Herkenhoff, 'Painting Suturing', in: *Pintura/Sutura* [exh. cat.] (São Paulo, Galeria Camargo Vilaça, 1996), pp.1-2

Proposal for a Catechesis Series, Part I, Death and Dismemberment, diptych, 1993.

The tiles Varejão paints are material carriers of images, translators from one location or culture to another made visible. Her use, exploration and interrogation of *azulejos,* or tile work – to which she returns in various forms – is an art of counter-conquest which exposes the wound inflicted and the nature and repercussions of colonisation. Her *Proposal for a Catechesis* series*: Death and Dismemberment* [1993- pictured above] and *Entrance Figure* [1997] borrow from and subvert Theodore de Bry's infamous prints based on the written accounts of British geographer Richard Hakluyt (ca. 1552-1616), which depicted the cannibalistic practices of the indigenous people of the New World and scandalised 17th-century Europe. It is hard to work out who eats whom in the picture, which juxtaposes two rituals, one supposedly civilised – the Catholic, colonising ritual of cannibalism inherent in transubstantiation, in communion and the consumption of the body and blood of Christ – and the other a Tupi ceremonial cannibalistic consumption. Illustrating anthropophagy and cannibalistic translation, it brings into question and casts doubt over deep-seated certainties (as discussed above) that were used to separate the savage from the civilised, and elevate the coloniser over the native.

Tiles allow Varejão to do this because they are inherently deconstructive. They open up the unified plane of the canvas to division, fragmentation and flaw, to the proliferation of voices and influences that reverberate within the echo chamber of the Baroque, enabling different readings and perspectives according to placement and point of view. In the spaces between, in the visible matter of grout and filler, they expose the space of play and its potentiality within the interstice of artifice. Tiles allow Varejão to mix or collage, layer, cut and paste scenes and images of the cultures involved in the encounter while exposing difference through the disruption of pattern, tone, style, erosion, fragmentation, wound and fissure. Tiles as material support, as matter that carries, seem inseparable

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from her description of her sense of the Baroque she experienced in Ouro Preto:

> "Baroque matter, what can be perceived through it – a feeling, and not the intellectual tradition of what that is or was, It's a more philosophical instance, compressed in the cracks, between stones, in the grain of the wood, It's not something concrete or hard; it's elastic and absorbent like a spongy matter.[68]

Adriana Varejão's exploitation of Baroque theatricality through tiles coincides with de Campos' and Umberto Eco's idea of the open work.

> Baroque form is dynamic; it tends to an indeterminacy of effect (in its play of solid and void, light and darkness, with its curvature, its broken surfaces, its widely diversified angles of inclination); it conveys the idea of space being progressively dilated. Its search for kinetic excitement and illusory effect leads to a situation where the plastic mass in the Baroque work of art never allows a privileged, definitive, frontal view; rather it induces the spectator to shift his position in order to see the work in constantly new aspects, as if it were in a state of perpetual transformation. [69]

Eco has pointed out that the Baroque of the colonial era was not truly as open, mutable or mobile in the sense that it might be understood today through the work of Deleuze, de Campos or Sarduy, but was subject to codification. Adriana Varejão's deconstructive translation and reworking of it through the medium of the tile draws on the subsequent opening up of the Baroque that creates a "circularity where no one can tell who is influencing who any more."[70] Thus her use of it moves it on to expand

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[68] Adriano Pedrosa, Varejao, Adriana, *Coincidences* (Edit 4), Interview: Histories at the Margins, Massachusetts Institute of Contemporary Art., Boston, 2014. http://www.adrianavarejao.net/pedrosa-adriano-varejao-adriana-coincidences-massachusetts-institute-contemporary-artboston-2014

[69] Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 26.

[70] Paulo Herkenhoff, quoted in: Charles LaBelle, 'Ultra-Baroque', *Frieze*, 56 (January-February 2001), https://frieze.com/article/ultra-baroque

"art's horizons to temporalities, materialities, figurations and contrasting, dissonant poetic and perceptive experiments."[71]

Like words, the tiles she depicts have navigated the world in the holds of ships from Africa and the Middle East to Europe, China, India, and on to Latin America. The Portuguese term *azulejo* came from the Arabic word *al-zulayj*, meaning polished stone, and, like the art of making ceramic tiles or *azulejos* that it would represent, it migrated, probably arriving in Portugal from Persia via Morocco and Spain (Seville and Valencia). Portuguese workshops developed the techniques associated with blue and white Delftware tiles. In the 17th century, through the influence of painters using the majolica technique of painting oxides onto tin glazes, the image expanded beyond its containment within the single tile to spread across the surface of an assembled grid – prefiguring the contemporary digitised pixelated image – that could be transplanted, flat-packed across the globe, exporting decoration for the structure and cladding of imagined spaces.

The tiles Varejão recreates and represents in her paintings and sculptures are both the traditional crafted objects that have been regarded as artisanal and demotic and those that over time have become machine-produced, anonymous, homogeneous components. They have described, decorated and protected diverse spaces: sacred and profane, ceremonial and mundane, contaminated and clean, with a ceramic crust of global export/import civilisation. Varejão's tile paintings evoke these three-dimensional spaces: a kitchen, a bathroom, a Carioca bar, a public pool in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, a cubist mesh of modern painting, a hotel for casual sex, a hospital, a laboratory, an operating room, a supermarket, a butcher's shop, a slaughterhouse, a morgue, a dissecting room, a flaying room, a tattooing room, a church, a sauna.[72]

Displacement between locations and cultures gave rise to shifts and modifications in *azulejo* craft practice. The manner of fabrication,

[71] Luz Camillo Osorio, 'Surface Depth', in: *Entre Carnes e Mares* (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Cobogó, 2009), p. 231.
[72] Herkenhoff, Paulo, 'Saunas', in: Adriana Varejao, *Chambre d'echos/Câmara de Ecos* (Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain/Actes Sud), 2005, http://www.adrianavarejao.net/saunas-0

decoration, location and use became inflected and creolised in response to new environments, materials and cultures. The trade in tiles is analogous with the to-ing and fro-ing of traffic between civilisations. As Lilia Moritz Schwartz has observed about Adriana Varejão's work, "the *azulejo* tile dialogues, socialises and allows for exchange" between cultures and "as part of the exchange of *azulejos* came values, projections, utopias and simulacra."[73] Gayatri Spivak has shown, in 'Translation as Culture',[74] that it is disingenuous to suggest that this traffic might have been one way, but should rather be seen as similar to the task of translation – to the constant shuttle and tussle that is life – and as a process of text-making between warp and weft, inside and outside, source and target. Like Varejão's tile works below, Spivak's image exposes the embedded grid of power structures, but also draws attention to their fleshing-out, to the constant flux involved in the less predictable 'peopling' of these structures: to an idea of this translation of cultures that becomes fleshy, imprinted on and absorbed into bodies. It is an image made concrete and tangible in Varejão's tile works with live flesh [1999 onwards] and *Linda da Lapa* [2004], from her *Jerked-beef Ruins* series, in which flesh, blood, guts and gore ooze out from rends in the gridded canvas and are made visible between painted 'ceramic' surfaces, which no longer seem able to retain it within them.

Figure 20. Tile work with live flesh, 1999, Oil on canvas and polyurethane on aluminium and wood support, 220 x 160 x 50 cm

http://www.adrianavarejao.net/category/category/paintings-series

Varejão primarily expresses herself in and through paint. Paint as material – as pigment carried by a medium that colours and nuances our

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[73] Lilia Moritz Schwartz, 'Paved and Tiled by Adriana Varejao', in: *Entre Carnes e Mares*, p. 144.
[74] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Translation as Culture', *Parallax*, 2000, 6 (1), 13-24.

perception and understanding – carries her acts of representation and, like the tiles she depicts, reveals them to be of the surface and imposed. As a permeable skin layered and blended to create images that draw on a colonial past, paint allows her to express and expose through her work the constructed nature of historical documentation and its arrangement of fact, which, as representational acts, should be questioned, rather than assumed as given.

Varejão seems unable to see, or depict, a tile without allowing the tile, which lends her paintings material density, - and its materiality as an object - to disrupt the plane of representation with its evocation of the depth behind it, fracturing the two-dimensionality of the image and exposing a third. Tiles lend her work the character of a cold, difficult, rational, aseptic, brittle, portable and fragmented painting: painting as representational artifice, superimposed and seeping into skin like an indelible image printed onto a body. The blood and guts, which allude to the wound of colonisation through the violence perpetrated on people indigenous to the continent, rupture the surface and spill, spectacularly, sensationally and shockingly, from within the paintings. The artist's representation of the act of tearing, cutting into and exposing the guts of the shared flesh beneath the surface of the painting, that underlies the superimposed structures that would represent and regulate existence, illustrates the vulnerability of these and of their representations of history to acts that would challenge, penetrate and transform them. In Varejão's work those structures never cease to exist but contribute to its impact and persist in the gridded disposition that continues to inform the shape and form of the work in relation to the distribution of flesh. The exposure alluded to in her representation of image as rend cannot function, cannot perform its disruptive function, if it is devoid of resistance.

The sculptural, mimetic, representational paintings in her later *Jerked-beef Ruin* series (2000-2004) take tiles off the gallery wall and place them on freestanding architectural ruins at various stages of disintegration. Again, these are history paintings that draw on historical iconography – on the narrative of the imposition of identity, rupture and wound in the event of

colonialism – to depict and critique the representation of historical fact. Contemporary urban decay, ruin or demolition expose the mass of human flesh these structures had contained or domesticated. The skin of anonymous, homogenous tiles, or cladding of a represented identity, which is Baroque in that it both conceals and reveals matter, retains and maintains form and adheres to flesh with the sticking power of an imagined community.[75] The application of paint, the thickness and texture of her painting, produces grotesque depictions of fresh, lusciously bloodied organic matter that contrast with the gridded patterns of thin, aseptic mass-produced tiles. An excess of blood, flesh, organs, tendons, intestines, constructed in paint and polyurethane over an aluminium supporting structure spill out from within the painting.

Figure 21. Linda da Lapa, 2004, *Jerked-beef Ruin* series, Aluminium, Polyurethane and oil paint. 400 x 170 x 120 cm

http://www.adrianavarejao.net/category/category/paintings-series

Just as questions that challenge assumptions of historical representation arise from within and as a result of the confines established by our linguistic, conceptual representations of it, the painted flesh of depicted humanity that disrupts the surface of the structures it adheres to similarly interrogate the boundaries of its discipline through technique and practice. As an exercise of an embodied practice that constructs and deconstructs with and through matter, it questions from within what painting and its dimensionality might be. In this respect Varejão's practice acknowledges and derives, or is generated by, the presence and significance of the outsider within itself inherent to the anthropophagic act. This gives rise to questions surrounding the degree of assimilation of the other by the subject, which is based in part on an understanding of

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[75] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso,1991).

humanity as having the capacity for imagination, the potential for genius and creative resistance.

> If, once he is there, he remains a stranger, then for as long as this remains so - and does not simply become "naturalized" - his coming does not stop: he continues to come, and his coming does not stop intruding in some way: in other words, without right or familiarity, not according to custom, being, on the contrary, a disturbance, a trouble in the midst of intimacy.[76]

This singular aspect is explored further in Varejão's *Sauna* series (2003 – 2009) of paintings and drawings, which develop into a more abstract, less referential area of inquiry concerning the nature of humanity, or what it might in essence be in relation to the virtual worlds and imagined identities that forms of technological reproduction would conceive of, replicate and reproduce. These paintings primarily depict empty computer-generated models of tiled bath-houses where inherent mesh or grids waver through water and around whirlpools, multiply and vanish into impossible virtual, perspectival systems that evoke the persistence of the Baroque in our imagination.

> My painting, in the *Sauna* series, departs from the conceptual field of references to historical iconography and enters the field of the sensorial. These are timeless environments. But they are figurative works that combine figuration with geometry. They work on questions intrinsic to painting, such as color, composition, perspective ... They are works that converse with architecture and space, but in a virtual way. They are projected spaces. [77]

The paintings focus on formal qualities, on technique in painting and its capacity to evoke sense through the relationship of geometry to figuration, and on the scientific investigation and quantification of ground. The relation of the properties and relations of magnitudes in space through

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[76] Nancy, *L'Intrus*, p.161
[77] Adriana Varejao, interview by Hélène Kelmachter in *Chambre d'echo = Echo Chamber*, p. 95.

line, surface and solid form to painted pictorial or plastic representation is akin to the application of the algorithm to translation, the translation of poetry and to making art. Not impossible. In the process of translating between media and realities, the implication is that painting makes itself relevant through its craft, through a slower-paced, self-consciously human, sensuous and sensorial, manually and materially mediated interaction with representations created within and by virtual and digital realities.

The sterile, regulated environments depicted in the *Sauna* paintings reify the absence of humanity, leaving us to question the cause and significance of it. Did this absence result from loss, exclusion, irrelevance, or simply from the failure to attend, to occupy a space? Through hand-painted representations of human absence the paintings ask us to think and sense what it is that constitutes our understanding of humanity and where might it reside or remain in a contemporary context where:

> Our globalized society evacuates bodies, turns them into images, into roles, into absences. We are becoming mirrors that, in a dream, are reflected in mirrors. In the saunas all illusions have vanished, everything evaporates. Saunas are perfectly democratic. Impeccable. Terminal[78]

While in previous works these questions might have found some response in reference to the resistance of flesh, flesh as excess and in the singular, disruptive and chaotic qualities of organic matter in relation to ordered conceptual structures, Varejão's *Sauna* series largely forgoes rendering this aspect in its open-ended conjecturing.

Figure 22. The Guest, 2004. Oil on Canvas, 45 x 70 cm

http://www.adrianavarejao.net/category/category/paintings-series

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[78] Varejão, *Chambre d'echo= Echo Chamber*, 2005, p.6.

Guest [2005], pictured above, is the smallest of the series and contains one of Varejão's few explicit references to the body. Aside from random unidentifiable traces left in the movement of water, or in her drawings[79] by stray hair distanced from the fabric and seemingly superimposed on it – as upon a lens that would mediate the image – physical evidence of humanity in these depictions of it has become slight, echo-like. The scene, or set, in *Guest* – because the paintings evoke staged environments lacking actors or agents to people them – is white monochrome, with a large pillar in the foreground, behind which blood has bled, issuing unevenly from an unknown source, into and over the tiled surface and along the ridges between them. This is a painterly representation of an organic intrusion into a virtual space, which skirts around the edges of genre and melodrama, and as such I find that it obscures, detracting from a more fundamental manipulation of the viewer that Varejão perpetrates in the other *Sauna* paintings.

Figure 23. The Seducer, 2004, oil on canvas, 230 x 530cm.
http://www.adrianavarejao.net/category/category/paintings-series

The paintings are life size and require their human scale to narrow the distance and absorb the viewer in the virtual space they create. The frame stretches far enough to exceed the limit of our visual perimeter, locating the viewer at the boundary that would separate them from the picture – just at the point where making a mental leap, a conceptual crossing over and entering into the other reality it creates, begins to feel possible. The painting asks us to project ourselves into its material representation of spaces within space and to sense our physical response to it. In response to the painting the viewer is asked to look, to feel, experience and sense

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[79] see, for example: *The Obscene*, 2009, graphite and watercolour on paper, 70 x 100 cm, *The Obsessive,* 2007, graphite on paper, 42.0 x 29.7 cm and *The Wicked*, 2009, 70 x 100cm http://www.adrianavarejao.net/category/category/drawings

the effect of imagined realities on us and their ability to condition, to represent for and to us a sense of who we are and what we feel. The experience of disorientation created by the painting raises the issue of at what point, and to what extent, might this evocation of strangeness cease and become naturalised, habitual, ordinary and everyday. In relation to the intrusion of virtual perspective-shifting systems into the organic and human, can an element of difference and resistance always remain? "How does one become for oneself a representation – a montage, an assembly of functions? And where does the powerful, mute evidence that uneventfully was holding this together disappear to?"[80]

The problem inherent in the privilege or luxury of representing a question - as these paintings and drawings do - of framing a challenge without the demand to do more, makes it vulnerable to becoming a representational exercise that facilitates assimilation and dissipates its disruptive potential.

Cannibalistic translation, which, like deconstructive practices, derives energy from the other, works from, dismembers, consumes and digests a given as it recreates, is invariably an exercise that involves a representational aspect. In relation to Varejão's work the question this provokes is to what extent does the representation of the bodily and human, or material, aspect of her work become more than a display of virtuosity or emulation and a technical representation of it? Does it do more than represent itself, describe, package and self-consciously offer up the product of the cannibalising impulse for display and consumption by the global art market? This issue is complicated by an understanding that the perceived success of an organically informed and engaged artistic process and practice, whose ability to agitate and irritate rather than become absorbed, seems contingent upon its capacity to resist assimilation, to be more than a representation of and to itself. Should this capacity become represented and representational then what results becomes understandable, and as such a consumable, marketable work, or artistic product. As Varejão affirms, in interview:

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[80] Nancy, *L'Intrus*, p.4.

"The exhibition and the market remain, but art itself, I believe not."[81]

The difference between a translational practice and an interpretative one that was framed in Jena Romantic thought reasserts itself through the persistence of a connection, or correlation, between interpretation, representation and product. Translation in art asserts its identity in the powerful, mute potentiality of an immune response to intrusion that hosts as it resists absorption, retaining the potency of the strangeness of the stranger that enters, as identified by Nancy. In relation to Varejão, in some ways the market and its capacity to absorb has muddied the waters: her work has become a commodity whose capacity to act against the grain has been mitigated by it. However, a vestige of its initial impulse remains in its intent to occupy the interstice as it navigates the tripartite space of the Baroque, anthropophagy and translation and in its capacity to posit and question through its exploration of the human, of sense in relation to technology and artifice, self and other, painting and reality, construction of culture and the invention of tradition. Through a Baroque understanding of the way artifice manipulates emotion and disorientates sense, Varejão's work and its use of the body remains illustrative of the slight, almost empty space between self and other, subject object, representation and presentation in which art - as 'two I's (or *subjects*), strangers to one another (but touching each other)'[82] - has come to site itself. A space from which to insinuate just as we have never really been modern, neither have we been entirely human.

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[81] Adriana Varejão, *Coincidences,*, 2014, http://www.adrianavarejao.net/pedrosa-adriano-varejao-adriana-coincidences-massachusetts-institute-contemporary-artboston-2014

[82] L'Intrus, p 169 my parenthesis.

CHAPTER 5

TRANSLATION AND TRANSITION

Winnicott and Transition
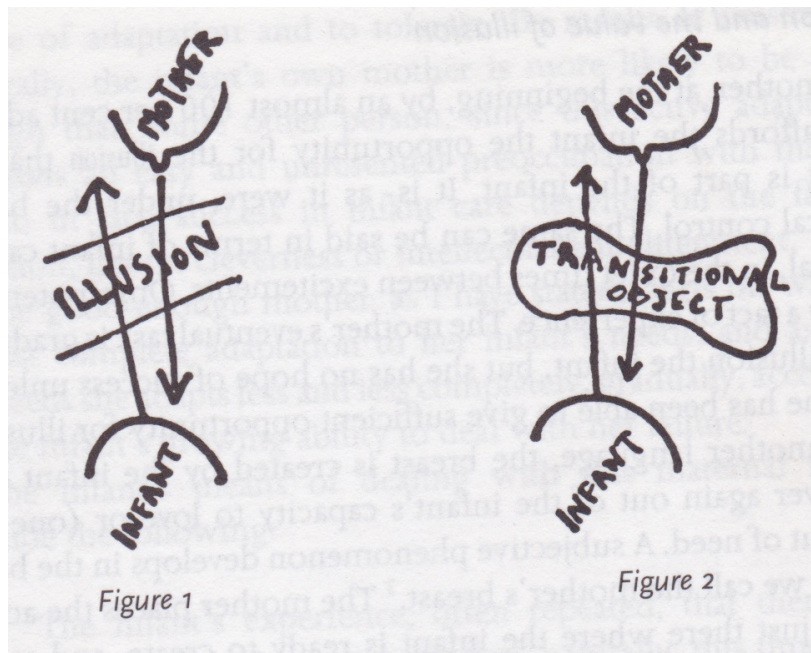
Figure 24. Winnicott's diagram from Transitional objects and Transitional Phenomena. Ch.1, p.16, Playing and Reality, Winnicott, 1971.

Donald Winnicott's theory[1] of transitional objects and phenomena – developed through his experience observing infants and their mothers as a therapist and paediatrician and working with evacuated children in Oxfordshire during the Second World War - analyses the first 'not-me' possession[2] in the

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[1] D.W. Winnicott, 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena: a Study of the First Not-me Possession', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 34.2 (1953) and in D. W. Winnicott, *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1958) Republished as Chapter 1 of *Playing and Reality* (1971) (London: Routledge, 2005)

[2] Summary of the special qualities in the relationship of infant to the transitional object:

1. The infant assumes rights over the object, and we agree to this assumption. Nevertheless some abrogation of omnipotence is a feature from the start.

2. The object is affectionately cuddled as well as excitedly loved and mutilated.

3. It must never change, unless changed by the infant.

4. It must survive instinctual loving, and also hating, and, if it is a feature, pure aggression.

5. Yet it must seem to the infant to give warmth, or to move, or to have texture, or to do something that seems to show it has vitality or reality of its own

6. It comes from without from our point of view, but not so from the point of view of the baby, Neither does it come from within; it is not an hallucination

7. Its fate is to be gradually allowed to be decathected, so that in the course of years it becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo. By this I mean that in health the transitional object does not 'go inside' nor does the feeling about it necessarily undergo

[....] intermediate area of experience between thumb and teddy bear, between oral eroticism and the true object-relationship, between primary creative activity and projection of what has already been introjected, between primary unawareness of indebtedness and the acknowledgement of indebtedness.[3]

In the diagram illustrating this concept, Winnicott presents us with two images side by side. Their sequential numbering suggests progression – one developing out of the other – but parallel placement also implies persistence and asks for recognition of equivalence and an ongoing process in terms of the way they should be read. The first depicts a state of being in relation while the second introduces an object into that relation. For Winnicott, Figure 1 illustrates the idea

that at some theoretical point early in the development of every human individual an infant in a certain setting provided by the mother is capable of conceiving of the idea of something that would meet the growing need that arises out of instinctual tension"[4]

Incomplete membranes define the physical entities of infant and mother: the curve delineating the mother has a nipple-like form projecting from the parenthesis while the child's is smooth. The curve of the bracket creates an interface between two incomplete parentheses delimiting mother from infant - holding content inside and aside, foregrounding

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repression. It is not forgotten and it is not to be mourned. It loses meaning, and this is because the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common', that is to say, over the whole cultural field." Winnicott, Playing and Reality, p.7

[3] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p.3,

[4] Ibid.,pp.15-16, For Winnicott the Freudian term instinctual tension refers to the tension between the mind's impulses and the body's response (or psyche-soma) and suggests that stress generated by this is humanly inherent, a given that has to be lived with mitigated and managed, but never eliminated or solved. These things are not limited to material objects, but include words, which occupy an indeterminate space between a thing and a person: "By this definition an infant's babbling and the way in which an older child goes over a repertory of songs and tunes while preparing for sleep come within the intermediate area as transitional phenomena, along with the use made of objects that are not part of the infant's body yet are not fully recognized as belonging to external reality."

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what goes on in the space between the two. These abut the space between, where two open-ended asymptotic lines in transit delineate an area of illusion between mother and infant that is intermediate and maintained at a distance one from the other. Arrows, like the projection of an idea or impulse, project from each entity and trace the trajectory of interaction between the two parties across this space. Evoking an image of *kairos*, the mother's arrow, like her attention to the infant, originates from the point of the breast and is directed towards the centre of the infant, focused and on target. The diagram seems to imply the infant's is less focused since the line of its arrow is off centre and oblique and its course suggests that it skims or slips past her left side. It appears to be – paraphrasing Winnicott – indicative of the ideal situation, in which the 'good-enough' mother adapts sufficiently well to give the infant the illusion that external reality corresponds to its own capacity to create. Thus initially it does not need to be as aware as the mother because, in the '*optimal holding environment where a state of integration has been achieved*', the infant's primary needs have been adequately anticipated and met. This shared space of illusion provides the basis for the individual's true, or authentic, self and the conditions for creativity. Failure to adapt adequately to the infant's needs results in a bad environment which '*becomes an impingement to which the psyche-soma [i.e. the infant] must react. This reacting disturbs the continuity of the going-on-being of the individual* '[5] and contributes to the development of a compliant, false or reactive self. In Winnicott's ideal situation there is neither interchange nor clear separation but rather instinctual overlap, since psychologically the '*infant takes from a breast that is part of the infant, and the mother gives milk to an infant that is part of herself*'[6] For Winnicott this ordinary relationship has symbiotic and mutually beneficial aspects, since

> [. . .] the baby has instinctual urges and predatory ideas. The
> mother has a breast and the power to produce milk, and the
> idea that she would like to be attacked by a hungry baby.
> These two phenomena do not come into relation with each

[5] Winnicott, D. W.,, 'Mind and its Relation to the Psyche-Soma', *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 27 (1954), 201-209 , p.245 ?? quoted in Phillips, p.77
[6] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p.16.

other till the mother and child *live an experience together.* I think of the process as if two lines came from opposite directions, liable to come near each other. If they overlap there is a moment of *illusion* - a bit of experience which the infant can take as *either* his hallucination *or* a thing belonging to external reality.[7]

The second figure carries subtle differences, which imply incipient movement towards awareness of external reality and indebtedness. It begins to chart the infant's growing ability to distinguish the 'me' from the 'not-me' facilitated by the mother's watchful neglect, or controlled failure to adequately meet its needs that results in gradual disillusionment. The arrow describing the trajectory of the mother's attention to her infant remains on target; however, that of the child's towards the mother is now less oblique and more focused on the other, signalling a nascent consciousness of the mother as not entirely of itself and of incompletion. In this figure the intermediate area of overlap between the two is enclosed and given a form, thus giving shape and containment to the area of illusion. It is illustrative of the potential Winnicott ascribed to the transitional object or phenomenon, the main function of which was to provide each person at the start of life with a neutral area of experience that must not be challenged. For this to be achieved successfully, the question *"Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?"*[8] should remain unformulated. Thus initially a protective or nurturing collusion on the part of the mother is required to perpetuate a state of *original pre-ambivalent dependence.*[9] This ensures that the infant's *going-on-being* is not disrupted and allows for unconditional use, or the 'ruthless demand' of the mother for its own growth.

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[7] p,.152 "Group Influences and the Maladjusted Child' (1955, Winnicott, 1964b.) what is this Winnicott ref? Quoted on p.83 of Winnicott, A Phillips,

[8] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p.17.

[9] Adam Phillips, *Winnicott* (London: Penguin, 2007), p.93. Melanie Klein, following Freud, believed in primal and therefore formative ambivalence; Winnicott posited an original pre-ambivalent dependence.

From the infant's point of view he is simply loving the mother; from the mother's point of view it can feel like ruthless assault in which the infant cannot, and must not be made to empathise or identify with the mother. (...), in Winnicott's parallel model [..] mothering, is, at the very beginning, an act of supreme sacrifice and self-control. The mother, in this excessively demanding account, must allow herself to be used in the service of the developmental process. She is, as it were, continuously giving birth to her infant.[10]

Winnicott's introduction of a third, neutral transitional space and questioning of primal, or formative, ambivalence breaks up an individual or dualistic approach to the person and opens up the possibility of beginning to think about what takes place in the shared, third space between the subject and object, and the effect of their interaction. Winnicott suggests that

Of every individual who has reached the stage of being a unit with a limiting membrane and an outside and an inside, it can be said that there is an *inner reality* to that individual, an inner world that can be rich or poor and can be at peace or in a state of war. [. . .] My claim is that if there is a need for this double statement, there is also need for a triple one: the third part of the life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated.[11]

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[10] Phillips, *Winnicott*, p.90.
[11] Winnicott *Playing and Reality*, p. 3

From our contemporary vantage point Winnicott's observations may now seem obvious and almost commonplace; however, as Adam Phillips explains, this involved a radical departure from psychoanalytic theory:

> Prior to Winnicott's conceptualizing of all that was transitional in human experience, psychoanalysis, broadly speaking, had been a theory of subjects in some kind of instinctual relation to objects. From Winnicott's point of view, it had not taken sufficient notice of the space between them, except as an obstacle.[12]

This third, intermediate, area of experiencing, or potential space of paradox, was a space of illusion in which the world of external reality and the inner world of unconscious fantasy were allowed to overlap.[13] In it the loss of the mother could gradually become tolerated through the transitional object or phenomenon. This *"intermediate area . . . . that is allowed to the infant between primary creativity and objective perception based on reality testing"* was a space in which objects could have both an autonomous existence in the outside world and a life in the inner world of the individual.[14]

Transition, Translation and Symbol Formation

Winnicott's understanding that the intermediate contested space of transition was the site of symbol formation, creativity and locus of cultural production seems to build on Melanie Klein's thesis that External and internal situations are always interdependent, since introjection[15] and projection[16] operate side by side from the beginning of life. It acknowledges the anxiety and strain inherent in living with the tension created by the conflicting demands of inner phantasy and external reality

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[12] Phillips, *Winnicott*, p.118,

[13] Ibid., p.119. Winnicott calls the area of overlap between those individual preoccupations illusions, not because they are false, but because they combine the desired with the actual in tolerable ways.

[14] Kuhn, Annette, ed., *Little Madnesses: Winnicott, Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience* (London: IB Tauris, 2013) p. 154 .

[15] Introjection is the taking in of external qualities from objects and attributing them to the self.

[16] Projection is the act of projecting parts of the self into an object.

and makes it a place of creative production. It assumes an innate tendency to form a subjective image of an object and to transfer to it the emotional energy previously given to the object-mother; or to ease and relieve the mind of the weight of constant preoccupation with it by depositing it in an object that might not be lost, but be used as a substitute: put down, overlooked, its significance eventually dissipated. As such, his theory can be used (as in object-relation theory) to discuss the cathected object and its relation to the art object, since it makes space for consideration of the power and value of affect and attachment in relation to other formal and compositional properties. Thus in relation to the art object, the transitional object, as both *subjective object and [an] object objectively perceived'* depends on an inter-subjective area of metaphor, which is able to hold aspects of the pre-symbolic and symbolic within it.

The issue at stake in equating Winnicott's theory of translation is also intrinsic to the relation that can be drawn between the transitional object and art object, and by extension to the relation of art to language. Essentially this arises out of the ambiguous symbolic status of the transitional object. While it performs a symbolic function for the individual, its subjective nature means that it functions as a proto-, or presentational, symbol.[17] Compared to the more socially shared discursive or symbol proper that we find in the art object, or in language,[18] the transitional object is essentially idiosyncratic and un-shareable. As a bridge between the object-mother and the environment-mother "it has permanence, resilience and a degree of apparent autonomy. It is

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[17] See Kenneth Wright, *Vision and Separation: Between Mother and Baby* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), for his discussion and analysis of the proto and presentational symbol. "The presentational symbol is in relation to the proto symbol of the transitional object in as much as it looks back to the subjective pattern of experience with the mother and importantly and in contrast to the transitional object - in that it looks forward to the more fully separated symbol of representation as in the symbolic function of language which the subject can use to know the world." See also: Josie Grindrod, 'The Space In-between: Psychoanalysis and the Imaginary Realm of Art' (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2006)): who argues that this makes it possible to equate the art object with the presentational symbol, which evolves from the transitional object or proto-symbol.
[18] We are able to accept the artist's subjective phenomena because the work integrates the truth and life of the artist's inner experience with the language through which it is articulated and through which it is subsequently read by the viewer. Thus the artist has created a socially shared object if we do not need to ask: "did you make this or was it found?" because it is both subjectively made and found in social language.

"observable by others – not an hallucination' – but cannot have a comparable significance for them."[19] For it to remain significant to the individual its status must not be objectively challenged.

Although he is not clear how the progression is made, for Winnicott there is continuity through the "substance of illusion, that which is allowed to the infant, and which in adult life is inherent in art and religion"[20] between a first, private, object and an adult's subsequent use of a shared cultural tradition as it becomes useful to her. The object is part of a potential continuum of meaningful objects 'spread out over' the intermediate territory that constitutes the 'cultural field'.[21] The first attempt at symbol formation manifest in the transitional object or phenomenon arises out of the infant's response to loss and their capacity to associate an internal construct (their image and sense of the absent mother) with an objectively perceived real thing, and to create a new object invested with imaginative and subjective meaning that compensates for this loss. The process of symbol formation whereby we begin to discern and separate pattern from the object and progress along a continuum from proto-symbol to the creation of symbol proper mirrors a similar dynamic inherent to naming and language formation. This progression from direct to indirect object is at play in the ability to extrapolate a pattern and idea of form (cylinder, handle) and function (to drink from) from an object; to code it into a noun, or name, 'cup', which is the particular, original and significant first cup for the child, to transfer it to an anonymous, indeterminate other, 'a cup', which has the form and shape of "the cup", but is not same. It shadows the archetypical process of Plato's theory of the Forms.

Thus while the proto-symbol or transitional object contains a more direct, almost vicarious presence of the thing it represents, the symbol proper, or word, is less direct or iconic and more abstract in the way it communicates this relationship. It is generally held to be less invested, since as the distance between the two parties increases, as meaning becomes more

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[19] Phillips, *Winnicott*, p.116
[20] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p.7
[21] Phillips, *Winnicott*, p.117.

diffuse and detached, it can be freely transferred from object to object and used and adapted to produce knowledge in the world. This relationship is illustrated in Jonathan Swift's parody, which reverses the developmental movement from continuing attachment to the object and existence in the world of fixed or specific things towards a symbolic signifying existence free from the object, in order to ridicule the impulse to circumvent possibilities of misunderstanding created by the nuanced subtleties and manifold interpretations available in language in favour of a more cumbersome, but direct and unambiguous, correspondence.

> Since Words are only Names for *Things*, it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them, such *Things* as were necessary to express the particular Business they are to discourse on [...] which hath only this Inconvenience attending it; that if a Man's Business be very great, and of various Kinds, he must be obliged in Proportion to carry a greater Bundle of *Things* upon his Back, unless he can afford one or two strong Servants to attend him.[22]

Functioning like a tally corresponding to a left-luggage locker, words become a space into which the object can be deposited to relieve the interminable burden of carrying it around. And in this respect they share features of Winnicott's 'resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated.' However, connection to the object ensures that words do not become insubstantial. In moving from tangible reality into a psychic space dependent upon subjective perception and memory the virtual presence of the object becomes a shifting, mutating substance that weighs on the mind.

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[22] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), ed. Herbert Davis, vol.11,(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 169

Holding Space – Space of Translation – Space of Culture

Winnicott was not a translator negotiating the transfer of linguistic signifiers like the pairings used in previous chapters. However, his discussion of the creation and use of symbols and the transitional object use a model that is both linguistic and translational. It recognises interplay between the symbolic and semiotic as defined by Kristeva and the creative potential of word play in the form of synonymy and antinomy as a means of diffusion. Adam Phillips[23] has noted that Winnicott's descriptions and use of terminology for the transitional are inconsistent and mutable, and that Winnicott's terms shift, and his descriptions are made difficult to imagine or pin down. I would suggest that in part this is because he worked in an unstable space of metaphor and translation rather than of interpretation. Like language the transitional object that bridges the space of illusion is ceaselessly negotiated. It occupies and generates a space, which needed to reflect upon itself and redefine its role in order to evolve and remain creative.

At a functional or methodological level parallels can also be drawn between a practice of translation and Winnicott's theory of transitional objects and phenomena and the role that these play in the infant's gradual disillusionment from its sense of omnipotence towards a consciousness of itself as a separate subject in relation to an object. The growing awareness of the mother as other, of the space between and the use of the first not-me object to bridge a gap opened up by this realisation, could be understood as a theory which brings out and uses 'translational' aspects of the infant's earliest experiences.

As in language – in the idea of language development as a descent from a perfect language into manifold languages or Babelian multilingualism – in psychoanalysis the child's sense of loss of integrity and inevitable disillusionment that has to be managed by the mother emerges out of experience of separation from original union or perfect correspondence,

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[23]Phillips, *Winnicott*,

while guilt and indebtedness come with the growing realisation of one's own lack of omnipotence and completeness and the resultant sense of contingency and dependence on another to supply a lack. In translation, which at its core deals with problems of mediation and strategies of cultural connection, a similar dynamic becomes evident in the necessary interaction with the other, or 'alien'. When lack of equivalence in the mother, or first, tongue results in failure to supply meaning one is confronted with the alien's reality as other than we can conceive of. In translation, meaning – symbolic meaning, as contained in words – is repeatedly brought into question, taken apart and tested against another reality that reveals an asignifying and pre-symbolic aspect. Walter Benjamin noted that in this space between, in which symbolic meaning is dismantled, translation has the privilege of touching on and reconnecting with an original moment of symbol formation.

Adam Phillips has noted[24] that psychoanalysis along classical lines, prior to Winnicott, was concerned with the interpretation of the transference. In the mother-infant relationship there had always been an overlap between two sets of developmental needs, since both infant and mother were developing in relation to the other. The effect of Winnicott's work shifted the focus onto the area between these two parties and by implication brought into play issues of reciprocities within analytic treatment and attention to the previously neglected issue of the effect of the interests of the analyst on the process. In terms of the analytic process this shift in optic challenged established practice and shifted the balance of power between analyst and analysand, which in turn problematised the role of authoritative interpretation and raised issues of reciprocity and empathy in the analytic process. Thus, while the analyst had been assumed to be a relatively anonymous, neutral and disinterested party, attention was brought to the implication of their interests and action on the process.

> A sign of health in the mind is the ability of one individual to
> enter imaginatively and accurately into the thoughts and

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[24] See Phillips, *Winnicott.*

feelings and hopes and fears of another person, also to allow the other person to do the same to us. . . . . When we are face to face with a man, woman or child in our speciality, we are reduced to two human beings of equal status.[25]

Winnicott proposed that psychoanalytic treatment should not be exclusively interpretative, but first and foremost provide a congenial milieu, a 'holding environment' analogous to maternal care, in which the analyst acts as a kind of host. The analytic environment could be a 'transitional space for collaborative exchange"[26] in which, as Phillips has pointed out, "What Paul Ricoeur has called the "hermeneutic of suspicion' in Freud's work is replaced by the attempt to establish an analytic setting in which the patient does not undergo authoritative translation [*or be subject to authoritative interpretation*]- having his unconscious fed back to him, as it were - but is enabled by the analyst, as Winnicott wrote, 'to reveal himself to himself'.[27]

From my perspective, an ongoing "code, de-code, re-code' method intrinsic to a process of translation allows Winnicott to bring about this shift in emphasis from an interpretative, hierarchical model of psychoanalysis towards a translational, horizontal model in which

> ... development through the use of Transitional Phenomena was not for Winnicott, as it was for Freud, a process of cumulative disillusionment; it was not a growing capacity for mourning, but a growing capacity to tolerate the continual and increasingly sophisticated illusionment – disillusionment - re-illusionment process throughout the life-cycle.[28]

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[25] D.W. Winnicott, 'Cure' [1970], in: Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd, Madeleine Davis, eds., *Home is Where We Start From*: *Essays by a Psychoanalyst*, (London: Penguin, 1986), pp. 112-123 (p. 117)

[26] Phillips, *Winnicott,* p.118
[27] Ibid., p.11 My italics.
[28] Phillips, *Winnicott,* p.121.

This more optimistic approach, rather than focusing exclusively on the loss of perfect correspondence between language and object, sense and expression, focuses on the potential in transition. Similar to Benjamin's understanding of translation its creative potential results from the slippage between object and subject, language and referent and the disorder, instability and aporia that a language encounters in the space where it is dismantled and held prior to reassembly in another. Thus the interface between two parties, cultures or languages allows a space of translation or transition to emerge as a place of encounter, negotiation and development as well as holding and providing a focus for the effect of irreplaceable loss through repair.

Winnicott located culture and art in play as a site of potentiality in which internal or idiosyncratic representations interact with outer, more fixed and objective representations.

> It is assumed that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience [which] is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play.[29]

Rather than understand creativity as the mysterious possession of a few gifted individuals, this approach regarded meaning-making and creativity as integral to healthy living.[30] This view of cultural production involved an inclusive attitude – a democratic, horizontal rather than hierarchical discipline-led or elitist approach to creation. It made way for the thought that creativity and art are fundamental to being and that everyone has the

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[29] Winnicott, 'Transitional objects and Transitional Phenomena', p.96. For Winnicott: "Play is exciting, not because of the background of instinct, but because of the precariousness that is inherent in it, since it always deals with the knife edge between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived." Winnicott pp: 205-206, Playing and Culture, 1968, Collected Works of D.W. Winnicott, Vol 8, 1967-1968 p,263 quoted on p.12, Psychoanalysis and Art, The Winnicott Legacy, Malcolm Bowie, Ch.1 Art, Creativity, Living, edited by Lesley Caldwell, Karnac, 2000.

[30] Winnicott's is a long way from 'Freud's view of culture as the sublimation of the instinctual life, or the wishful compensation for the frustrations imposed by reality. In the Freudian scheme culture signifies instinctual renunciation; for Winnicott it was the only medium for self-realization'. (Phillips, *Winnicott*, p. 119.)

potential to produce and appreciate art.[31] To paraphrase Winnicott: *whenever we feel moved by a piece of music, or work of literature, respond to a landscape or something in the outside world that takes on a particular significance for us, we are engaging in the creative process. We are endowing the outside world with elements of our own inner experience and in so doing we give it life, a life that is personal to us.*

Winnicott's transitional third space as a place of ongoing dynamic paradox resonates with and would facilitate concepts of culture as translation that we see, for example, in the work of contemporary cultural theorists, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edouard Glissant and Homi Bhabha. Central to these theories and to Winnicott's theory of the transitional in human development is the assumption that:

> .... the subject does not preexist or exist independently of a formation through symbolic systems. Thus visual art ... cannot be characterized as an *expression* of an existing self, but rather [as] elements of the ongoing *formation* of the subject through representation. The concept of subjectivity is also premised on the idea that knowledge is mediated through representation, which is always historically and culturally specific.[32]

Joanna Drucker's concept of culture assumes Walter Benjamin's theory and a Romantic understanding that we exist within language:

> We recognize things, once again, *in* language, not first of all by means of it. Thus its incommensurability: inhabiting language as we do, we are unable to take its measure, other than to recognize

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[31] The "substance of illusion, that which is allowed to the infant, and which in adult life is inherent in art and religion." (Winnicott, 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena', p. ??)

[32] Johanna Drucker, *Theorising Modernism: Visual Art and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press,1996), p.148.

that 'the existence of language . . . . is coextensive . . . with absolutely everything." For us, there is no outside of language. [33]

In the context of Gayatri Spivak's concept of culture as translation and in relation to her reading of Melanie Klein this focus on the in-between in culture leads to an understanding that the: *'work of translation is the incessant shuttle that is 'life'.* Spivak similarly sees this translational dynamic beginning at a fundamental, primary stage in our development, when in the early process of its development the human infant grabs onto one thing and then successively onto other things.

> This grabbing (begreifen) of an outside indistinguishable from an inside constitutes an inside going back and forth and coding everything into a sign-system by the thing(s) grasped. One can call this crude coding a 'translation'. In this never-ending weaving, violence translates into conscience and vice versa. From birth to death this 'natural' machine, programming the mind perhaps as genetic instructions program the body (where does the body stop and mind begin?), is partly metapsychological and therefore outside the grasp of the mind. Thus 'nature' passes and repasses into 'culture' in a work or shuttling site of violence (deprivation - evil - shocks the infant system-in-the-making more than satisfaction, (...): the violent production of the precarious subject of reparation and responsibility. [34]

Spivak's use of Klein, quoted above, describes the infant's experience of, and interaction with, the world and by extension a pattern of interaction between subject and object, physical and psychological, and the process of meaning-making and symbol formation that occurs in the process of

[33] Howard Eiland & Michael W Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life,* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2014), p. 88
[34] Spivak, 'Translation as Culture', p.13.

acquiring the mother, or first, tongue and subsequent languages. However, while Winnicott bases his work within this area of interplay and an economy of indebtedness and guilt he significantly replaces the 'violence' and instinctual ambivalence of Klein's theory with 'love' and pre-ambivalent dependence emphasising the importance and potential of an in-between holding space of paradox to the development of the infant, which continues throughout life.

Similarly, for Homi Bhabha, when two or more parties (cultures, individuals) interact a third aspect develops. This ambiguous and ambivalent area has the potential to challenge occidental ideas of time and linear progression and destabilise a pervasive, hierarchical sense of the *"historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People."* Within this purview culture has no fixity, it is not innate, original or pure, but the result of ongoing processes of interaction involving appropriation, translation and adaptation.

> Culture [..] is both transnational and translational. [...]
> The transnational dimension of cultural transformation –
> migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation – makes the
> process of cultural translation a complex form of
> signification. The natural(ized), unifying discourse [...]
> cannot be readily referenced. The great though
> unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you
> increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the
> invention of tradition[35]

Culture as translation is not static, nor a given, but continually evolves through processes of encounter. In the context of post-colonial debate concerning power relations and movement between the centre and the periphery and the product of cultural overlap, Homi Bhabha used the perceived potential of translation to construct culture identified by

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[35] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 247

Benjamin to propose the use of a 'translational culture' as a new point of departure for studying cultural encounter. [36]

Alison Britton: Practice in Paradox

In the second part of this chapter I discuss the work of ceramicist Alison Britton with reference to her more recent and less discussed work that found expression in her exhibition 'Standing and Running' at the Marsden Woo Gallery (Feb-Mar 2012). This approach does not seek to ignore the substantial body of her earlier work;[37] rather, it brings to the fore less discussed themes to which she has returned throughout her career. It also allows me to explore the importance of paradox and in-between-ness to her practice through another way of writing – from being with, or alongside, the artist, that draws on a translational dynamic.

Britton acknowledges the influence of her father, James Britton,[38] an English teacher and educationalist who also drew on the work of Lev

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[36] Ibid., pp. 227-28,
"Unlike Derrida and de Man, I am less interested in the metonymic fragmentation of the 'original'. I am more engaged with the "foreign" element that reveals the interstitial: insists in the textile superfluity of folds and wrinkles; and becomes the 'unstable element of linkage,'[36] the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions through which 'newness comes into the world.' The foreign element 'destroys the original's structures of reference and sense of communication as well not simply by negotiating it but by negotiating the disjunction in which successive cultural temporalities are 'preserved in the work of history and at the same time cancelled'

[37] Through her career as a ceramicist, writer, curator and teacher Alison Britton's work has been analysed and written about in depth by insightful writers such as Tanya Harrod, Peter Dormer, Linda Sandino, Martina Margetts, John Houston and Glenn Adamson, and in many ways much of what is to be said about her work has been articulated. For examples of this see: Tanya Harrod, *Alison Britton: Ceramics In Studio* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1990), John Houston, *The Abstract Vessel* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1991), Linda Sandino, *Complexity and Ambiguity: The Ceramics of Alison Britton* (London: Barrett Marsden, 2000). Much of this writing has given biographical information and tended to concentrate on the formal properties of the work, the quality of painting and structural composition. Passing reference is given to motivation and other concerns.

[38] "I want to associate spontaneous shaping, whether in speech or writing, with the moment by moment interpretative process by which we make sense of what is happening around us; to see each as an instance of the pattern-forming propensity of man's mental processes. Thus, when we come to write, what is delivered to the pen is in part already shaped, stamped with the image of our own ways of perceiving. But the intention to *share*, inherent in spontaneous shaping sets up a demand for further shaping."
(Britton. Shaping at the point of utterance, pp.13-20, Learning to Write: First Language/Second Language. (selected papers from the 1979 CCTE Conference, Ottawa, Canada. Eds. Freedman, Pringle and Yalden. Longman, London, 1983. p16,

Vygotsky and Michael Polanyi in relation to language and learning. Alison Britton grew up in an environment familiar with Winnicott's ideas.[39] She was related to Winnicott through his marriage to her aunt, Claire Britton, a psychiatric social worker who maintained a close working relationship with her husband: her contribution to Winnicott's concept of the 'holding environment' has been acknowledged and discussed by Joel Kanter in his recent biography of her. Britton became more directly or consciously aware of Winnicott's ideas and his writing during her time at art college. In the 1970s Britton read *Playing and Reality*, which she cites as an important book for her since it described transitional phenomena, the roots of creativity and importance of art to culture and society. In 'Overlap', her MA dissertation at the Royal College of Art (RCA), written while she lived in Chester Square with her aunt, she looked at the relationship of painting to decoration and through it to that of function to fiction. She drew on Winnicott's thought, Arthur Koestler's ideas of bisociation,[40] the writing of Oscar Wilde and on Gombrich's ideas on decoration as set out in his series of Wrightsman Lectures, subsequently published in *The Sense of Order*. After leaving the RCA, one of Britton's first commissions was a tile fireplace surround for the psychoanalyst Marion Milner, whose ideas, explored in her book *On Not Being Able to Paint*, were also influential on Britton's thinking.[41]

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[39] Britton's relationship to Winnicott has been documented in the literature and in interviews as a point of information referred to in passing. Britton is open about the connection, which began in 1951 when her aunt, Clare Britton, a psychiatric social worker, married Donald Winnicott. They had met during the war, when both were involved in a project working with evacuees in Oxfordshire. Britton recalls that as a family they saw the most of her aunt and uncle, who were always "fun, full of joy, excitement"[39] and regular visitors while she was growing up. Subsequently while studying in London she got to know them quite well as she would stay with Winnicott to keep him company. She says that she adored Donald Winnicott, who she remembers as a "fantastic, significant and unusual figure, who was not like other people, but had a special quality".[39] Her memory of him is as a good communicator who had retained a childlike quality and was playful conversationally, who preferred to sit the floor than a chair, but was also very sophisticated intellectually.

[40] Koestler's thesis, as set out in *The Act of Creation* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), is that a creative act is an act (not merely association, but) of 'bisociation'. Thus the creative process uses comparison, abstraction, categorization, analogies and metaphors to blend elements from previously unrelated matrices or frames of thought i.e. "any ability, habit, skill any pattern of ordered behaviour governed by a 'code' of fixed rules"(p.38) to form a new matrix of meaning.

[41] See Alison Britton, 'The Fiction of Form', *Journal of Modern Craft*, 2 (1) (2009), 91-99 "in the monograph Harrod wrote for the 1990 exhibition (retrospective of AB's work), I still enjoy the gift of this quotation from the psychoanalyst Marion Milner's book *On Not*

It has become commonplace for analysts to acknowledge the transformational value of great art, literature and music, but it is absolutely characteristic of Milner's idiom that she is able to find the transformational value in moments and acts of the most ordinary, everyday kind. There is something about the certainty of the value of what is found, simply by the fact of being found, that guarantees its meaning for the subject. There is an absence of striving.[42]

This quality is shared by Winnicott's transitional object, found and chosen by the child as it separates from the mother. These objects are day to day, deeply familiar, unremarkable everyday objects. As the child grows and matures the transitional object becomes less meaningful, but not forgotten, as the need for the object to provide comfort to the child becomes diffused, and other means, such as friendships, gradually fulfil this need. Unlike Melanie Klein's concept of the part object, which fulfils the role of fetish, or object, onto which all the child's fear and desire for the lost maternal object are projected, Winnicott's transitional object is not purely symbolic, but has actual value in that it exists and is in and of, contingent to, the world surrounding the child. As such it gives room for the process of becoming able to accept the difference between difference and similarity.

Being Able to Paint (London: William Heinemann, 1950) (published under the name of Joanna Field):

> "I woke one morning and saw two jugs on the table; without any mental struggle I saw the edges in relation to each other, and how gaily they almost seemed to ripple now they were freed from this grimy practical object of enclosing an object and keeping it in its place." (p.19)

Here Milner is writing about perception and representation, about suddenly seeing form; an artist taking charge of a sight in the world and feeling moved, through the eyes, enough to paint it; about the process of catching an image out of reality, and making an imaginative construct that stands for the real thing. I can feel all that – have felt it as a painter and a photographer stimulated by what I see. But I feel something three dimensional too, shapes in the chest. I don't know what jugs Milner was looking at, but I can visualise *my* two jugs on a table, a double image, compare and contrast a slice of life and still-life at once (....). These words of Milner's are like a small manifesto for me. It's not about being kept, neither me nor the pots, in our place. My pots, too, ask to be freed from any grimy practical business, although I am stuck with the container form - I need to make open objects, not closed ones."

[42] Claire Pajaczkowska, 'On Humming: Reflections on Marion Milner's contribution to Psychoanalysis' in Lesley Caldwell, ed., *Winnicott and the Psychoanalytic Tradition* (London: Karnac, 2008), p. 47

Winnicott's discussion of the use of transitional objects and transitional phenomena draws on observations made from practice in order to theorise and draw attention to the importance of a third, intermediate, space. Similarly, Britton has chosen to work in a creative in-between space of paradox, of interaction between subject and object, playing (fiction) and reality, function and form, practice and its representation. Her practice of vessel/pot-making explores the need for holding spaces that frame this instability within the context of the day to day. Winnicott's thought as a parallel, or companion, text to her work brings out these and other aspects of Alison Britton's contribution to a modern tradition of ceramic practice through the role she played from the 1970s onwards as one of the pivotal figures in a new movement in ceramics.[43] The form of studio pottery that she was instrumental in fostering through her overlapping practices as artist, writer and curator entailed a development from the ethical pot promoted by the Leach tradition[44] to an idea of the pot as meta-pot[45] and self-conscious, cathected pot: an idea of the pot as a psychic, relational space, and of vessel-making as an in-between practice that works within and draws on the contested space[46] of a border territory where disciplines

[43] "My work in the future may be seen to have belonged to a 'group' . .. I could say that this group is concerned with the outer limits of function; function, or an idea of possible function, is crucial, but is just one ingredient in the final presence of the object, and is not its only motivation. I think that this preoccupation, which can be perceived in various fields and materials, stands out as a distinct contribution over the last ten years." (*The Maker's Eye* [exh. cat.], (London: Crafts Council,1982). p.16

[44] As we saw in Chapter One, Leach's translation was based on a mediated impression of an oriental tradition that he assumed to be authentic. His approach as a translator was ruled by an overriding sense of fidelity or indebtedness to the original in the translation of it from source to target culture. This resulted in a strong, almost unquestioning, sense of loyalty, or duty not to betray the original in carrying the message across – to ensure accurate transmission of what he perceived as an authentic, indigenous eastern tradition. The ethical aspect of his idea of potting could be seen to derive from this, while his standard retained an idea that the message could be carried across intact, ring-fenced, that there were inviolable absolutes. However, it also resulted in a rigidity which failed to appreciate the openness inherent to translation and potential for infinite difference.

[45] "A modern novel is both made of, and about language. Some of the objects I have chosen are similarly self-referential, that is, they perform a function and at the same time are drawing attention to what their own rules are about. In some ways such objects stand back and describe, or represent themselves as well as being. In the analogy with the novel 'function' stands for 'story' as the central context." (*The Maker's Eye*, cited in Harrod, *Alison Britton: Ceramics in Studio*, p. 32)

[46] The sense of a wasteland or un-owned place, belonging to no-one, neglected by or caught between disputing interests is important to hold on to in relation to Britton's work. She seems to have made a conscious decision not to enter a fine art world, to remain outside, and, in Britton's case, on the fence. See one of her earliest works, *Survivor Cup'*, in which a bird figure sits on the rim of a cup and inverted saucer. However, it also alludes to the feminist aspect inherent to her work. Like many other women artists and

converge and overlap. Britton's practice has involved and been facilitated by dialogue and interplay between the categories of design, art and craft. As such it exploits a historical, conceptual division between useful artefact or object and use-less art object, and feeds off the resulting contextual contingencies of domestic, studio and gallery spaces. Like Winnicott's theory of the transitional object, her work draws on these combinations and is on a continuum

> ... that provides by virtue of being more than the sum of its parts a new, third alternative. And it is never merely a substitute for something else.[47]

As we see in the quote below, drawing on analogies from literature, and the demands of differing genres such as fact and fiction, function and form, prose, poetry and pottery, she uses alliteration and consonance to consciously confuse and commingle literary and aesthetic terms. She is steadfast in insisting on the possibility of maintaining paradox: to be both poetic and prosaic, verbal and visual, and to work in the middle ground, on a continuum that, rather than accepting dichotomy as separation and definiteness, is fuelled and made distinctive by its exploitation of it.

> There is prose and there is poetry. In pottery there seems to remain a possibility for providing both, sometimes in the same object. Pottery can be about design or about art, and occasionally both. Pots succeed because they move the spirit, like art, or because they exactly fill a requirement, like design. That one discipline can straddle both areas with dual emphasis is distinctive.[48]

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theorists working in the West in the 1970s (Roszika Parker, Judy Chicago, Mary Kelly, to name a few of the best known), the decision to work in an applied art or craft was also a deeply political and subversive one.

[47] Phillips, *Winnicott*, p114.

[48] Peter Dormer, *The New Ceramics: Trends +Traditions* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986), p. 7. For Britton, poetry is inherent to pots. In the paragraph quoted below, the words, like the concepts they symbolise, are open to misapprehension and confusion: poetry and pottery, poet and pot.

As Quentin Blake observed about her work: "The work may begin as a jug, but it becomes a freestanding story, a poem, a situation.", *The Work of Alison Britton*, 14

In terms of her artistic practice, Britton's adherence to the vessel form is a primary example of this. While some of her contemporaries have abandoned it in favour of sculpture,[49] her commitment to a tradition of pot-making – to a domestic, everyday, human scale and to connotations of containment and use implicit within this – has remained constant. Her refusal to renounce function and parallel 'use' of the vessel as a predominantly formal and conceptual consideration has meant that her practice has necessarily continued to operate at the edges of institutionally delineated art worlds. In 1993 she wrote in a note to herself:

> I have thought for a long while that "new Ceramics", as it developed initially around us in the 1980s, was an artificial territory - entertainingly ambiguous and rich in first and second glances. But its borders are disconcertingly vague, it is perhaps a limbo, a place to stay in temporarily. The way out would seem to be towards 'real' sculpture or towards 'real'

November 1979-12 January 1980, Crafts Council, London [exh. cat.](London: Crafts Council, 1979)

See also: V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (New York; London, Seminar Press, 1973), pp. 23-24: "It is possible to conclude that if from one perspective the assertion that poetic language is a particular case of natural language is well-founded, then from another perspective the view that natural language is to be considered a particular case of poetic language is just as convincing. "Poetic language" and 'natural language' are particular manifestations of more general systems that are in a constant state of continual tension and mutual translation, and at the same time are not wholly mutually translatable; therefore the question of the primacy of one or the other communication-modelling system is determined by the functional direction of a specific act of translation, that is, by what is translated into what."

[49] Alison Britton, on her friends' decision to break links with the craft world: "I think you could look at what Jacqui Poncelet and Susanna Heron decided to do in an genderist light. I think they wanted to get further than a) women and b) people in the applied arts can get and they want to play the real game with the real rules in the big pond. And that's largely a male pond isn't it? (.....) I thought it was sad to feel you've got to play with their rules, with their materials - before she was changing the rules. I admire their courage. I think my own feelings go in two directions: one is that I can't imagine wanting to make something very different from what I'm making now. I think there's still a lot of material in this patch which goes on being interesting. I think I'm more interested in changing something from the inside, in actually staying where I am and saying, "But it can be this, or it can be that," rather than getting out and giving up. I so see it like a defection in a way. It's double edged - I think they're wonderful and I admire them and like almost everything they do - on the one hand - and on the other I think it's a pity that this is the only step they think is worth taking." (Alison Britton, quoted in Harrod, *Alison Britton: Ceramics in Studio*, p.44

function. Many of my ceramicist friends have made one of these choices. But I am still on the fence, spinning out an old enjoyment of the hybrid.[50]

In the Collector's Space

By way of introduction to Alison Britton's body of work, which spans three decades, I accompanied the artist to Highgate on a visit to Ed Wolf's collection of her pots - some 70 pots, collected since 1979. The visit took place at a significant moment, since in consultation with Britton Ed Wolf had begun the process of dispersing this largest collection of Britton's work - strategically placing some of these pots for posterity in national and regional collections. This morning the V&A's movers had come to collect seven of her pots their curators had chosen for their collection.

Ed Wolf has been a longstanding collector (or patron), and from what I can tell he has made a benign, nurturing and ongoing financial commitment to the artist and her work. His collection contains the work of other ceramicists - there's a dinner service by Carol McNichol, an early tea set by Angus Suttie and work by Martin Smith, for example, but none have been collected as assiduously or consistently as Britton's. Some pieces by other artists sit gathering dust on less impressively arranged shelving in a corner facing Britton's body of work. According to an article that refers to Wolf's collection, seeing her work for the first time made him realise that there was more to life than Bernard Leach. He has continued to collect her pots because her work and its affinity with Braque's paintings appealed to him, and because he likes and feels comfortable with them.[51]

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[50] Alison Britton, 'Postscript: Skill and Anxiety', in: *Seeing Things*, p.150.
Britton wrote in 1987: "Pots that I have made have been *like* jugs (though some of them have *been* jugs) and recently like parts of the human figure. They continue to play with the gap between first and second glance, in the belief that gaps are thrilling because the imagination must run into them at a moment of engagement with an object that hopefully shifts you temporarily out of the ordinary world. That is another kind of function." Alison Britton, quoted in Harrod, *Alison Britton: Ceramics in Studio,* p. 45
[51] 'From Florida to your room on a moped', *Hampstead and Highgate Express*, February 6th, 2004, Available at http://www.indoorgardendesign.com/companyinfo/images/H&H-Feb04.pdf) Accessed …

It is unusual to be able to see so many pieces from an artist's oeuvre together in a space that does not form part of a retrospective in a gallery environment. Displays in museums and galleries create particular viewing environments that establish reverent distance – temporal, spatial or psychosocial – between object and viewer. While less institutionally determined, the display at Wolf's offices established its own distinctive environment indicative of the ongoing relationship between artist and collector.

The relationship that developed has been an important one that is valued by both parties. His act of collecting her work has evolved into a thing in itself that has been exhibited on a number of occasions.[52] In 'New Work and the Ed Wolf Collection of Alison Britton Pots' at the Barratt Marsden gallery (2005), alongside her new largest work, which she placed on plinths in the centre of the space, Britton exhibited this private collection of 70 pots on a high shelf tracing the perimeter of the gallery's three internal walls "like an archive hovering in the upper margins of sight."[53] Britton's relationship to the collector, and also to the collection, is significant in that it displays an attitude to past and present, tradition and creation both within her own practice and in a more abstract sense. As Susan Stewart points out, "The collection does not displace attention to the past; rather the past is at the service of the collection [...] the past lends authenticity to the collection."[54] Britton's use of the collection is in keeping with her practice as an artist that, despite situating herself in between disciplines has managed to work with and within the institution: the museum, the gallery, the art market, and the educational establishment, with and within indigenous and international ceramic traditions of vessel-making, decoration and painting and with and within the corpus of her own work, which now and with hindsight forms part of the canon that she draws on.

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[52] For example: 1988 exhibition of Ed Wolf's collection of Alison Britton's pots at Parnham House, Dorset.

[53] Alison Britton, 'Losing the Plot', essay for the exhibition 'Containing' at the Barratt Marsden Gallery, 30 March - 12 May 2007.

[54] Susan Stewart, *On Longing*: *Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), p.151.

The majority of the collection resides at Wolf's company's offices in Highgate from which he runs his interior and garden design company, while some pieces from the collection are kept at home and inhabit a more intimate, embedded environment.

Figure 25. Ed Wolf Collection of Pots by Alison Britton

The pots don't stand on ceremony, but sit on rows of open wooden modular shelving against a white wall at the end of a bright, rectangular glass-fronted room whose windows open onto a yard full of plants stored for use. The room looks as if it is used for holding business meetings, as awards line the back wall and a large table and chairs occupy the central space. The collection of Britton's pots faces the doorway, so as I walked into the room it was the first thing that I saw. I use the word 'thing' advisedly and in a particular sense, since this first sight and the manner of its display established it as an entity, which I encountered as a thing rather than a series of discrete objects that just happened to be in the same place. As a gathering or assembly of objects or body of work it confronts us with the artist as practitioner, as career and sum of their parts – and presents

ongoing artistic activity as a project that evolves through the habitual practice of doing one's thing relative to the institution and its capacity to turn these objects into things.

In this, as in any collection, the artist's body of work has been filtered through the selection of the collector, according to aesthetic judgements that Britton hasn't always understood or concurred with. Together they make up a wall of colour and form in which taller vessels predominate over flatter, more horizontal, plate shapes. But the pragmatic, functional, dresser-like layout of the shelves has the effect of flattening the work. It diminishes the impact of its three-dimensionality and dampens multi-faceted complexity into low relief against the backdrop of the wall behind. The work is safe on shelves. Their function has been removed, and, neutralised, they settle into the role of objects made to be collected and looked at. Like a cabinet the display lends itself to a visual, hands-off apperception of the valuable. It sets up a barrier, a wall of renown or reputation, and encourages the visual appreciation of a particular plane of a piece that denies the more physical, intimate form of engagement required by these complicated objects which would make a claim on the space around them and solicit interaction. While the overall mass of the objects remains, there is an apparent loss of bulk. Collections are impressive, but they also impress, leaving their own – collector's – mark on things, and in doing so they compress: they squeeze together and condense individual objects into a thing. In this configuration, which distances, the collection acts more as a visual reference and I began to understand Britton's decision to display it in the gallery as *'an archive hovering in the upper margins of sight.'* An artist's body of work settling slowly into a line, a sedimentary unconscious, resurfacing periodically as aspects of it are stirred and rise to inform and find expression in new work.

Gradually my eye began to distinguish individual pots from the crowd and was drawn to particular shapes and painted surfaces. Although each vessel had been dated, it was clear from their formal qualities that they

weren't arranged chronologically according to a linear narrative of creative exploration and progression. Nor, despite their flattening effect, did I feel that the shelves were being used as a device, like the running line Britton had used for her 2005 and 2007 shows:[55] the *long horizontal to inscribe with odd objects placed on it like words in a sentence.* If this was the intention, it emulated a kind of automatic writing that didn't seem to conform to the grammar of a particular code. Aesthetic appreciation of which form, colour or surface composition would sit well in relation to another could have guided placement, but I suspect other criteria that were used resulted from pragmatic concerns such as size and the optimisation of space. Viewing the wall of pots in this way I began to appreciate that Britton's practice produces work where

> [. . .] are all different, but pieces of work are not isolated. Each one is part of a chain that is pulling along a slow sequence of ideas. Progress is not necessarily linear, or smooth, there are loops and reversals and the picking up of old threads.[56]

Familiarity through research directed my eye as I began to track Britton's well-documented progression from figuration to abstraction. In the earlier work the skin of the pot provided a picture plane for a painter, but as the form began to demand more of the viewer so she moved away from images on its surface, and from figurative and narrative representation towards abstraction and interaction between form and surface.[57] Her preoccupation with the pot as body, and as a cathected, psychic space, is made manifest in this work exploring the other, both within the self and without. Earlier, more conventional, jug shapes evolved into deconstructed complex constructions, diagrams evoking the dynamics of

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[55] 'Containing', Barrett Marsden Gallery, London, 2007; 'New Work and the Ed Wolf Collection of Alison Britton Pots', Barratt Marsden Gallery, London, 2005.
[56] Alison Britton, 'The Story So Far', *Ceramic Review,* 129 (1991).
[57] "I think that the 1979 Crafts Council show was the beginning of being non-figurative. The last figurative phase was a painful time and I didn't know how to follow it. (....) You are putting on one side some quite articulated stories if you stop being figurative. It felt like development - that I didn't need them any more and it was somehow pithier to be abstract. I was becoming more sensitive about three dimensions and if you have a very strong feeling about the solidity of form you can't draw a picture on it." Harrod, *Alison Britton: Ceramics in Studio*, p. 28.

social interaction, in which openings, handles, spouts, indentations, bulges and folds were analysed as places of intercourse, of invitation, acceptance and evasion, connection and rejection. It is testimony to the psychological complexity of some of her work that her pieces, like people, are able to embody such differing and conflicting impulses. Some single stand-alone pots and pairs or trios of pots formed in relation each to each other evolved into composite double- or sometimes triple-chambered vessels that display a range of relationships. As Linda Sandino has commented,

> They appear as "pairs", sometimes as the official marriage of (male) jug and (female) bowl. Many such as Green Double Pot [1993], . . . , and even dishes, display a more intimate supportive 'togetherness' beyond conventional pairing. [58]

The double form – pots 'welded together, bridged or as a separated pair"[59] – described by Britton as 'the most important form I have ever made', combines her fundamental interest in the relationship of nature to culture and I think with a lived, physical experience of maternity and mothering and understanding of the importance of both to a generative, matrixial idea of culture.

> ... it is in pregnancy that we see the articulation of the threshold between nature and culture, the place of margin between the biological 'reality' of splitting cells and the cultural 'reality' of the beginning of the symbolic. Out of this dividing - this process of differentiation and relation - the subject is generated, both created and separated from what it is not; and that initial separation/joining has a reproductive capacity that is the basis for the reproductive capacity for all signifiers. [60]

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[58] Sandino, *Complexity and Ambiguity,* p. 26
[59] Alison Britton, unpublished notes for 'Fiction of Form', [lecture], University of Colorado Boulder (2014).
[60] Stewart, *On Longing,* p. X

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In view of the loss of seven pots to the museum and subsequent, scheduled donations to other institutions to deplete it further, we considered the practicalities of rearranging the remaining collection. As the collection grew, pots had become crowded onto the four shelves and larger ones been made to sit in a row on the carpet floor, a formation that curiously brought to mind the formal arrangement of a cohort captured in a school photograph. However, now more space could be made around each piece, and the larger ones lifted off the floor onto a shelf. Similar organisational decisions – finding a suitable location; the construction and expansion of flexible shelving to accommodate it – must have been an ongoing feature of the life of the collection as it grew and developed with each acquisition. But this operation was different in that it concerned its gradual dissolution rather than its composition. It was a decision only Britton could make, since it involved a degree of transgression, of upheaval and disorder – taking all the pots down from their places, disturbing the delicate cobwebs of connective tissue and surface dusting of a benign neglect, adjusting the heights between shelves and then replacing the pots in another different order – that only a sense of entitlement and intimacy engendered by parentage or ownership might give.

Britton decided to reconfigure the collection, so I helped. As we removed the pots from the shelves I was made aware of the shift in perception brought about by being able to apprehend – to hold and handle – an object that environmental factors would generally only permit a visual perusal of. Holding Britton's pieces I began to appreciate her insistence on arguing for the need to maintain a place for the creation of unique, individual objects or works of art in the face of current trends within applied art that focus on the multiple and its relation to mass-production. As I lifted the pieces down from the shelves I had to consider how to hold each one. Some of the earlier more figurative jug pieces have obvious, almost run-of-the-mill handles that seem to invite an habitual, at-arms-length, one-handed way of picking them up. As the work developed these appendages became more awkward to handle. Some became enlarged and

lug-like – too large 'get a handle on' – while others shrank, withered or receded into the body of the pot, whose size, shape and weight often precluded holding onto the handle as the sole means of support. This work confronts us physically and sensually with the psychosocial problem of finding a way into the object and the other. The mind and the body are required to respond, eyes search for openings and angles and the other hand, arm and torso have to come into play. As I carry some across the room and feel their rounded curves inert in the crook of my arm, I find that I'm inclined to cradle the pot, to hold it closer like a still baby swaddled. These evoke memories of maternity and mothering, of containing an alien within, and of holding another as it becomes external to and separate from – ambivalent - to one's self.

The torso-like forms seem to invite a more adult embrace, but the carapace is unresponsive, shielded and defensive. Others are more awkward, sharp-elbowed and unapologetically difficult to handle. Holding some of these rigid, less forthcoming forms brings to mind a child – back arched and joints locked, in a physical expression of autonomy and assertion of individual will that will not be moved. Unexpected rough edges, the folds and pleats of complex concertinaed surfaces and ungainly protrusions of hostile, aggressive angles, must be negotiated and accommodated. Each requires time and asks for a particular form of engagement.[61] In this sense her work argues for the recognition of the individual in an environment

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[61] Alison Britton, unpublished notes for 'Pairing Practices', [lecture], University of Boulder Colorado (2014). I wrote a few years ago: "The shapes I have been concerned with in recent pieces bring a sense of the body even closer. I have been building lumps and depressions into the container that make it inviting to pick up; they can be like handles but are sometimes like limbs. These growths and clefts lean towards comedy and ugliness, and set a problem for the painted surface to reincorporate".

See also Linda Sandino, *Complexity and Ambiguity*, in relation to the relationship of pot to body in Britton's work: 'The mid-90's sees the emergence of works that are less angular, less photogenic, more solid in their awkwardness, new born but also a mature roundness, which is not to do with the roundness of jugs or bowls. It seems to me significant that openings are smaller, the body closed off . . . the recent pieces present an almost physical stance, an echo of a human presence embodied in clay. The exploration of visual forms, the exaggeration of functional signs gives way to a quest for forms as representations, or symbols, of human presence. Handles look like arms, holes like eyes. A metamorphosis has occurred in which the pot has taken on the idea of a person while still retaining its idea as a Britton vessel.'

that functions on economies of scale. Thus at a fundamental level her work is politically personal in that it rejects the uniformity of a one-size-fits-all model of mass production and demands that individual attention be given to the idiosyncrasies and complexities of each piece. We are invited to respond to the pieces as to other personalities.

Although as a maker and creator Britton seldom abandons a pot, she has preferences, or favourites, and as we work I sense from the way she responds to her pots that she bears a sense of relation to them, of ambivalence, affect and attachment. She knows how to hold them and how stable they are, which facet or profile shows each one to advantage from a particular angle of sight and which piece stands best in relation to another. The experience reinforces the significance of the human scale of her work and its development through careful crafting. Being able to hold her individual pots is important; being able to modify, manipulate and handle them through all the stages of their creative development goes beyond mere conformism to the dimensions of domestic scale in decorative or applied art. This is not indicative of an unthinking adherence to the limiting conventions of a discipline that relegates the work to the level of a lesser art, but a way of working between, and drawing on, the qualities of differing disciplines in order to explore the human in a day-to-day, everyday interaction with and through objects on a human scale.

> I felt and still feel that making things to exist in an ideal white cube space is nowhere as interesting as making things for people to live with and use. Making things to be used in a domestic context seemed, at that time, to be a truly revolutionary area to work in.

> The crafts have always seemed to me to be more radical than the fine arts because they are about changing the way people live. [....] For me the distinction is that things which are made to live in art galleries only have to sustain the viewer's interest

for a few minutes, whereas things made for the domestic context will be seen and used everyday and must be sophisticated and complex enough to remain interesting, as well as being simple enough to be a pleasure to use.[62]

Studio Space: Work in Progress

As part of the process of preparing to write about Britton's work I made a series of visits to her in her studio, an ex-kosher butcher's shop in Stamford Hill, in east London, to talk to her about her work and to watch it develop. The studio is Britton's space: a space which she has tellingly described as "another kind of home".[63] She allows people to come in, or pass through it – her studio partner, Bryan Illsley, paints in the shed in the back yard – but she owns it and works there on her own terms. It is not a constantly negotiated or contested space; however, like her work it embodies fundamental ambivalence and similar multi-chambered complexity.

The front door opens out onto the broad pavement of what was a small terrace of local shops. Now painted in a tastefully muted tone of grey, the original wide shop-window-paned frontage remains, but where once a clear glass window advertised the fresh meat of its stock on sale and lured in passing trade, its bottom half is now frosted to obscure the view of what lies within. As its previous function would dictate, there is no hall, but this street door leads directly into a bright, open ex-showroom. Now it is a puzzling space – neither shop, showroom, living room, nor workshop – but contains elements of all three. It belies the artist's triangulation of home, studio and gallery in her practice. This is not merely a conceptual tool, or feminist proposition, but indicative of lived experience and ongoing relationships with people and objects.

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[62] Carol McNicol, quoted in Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), p379

[63] Britton, *Seeing Things*, p. 182. Britton has formed enduring and significant attachments to people, places and spaces "I have lived in the same house for more than 30 years and in the same studio for more than 20." (Alison Britton, 'The Fiction of Form', *Journal of Modern Craft*, 2(1) (2009), 91-99.)

Like her interest in bric-a-brac, the second-hand, junk or found object as a form of resistance to relentless advertising and the commercial pressure to acquire new things, it belies an ambivalent attitude to the coercion and machinations of the chain of commerce. Her work is dealt in, bought, sold and collected, but its primary purpose and reason for being is not entirely for or of the market. In fact, one of the functions of this first and largest room seems to be the storage of work and work-related stuff. Tables and shelves line the walls of the room. Boxes and bags, indeterminate containers and packages, gather in huddles beneath tables. Large, shallow dish-shaped plaster moulds rescued from college skips (she points to one that I had made and discarded) are propped up against the wall next to some wide square shelves that stand in a corner facing the front door and hold papers, sketchbooks and catalogues.

Stacked paintings on stretched canvases line the walls at knee height and encroach into the floor space. Their fronts face the wall, their backs are towards us: only their titles and year of completion are visible. The accrued clutter of a seemingly lived-in space lends the room a sense of familiarity, and the ease of intimacy displayed by this environment seems welcoming, but just as ease of possession always entails its uneasy lack, it carries with it the alienating aspect of an intimate distance. Like the carefully constructed openings of her pots, it invites – "How boring if you can't see inside"[64] – but also makes one aware that the act of looking in is always a significant and potentially transgressive act. Indicative of this relationship of intimate distance,[65] located in a feminist understanding of translation and creation in relation to the mother tongue, as her work moves between home, studio, college and gallery: boundaries might be crossed, but not unconsciously.

The furniture in the studio is not purpose built, but primarily domestic, serviceable, sturdy stuff, recycled and adapted to suit her workspace. I

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[64] Harrod, *Alison Britton: Ceramics in Studio*, p. 32.
[65] See Joanne Morra, 'Daughter's Tongue: The Intimate Distance of Translation', *Journal of Visual Culture,* 6.1 (April 2007), 91-108

suspect that – like buses – as it began to wear it was cascaded by stages from successively less exacting uses, from home to studio. Her mother's chair sits in front of the window, in the middle of the first room and next to a low table. For Britton, like the inbuilt anthropomorphism of pots,

> Chairs, which also contain, have always seemed [. . .] the most animated and expressive of furniture types, echoing the body and structured with limbs.[66]

For the 2007 show 'Losing the Plot' she arranged her pots in a similar configuration to this less ordered, working one in the studio, running around the perimeter of the gallery, while a collection of antique and modern chairs spanning three hundred years occupied the central space. This chair in her studio reclines, and sometimes when she's working in the studio she rests or naps in it. It is draped with a handwoven Fulani cloth with bands of indigo black, rust red and ochre yellow. Uncannily, it is the same as ones I grew up with in northern Nigeria. When I see it, my eyes evoke the memory that my fingers still feel in their tips, of how it feels to the touch. My mother brought these strips of loosely woven cloth back to England with us and made them into curtains, which moved as we did and were altered to fit the differing windowed apertures of successive houses. It is difficult to see it without experiencing emotion from parts of my lived-life conjured into the present.

The textile, like her mother's chair, holds memories and associations which gather and evolve over time. The domestic is not just a formal or abstract thematic consideration in Britton's work, it is also indicative of the affective, of the memory and emotion generated by lived experience. Sitting in one's mother's chair, being held by the same structure that held her through similar ages, would I suppose evoke the sensation and emotion of being held and of holding, of being mothered, of mothering and grandmothering. This aspect is often overlooked and underappreciated in relation to Britton's work but my sense is that it is

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[66] Britton, 'Losing the Plot'.

central to her stated interest in the relation of civilisation and nature and to the generation of her forms. It is both feminist and feminine.

> I had always preferred my room, my books, and my silent games to the kitchen where my mother busied herself. Yet my childhood gaze had seen and memorized certain gestures, and my sense memory had kept track of certain tastes, smells, and colours. I already knew all the sounds: the gentle hiss of simmering water, the sputtering of melting meat drippings, and the dull thud of the kneading hand. A recipe or an inductive word sufficed to arouse a strange anamnesis whereby ancient knowledge and primitive experiences were reactivated in fragments of which I was the heiress and guardian without wanting to be. I had to admit that I too had been provided with a woman's knowledge and that it had crept into me, slipping past my mind's surveillance.[67]

Figure 26. Test Tiles

Next to her mother's rocking chair and low, round metal coffee table a wooden box of test tiles lie like a mending basket in the centre of the floor.

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[67] Luce Giard, 'Doing-Cooking. [1980], in: *The Practice of Everyday Life, Vol. 2: Living & Cooking* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 149-151

The tiles aren't uniform in shape or made to purpose, nor are they of the type that you would find in a conventional and systematic line blend or tri-axial test. Rather they look like random offcuts or remnants of vessel making and show the results of strokes, scratches and daubs of different slips, pigments and glaze in isolation or combination. Britton's palette and method is consciously limited, and there is an element of efficient recycling of material in this practice, but there is also openness to the possibilities of contingency and opportunity inherent in making do, which I come to discern throughout her working practice. It is frugal and parsimonious. For Britton, frugality is a lived experience and, like rationing was, is a quiet, ongoing day-to-day response to perceived global catastrophe:

Figure 27. Work in Progress: Runnel, Overspill, 2012

> Frugality is a virtue, an unwasting, beloved of the just-post-war generation with their careful parents and the last years of rationing. An old restraint has been strengthened by a deep new sense of

waste, both from decades of commercial pressure to acquire new things, and from diminishing world resources.[68]

This often misunderstood or underappreciated quality stems from the Latin *parsimõnia*, to spare or to save. It speaks to carefulness in the employment of money or material resources in a good, or neutral, sense but also, in relation to immaterial things, to an understanding that organisms tend towards economy of action. We see this in Britton's work and in her writing, in her economic use of language and materials, her return to and recycling of phrases, forms and ideas, and in her predilection for puns and *doubles entendres* that multi-task, in her use of seemingly simple shapes and words that alter according to context and are capable of communicating multiple meanings according to context. The theorist Rudolf Arnheim has noted the perceived quest for parsimony in the applied arts as an example of a broader – rather than literal – notion of function, which is more akin to the notion of function that Britton adheres to. Arnheim (who spent time with, and was openly influenced by, Yanagi Soetsu and his Japanese Mingei, or folk craft movement, and its philosophy) considers this to be so fundamental and pervasive that he advocates its application be broadened to include much of what goes on under the heading of the aesthetic. Thus:

> A basic demand in the production of objects or buildings is that the work be done with a minimum investment of time, material and labor. The same demand operates in the natural sciences, especially in physics. As Isaac Newton stated in Book III of his *Principia Mathematica*: "Nature does nothing in vain, and more is vain when less will serve; for Nature is pleased with simplicity and affects not the pomp of superfluous causes[69]

[68] Alison Britton, 'Old Stuff - New Life - Still Life: The Lure of Junk, in: Jorunn Veitberg, ed., *Ting Tang Trash: Upcycling in Contemporary Ceramics*, (Bergen: Bergen National Academy of the Arts and Arts Museums Bergen, 2011), pp. 28-37.
"I try to be very unwasteful with the sheets - **frugality can help determine the form of a pot**, as well as a response to the painting in the way that the lines are cut." Britton, quoted in Harrod, *Alison Britton, Ceramics in Studio*, p. 11.
[69] Rudolf Arnheim, 'The Way of the Crafts', *Design Issues*, 10 (Spring, 1994), 29-35 (p. 31)

Britton's parsimony in practice has aspects of the above inherent in it.[70] She works with a rigorous economy and with basic low-tech tools, techniques and materials, but it also derives from an attitude of considered 'care-full-ness' in relation to her work. This sometimes onerous duty of care and constancy is apparent in the way she makes her work and is manifest in her capacity for friendship and commitment to each vessel. Seldom abandoning a relationship with a form once she has begun it, she invests in and works through the difficulties she encounters with the material as she constructs and develops its surface until a sense of its formal resolution has been arrived at. This process involves working, reworking and repairing each piece between differing layers and stages of development, building up, masking or stripping back the surface of its decoration, sand-blasting it back to an earlier abraded and rawer initial stage to start again if needed rather than give up and destroy it.

During its progression through the different stages of its creation, development and resolution Britton's work moves between the outer and the inner studio space and passes through the kitchen into the kiln room, which lies at the back, beyond both. The first space operates as a holding space: a place for drying and 'resting' work, letting it settle between its various stages of development and for containing work after completion, before it goes out to be put on show – and subsequently if it returns. An open doorway between the shelves and an adjacent hatch leads into the middle room, evoking Marion Milner's "framed gap", or the safe space needed to enable one to become absorbed in and lose awareness of self in activity:

> (1) muscular action with a medium, a little bit of the outside world that was malleable, chalk, paint, etc., (2) within a limited space, a frame, the edge of the paper, even a wall, (3) a sacrifice of

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[70] "An approach, an attitude, or habit of action. Craft exists only in motion. It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions or people. It is also a multiple: an amalgamation of interrelated core principles, which are put into relation with one another through the overarching idea of 'craft'." (Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2007), p. 5.

deliberative action or working to a plan, instead of allowing the hand and the eye to play with the medium.[71]

Milner's identification of the factors that play a part in absorbed creative activity describes the working practice Britton has developed and remained constant to. And this method of practice has in turn shaped the space that enables her to relinquish conscious action with her chosen medium within a safe, 'boundaried' environment.

Figure 28. Work in progress: Influx, Runnel and Outpour, 2012

Work in Progress: Fiction and Function

When I visited for the first time, it was on a dark and cold late afternoon. Snow compressed into ice by the footfall and alternating thaw and freeze

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[71] The factors playing a part in absorbed creative activity as defined by Milner. (Field [Milner], p. 80)

of an urban winter covered the pavement outside. Inside, in the space between the street window and the inner window-hatch that opens into the middle room, raw pots in progress hardened into form over plaster moulds or rested on paper-covered boards on tables. One of the first red clay pots that Britton made while on a residency at Shigaraki, Japan, in 2010, and that inspired her more recent work, stood in this outer space at the back of a table close to the wall. It remains in an unfinished bisque state and I doubt if it will be shown, or indeed if that is the point of it. For the artist it is an incomplete beginning of a pot that finds forms of resolution in other works. As she related subsequently in a letter to Alun Graves: "The presence of the Shigaraki-made piece in my studio was important, despite its imperfections, to my moving on."[72]

In contrast to other pots the artist made in Shigaraki and to some of her more abstract and seemingly complex work it is an unambiguously figurative pot, with a distinguishable head and body that recalls a previous anthropomorphic body of work evoking torsos and trunks that Britton made in the 1980s.[73] Its face – because it clearly has one – has a startled expression as though surprised at or by itself. The pipe that first began to appear in her work around 2007 after Istanbul[74] as a ludicrous, 'animating attachment', an odd, vaguely unsettling phallic protrusion, sometimes a spout or a conduit or connector of disparate parts, here forms a pursing mouth-nose-proboscis. Squat, truncated sections of pipe cut into thick washer-like cylinders are fixed onto the surface to make round, unblinking orifice-like eyes while lines scratched into runs of white slip above suggest lashes or brows. At the back a pipe runs in relief, backbone-like, over the uneven surface of its body, linking the bottom to the top – the scatological to cerebral – where it juts out at a cleanly cut perpendicular angle, creating an overflow just below the rim.

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[72] Letter to Alun Graves, Curator of Ceramics & Glass Collections at the V&A, 9th May 2013.
[73] See series of work using torsos. Insert picture.
[74] "In 2006 I made two trips to Istanbul in Spring and Autumn. I had to go and see this city full of chaotic complexity and overlap after reading Orhan Pamuk's novel *My Name is Red*, which is concerned, among other things, with the relationship between words and pictures, and old and new influences. [. . .] Both in narrative and content it depicts many viewpoints - " Alison Britton, 'The Fiction of Form',(Oct 2008),

From a distance it isn't immediately clear whether the pipe form is superficial and decorative or integral and functional. It is difficult to make out whether it is incorporated into the wall of the vessel; whether the pipe permeates and grows out of the wall or if it sits on its surface: if it merely represents or alludes to connection and flow or if it is in fact capable of performing it. On first glance I suspect that it isn't. I reflect that the fact that it might be illusory or representational seems to matter, that at some level I feel affronted and don't want to be duped, or deceived, into thinking that something is 'real' when it is representative of real. In part this arises out of the fact that function is a constant within the artist's frame of reference, but also because it affects the integrity of the vessel.

Figure 29. Shigiraki Pot (unfinished)

In practice it informs the way the piece is made and how its form is thought through in the process of fabrication. The thought processes and techniques involved in attaching something to a surface, as low relief or sprig, are not the same as those used when thinking through how a handle, lip or spout might interact with, penetrate or extend the body of a vessel: how it might connect with, and be affected by, something outside itself. Although seemingly similar, pipes are not the same as coils, which are solid, pliable and rod-like. Rolled and stretched under the palm of the hand or formed from a mass like forcemeat they can be used to extend or bridge, as a construction might, but they cannot, in and of themselves, channel. To make pipes or spouts that are capable of conduction Britton rolls flat slabs of clay and wraps them around a cylindrical stick or tube that hollows out the core to create and contain a void. To allow flow between the two a hole has to be cut, breaching the body of the pot at the point of conjunction where it borders onto and opens into the conduit. In the process of attaching one to the other consideration to the effect of this on the inner and outer surfaces of the vessel is given, as they are scratched and scored to open up and increase the surface area exposed to facilitate melding. It is an abrasive and injuring process enacted upon the epidermis that uses slurry from the body to join one to the other.

When, on closer inspection, I discover that the pipes and spouts do pierce the body and create the possibility for flow and movement of what is contained I am strangely relieved. Tension is momentarily lifted and the mind is eased by rational explanation as I see that this response was evoked by the artist's insistence on the idea of function and adherence to the vessel, which creates a space for her to explore the way appearance and reality slide and slither against each other in interplay. This again is part of the paradox Britton consistently and repeatedly plays with, and the Shigaraki beginning-of-a-piece evidences the complexity of her work in relation to it. Consciously or subconsciously, Britton's position in this respect is in sympathy with Winnicott's recognition of the importance of retaining paradox, in life and to creativity:

I am drawing attention to the *paradox* involved in the use by the infant of what I have called the transitional object. My contribution is to ask for a paradox to be accepted and tolerated and respected, and for it not to be resolved. By flight to split-off intellectual functioning it is possible to resolve the paradox, but the price of this is the loss of the paradox itself. The paradox, once accepted and tolerated, has value for every human individual who is not only alive and living in this world but who is also capable of being infinitely enriched by exploitation of the cultural link with the past and with the future [75]

In her writing and commentary on her practice Britton has quoted and returned to the pithy comment of her tutor, Hans Coper, on working in this in-between area:

Practising a craft with ambiguous reference to purpose and function one has occasion to face absurdity. More than anything, somewhat like a demented piano-tuner, one is trying to approximate a phantom pitch. One is apt to take refuge in pseudo-principles which crumble. Still, the routine of work remains. One deals with facts.[76]

For Britton,

The concentrated enquiry in these sentences was alluring to many of us as students, as was the focus on ambiguity, the intrigue of the *phantom pitch*, which proposed that ideas could be pursued with uncertainty, within craft. Coper outlines an ambivalent connection with function and content. In the whole text the words 'absurd'

[75] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p.xvi.
[76] Hans Coper's artist's statement, in: from the catalogue to his 1969 V&A exhibition with Peter Collingwood. *Collingwood/ Coper: Rugs and Wall-hangings by Peter Collingwood, pots by Hans Coper* (London: HMSO,1969)

and 'economy' are repeated, revealing an austere and understated existential pull.[77]

Britton's insistence on maintaining the potential for use in her work lets her draw on the contingent uncertainty and ambivalent relationship between fiction, form, function and fact. Rather than act as the limitation it is often assumed to be,[78] it lends it its capacity to be and to represent, to function and also to depict and cite function. In this instance it allows a pipe to represent and to conduct, to function as a spout and also to be played with and masquerade: sometimes as a handle, or other appendage. To operate in an intermediate area between function and fiction gives her space to illude or play, to face absurdity and hold a paradox. Thus the form of applied art practice, or impure poetry,[79] described by Coper and practised by Britton, insists on retaining a reference to function yet draws its inspiration from the possibility of the poetic and prosaic coexisting in the same object. In doing so it exploits a gap equivalent to that identified between signifier and signified that arises out of a crisis of signification and gives rise to a perceived difference between ordinary, day-to-day, functional, standard language, which proceeds as if it were part of the material world, and poetic language, made of deviations and abstractions from ordinary language.

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[77] Alison Britton, 'The Fiction of Form' (2008),

[78] "Function has always been a key issue for the crafts. After all, what is the use of a container that is incapable of holding anything, or a teapot that doesn't pour? This notion of utility both defined and limited the crafts, and played a key role in preventing crafts from being included within the spheres of critical thinking and practice of avant-garde art and architecture. An insistence on function as the ultimate outcome of any practice is bound to have a limiting effect on the intellectual content and the tangible form of the finished object." Juliette MacDonald, 'Concepts of Craft', in: *Exploring Visual Culture: Definitions, Concepts, Contexts,* ed. Matthew Rampley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 34-50 (p.43)

[79] See Pablo Neruda's essay 'Toward an Impure Poetry' (*Sobre una poesia sin pureza*) (Pablo Neruda, editorial, *Caballo Verde de la Poesia* (*Green Horse for Poetry*) (1935)
"Let that be the poetry we search for: worn with the hand's obligations, as by acids, steeped in sweat and in smoke, smelling of lilies and urine, spattered diversely by the trades that we live by, inside the law or beyond it.
A Poetry impure as the clothing we wear, or our bodies, soup -stained, soiled with our shameful behaviour, our wrinkles and vigils and dreams, observations and prophecies, declarations of loathing and love, idylls and beasts, the shocks of encounter, political loyalties, denials and doubts, affirmations and tears."

Work in Progress: Surface and Slippage

Britton's vertical and horizontal forms refer to the planes occupied by plates and jugs and reflect her interest in the demotic and domestic and her long-held appreciation of the importance of the familiar and of the home, as a place we start from:

> The life of the table, of the household interior, the basic creaturely acts of eating and drinking, of the artefacts which surround the subject in her or his domestic space, of the everyday world of routine and repetition, at a level of existence where events are [. . .] the small scale, trivial acts of bodily survival and self-maintenance[80]

When asked to write about the R J Lloyd collection of Devon slipware in 2010, she reconnected with this through her writing in relation to tableware.[81] As an artist she was reminded of the aesthetic qualities created from the "rhythmic repetitive homogeneity of material and colour" and the mutations which develop out of sustained use and contingency, through the mechanical, technical processes of reproduction and repetition, of slippage over and between surfaces, both technical and Freudian, that are inherent in the everyday and embodied in traditions of crockery:

> Tableware is everyday stuff, and everyone eats, so everyone understands the basis for these forms - pots, bodies and eating are intertwined. The ordinariness of the object field of table, cup, plate, bowl, jug, and the habitual rhythm of getting up, washing, drinking, eating, going out to work, and returning to eat again, give us, in the history of ceramic forms, an assimilated sense of bedrock

[80] Quoted from Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked; Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion, 1990), by Britton on a talk 'Form and Fiction', given in Boulder Colorado, 2014

[81] Alison Britton, 'Laying the Table: Synthesis, Continuity and the Everyday', in: Simon Olding, ed., *The R J Lloyd Ceramics Collection: Artist as Collector*, (Bideford: Burton Art Gallery and Museum, 2010).

understanding. There are good pots and awful pots, but
we know where they are coming from. [82]

The initial Shigaraki pots hold a record of new technical and material departures from Britton's working practice: her use of a red clay body rather than the habitual pale canvas-coloured buff, and her first experiments with pouring rather than painting slip onto the constructed form.[83]

. . . it was during my short guest artist residency in Shigaraki in Spring 2010 that I thought of pouring slip. A much more liquid form of slip than my habitual painting version; thrown down the surfaces of red clay pots I made there. The long handled ladles normal in Japan were a stimulus, and the perfectly smooth ball-milled slip made for me by the technician there, and the freedom to change in a different work place. Also the quality of working with the red clay - quite groggy and unplastic, a bit like working with cement.[84]

Pouring slip is among the most difficult, highly unpredictable and risky kinds of decoration. Less predictable than trailing, the direction and rate of its flow are difficult to control, and once set in motion slip runs its course. It will follow and flood the form, soaking into surface until it runs off or out of it. Unlike the brush or stylus, which stem from and extend the dexterity and direction of the hand, it is open to and displays traces of vicissitude and impulse. Gesture, *acte gratuit* and its unanticipated

[82] Ibid.

[83] Britton observed in her essay 'Craft, Skill and Imagination', for the Crafts Council exhibition 'Beyond the Dovetail', in 1991: "In many people's minds there is a split between skills and ideas that is comparable to the split between craft and art. Furthermore they think that skill belongs to craft and ideas belong to art. And tradition belongs to skill and craft and innovation belongs to ideas and art. To sustain these notions you need to be thinking of skill as a manual thing, the gnarled and noble hand. But in reality the manual and the mental are seamlessly combined in the operation of skill whether you are ploughing a field or painting the Sistine Chapel."[83] (Alison Britton, 'Craft, Skill and Imagination', in: *Beyond the Dovetail*: *Craft, Skill and Imagination* [exh. cat.] (London: Crafts Council, 1991)

[84]

repercussions are held in its trail like a moment in time. For Britton the technique she rediscovered in Japan and in Devon slipware injected vitality and freedom into her working practice:

> In skirting the tradition of pouring slip, often white onto a red clay pot wall and into its interior, my rule bending predilection is engaged. It is fed by the risks of making wilder unusable forms, with surfaces overrun by traditional, even rustic 'pottery' techniques. For me fluidity and speed are linked ideas, the gravity of splashing liquid, reminders of the glorious rush conveyed by these gestures: uncontrolled verve responding to the instant.[85]

This development in Britton's ongoing exploration of slip through practice allowed for discovery and experimentation with new techniques to develop and advance the conceptual aspect of her pot-making (and vice versa - the traffic is never only one-way).[86] This approach, which understands the importance of an idea of material as otherness and of the autonomy of the medium, accords with the critic Adrian Stokes' suggestion that 'the quality of the art object comes from the extent that the 'otherness of the medium has been recognised by the artist. From the relationship and interaction of the body to the medium, of holding, muscular tension, blood pressure to the matter in which it is made manifest.''[87] Slip as material and process and slip as concept coexist in this body of work as the interface between bodies and surfaces, thought and expression. It embodies her inquiry into temporal, conceptual and tangible slippage, of what it means to give something, or be given, the slip, and of the potential and importance of error.

In her poem 'Essay on What I Think About Most', from *Men in the Off Hours*, [2000], Ann Carson unpacks Aristotle's theory of the metaphor in

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[85] Letter from Alison Britton to Alun Graves Head of Ceramics at the V&A Museum, 9th May 2013.
[86] Ibid.. (Notes on Outpour)
[87] Adrian Stokes, Inside out, An Essay in the Psychology and Aesthetic Appeal of Space, Faber and Faber, 1947., Quoted in Milner, p.187. See also Milner & her idea of apprehension of pictorial space as reflective of our self - definition involving negotiation of self - other relationships.

relation to error. As read through Carson Aristotle suggests that metaphor, like error, is able to express contradictory ideas simultaneously, to hold paradox and to bring about a disruption in meaning that unsettles the mind; that this error or mental event is valuable, because through it unexpectedness emerges. When we work within the space of metaphor we also work with the instability of the Greek understanding of translation as *metapherein*, as a process wherein something becomes something that it literally is not. Translation thus defined allows the artist to bring out what is held in common, but also to interrupt or trip the mind as it moves over the smooth surface created by the illusion of a stable world of meaning and continuity: to use error, inconsistency and the slippage of time, place, meaning and matter to problematise and bring out hitherto under-imagined aspects of the work.

> "Lots of people including Aristotle think error
> an interesting and valuable mental event.
> In his discussion of metaphor in the *Rhetoric*
> Aristotle says there are 3 kinds of words.
> Strange, ordinary and metaphorical.
>
> Strange words simply puzzle us;
> ordinary words convey what we know already;
> it is from metaphor that we can get hold of something new & fresh"
> (*Rhetoric, 1410b10-13).*
> In what does the freshness of metaphor consist?
> Aristotle says that metaphor causes the mind to experience itself
>
> in the act of making a mistake.
> He pictures the mind moving along a plane surface
> of ordinary language
> when suddenly
> that surface breaks or complicates.
> Unexpectedness emerges.
>
> At first it looks odd, contradictory or wrong.
> Then it makes sense.

> And at this moment, according to Aristotle,
>
> the mind turns to itself and says:
>
> "How true, and yet I mistook it!"
>
> From the true mistakes of metaphor a lesson can be learned.
>
> Not only that things are other than they seem,
>
> and so we mistake them,
>
> but that such mistakenness is valuable."[88]

Slip has been one of Britton's preferred, if not her primary, media for painting her work. It is ancient, ubiquitous, low tech, versatile and cheap. Practice, working with the material, leads to an understanding and appreciation of it as an inherently in-between, neither-nor medium – neither solid nor liquid, body nor surface, but capable of transitioning from one into the other and of being either. In its most basic form it is a suspension of clay and water: the dilution or slackening of a clay body into a soft, semi-liquid mass that is mixed and sieved to the consistency of cream and coloured according to the clay body used or by the addition of pigment in the form of metal oxides or stains. As a medium developed for casting in mass production it can assume and reproduce the inner form, or matrix, of the plaster mould it is poured into, reproducing resemblance through contact. Poured, painted, inlaid or trailed, like a skin, it is of the body and adheres, melds or solidifies into it.

Technical considerations surrounding its use stem from the compatibility of the slip to the clay body.[89] To ensure a perfect fit, ideally the slip is made from the same or a similar kind of clay as the body. If the slip shrinks to a greater or lesser degree than the body, it will flake, crack or shell off its surface as a result of tensions set up by differing particle sizes and rates of thermal expansion and contraction, which vary according to the chemical composition of each clay body. Generally it needs to be applied prior to, or

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[88] Anne Carson, 'Essay on What I Think About Most', in: *Men in the Off Hours* (London: Random House, 2000)

[89] "These pieces were my first return to red clay, though they were never satisfactorily completed. (The 'fit' of slip to body needed more testing and adjusting, and there wasn't time)" Letter from Britton to Alun Graves, 9th May 2013.

at, the leather-hard stage, before the body has become too dry, so that it can knit with it and form a skin over it. For most of her career Britton has opted to use the paintbrush to apply slip, seeing " .. ... the slow painterly application and layering as important in the gradual bringing into being of an improvised object."

Figure 30. Outflow and Cave

Figure 31. Outpour

Like paint, slip and stains allow you to work directly onto clay surfaces, as onto a canvas. In her earlier tile work the clay was treated more like a two-dimensional surface for painting on. As her practice developed, the versatility of slip allowed her to paint and develop surfaces in relation and response to form as it was modelled and refined through the differing stages of construction and moved from two into three dimensions.

> One of the things that I like about pottery is the fact that a pot consists of the clay that it is made from; plus something else, a surface of slip or glaze or both. So there are two strands to the work: first, building the pot in three dimensions and then dealing

with the surface, [. . .]. This treatment aims at a link between two- and three-dimensional ideas; between skin and body.[90]

In practice the application of 'something else' through slip involves consideration through material of the relationship of body and skin that is a conceptual investigation of the relationship of form and surface, internal and external, that we see in Britton's work. Thus her choice of medium is pragmatic and in keeping with both her painterly and anthropomorphic approach to her work with its implicit idea of surface decoration as a skin or clothing for the body of the pot. Since the mid-1980s she has developed a process of working in which she has

> . . . rolled out sheets of clay and painted them with slip on both sides in a relaxed way before cutting them up to make half-planned forms, a kind of equivalent to tailoring, without the crispness of intention or pattern-cutting. Pots were painted therefore two or three times; first with slip, which can be stained any colour and is opaque, and then with underglaze pigments, also derived from metal oxides, stronger and not opaque. I painted them when flat, when built, and then after they were biscuit-fired. It was like negotiating both body and dress, with the dress making the most of the body, and the final painting being the point where resolution was attempted. [. . . .] All the surface events on my pots were under the glaze; the glaze was just a clear matt surface which pulled it all together and enriched the colours. [91]

In this process, surface informs form and vice versa, and a conversation between the two is maintained. For me, her habitual and routine use of glaze belonged to the surface of a pot in a way in which her use of slip hasn't always quite fitted. Sprayed on, it created a unifying finishing

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[90] Alison Britton, 'The Critic's Eye', *Crafts*, 98 (May/June 1989), reprinted in *Seeing Things,* p. 60.
[91] Britton, 'The Fiction of Form' (2009).

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touch that sealed the surface behind a glazed coating, or casing, that made it ready for display or use. Unglazed, low-fired pots are rare in ceramics and are generally considered primitive, unfinished or provisional, and lacking the resolution brought by glaze. However, I think her more recent work and ongoing investigation into different uses of glaze and slip reveals that there has been an imperfect fit between Britton's stated intention and her habitual use of these media; between her idea of genuine improvisation, an object created extempore – on the spur of the moment – and her use of 'slow, painterly application and layering' as important in its 'gradual bringing into being'. It is a matter of degree and pace. A process of layering and re-working surfaces that are created through improvised, gestural and abstract painting is inevitably more considered, meditative and premeditated, and less risky or exposed to vagaries than the act of pouring.

In relation to her process Britton has often cited the film director Mike Leigh's comment that: "All art is a synthesis of improvisation and order".[92] For her this approach to art-making has been manifest in the order or structure provided by her working methods, materials and techniques described above and her refusal to plan, but rather to improvise, to play seriously, and to allow change to emerge gradually and cumulatively through the working processes that produce the pot. However, unlike the impulse in her article quoted above, I would suggest that, while the demands of display might require a show of synthesis, the primary and underlying motivation of Britton's art is not synthesis: to proceed in thought from cause to effect, from laws or principles to their consequences in order to unify a number of parts into a cognisable whole. It does not evidence a systematic and rational progression from thesis through antithesis into synthesis. Rather than reconcile, it has opted to work within, to use the conceptual and physical structure of the vessel form to contain and make manifest the difficulties and tensions created by the conflicting demands of order and improvisation. The difference is subtle, but significant, and may explain why in Britton's use of the quote from

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[92] "The system I described above was my order. The rest is improvised, changing a little from piece to piece.", Ibid.

Leigh above the word 'synthesis' could be seen to function much like the "clear matt surface" that she began to find increasingly unsatisfactory. In relation to her artistic practice and production it came to act like a mask that attempted to reconcile complex and disparate entities, smoothing over the surface of her otherwise complicated, difficult vessels. As such it is not surprising that it became the focus of questioning that led to its disruption in her more recent work.

If we step back in order to go forward – as Britton often does – I think there is an apparent inevitability to her progression towards and exploration of pouring and the excitement of its associated risk. Some time before 2007, Britton began to weary of spraying clear, matt glaze coating onto the outside of her pots. She said that it had come to feel automatic, like a boring way to make a surface that *implied that uniformity is desirable*.[93]

> Now I want to use glaze in a fleshier way, to include colour in it, to immerse in it, to pour it, slosh it on. I need to leave more unpainted space for lapping and flowing, and there is more risk of uncertainty for things going into the kiln.[94]

Maybe this habitual, almost perfunctory, way of 'finishing off', of ensuring function through a skin of impermeability, began to assume a deadening effect because it no longer fitted with the animating attachments she had begun to explore. I suspect that, like the pipes, it also grew out of an interest in the subject of flow – '*as a connector of parts, whatever they are*' – that she admits had begun to find expression in another in-between piece made too late for an exhibition in 2001. 'Trough', inspired by 'a North African ceremonial sink-like object made of stone, was a stepped form where water could run from chamber to chamber'.[95] In 'Unforeseen

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[93] " Another spur for change had been my exhaustion with spraying the outsides of my pots with glaze - which is a dull dry way to deliver a surface - I would prefer never to do it again." (Britton, Losing the Plot')

[94] (TFoF, JMC) "Now I want to use glaze in a fleshier way, to drip, to pour, to slosh it on, with leeway for lapping and flowing, and a little bit of uncontrolled dribbling in the kiln" (Britton, 'Losing the Plot'.)

[95] Britton, 'The Fiction of Form' (2008) : "The small double piece that wasn't ready for an exhibition in Paris in 2001 that opened on 9/11 was called **Trough**. With this piece my

Events', her 2007 show with Marit Tingleff, we began to see some striking examples of these experiments with other ways of applying glaze: pouring, dipping, painting, dribbling it over the surface and colouring it. While slip was still painted onto the surface using a brush, interruptions and disruptions became manifest in the surface coating: green copper-coloured glaze ran up, defying gravity, towards the top of a jar, while drops of glaze fell into the centre of a plate, splashing and running out toward the rim, and drips of turquoise gathered at the end of a seeping pipe. This new approach opened up another way – more dynamic and immediate and less premeditated than painting – of exploring the relationship of body to surface, thought to expression, which made apparent the effect of form and material and their ability to affect surface.

Figure 32. Tall Scrawl. 2009

interest in *flow* as a subject began. In life, swimming is my dream medium. I can't ignore water and in Venice I have trouble staying on the pavement. Flow is a connecter of parts whatever they are; and in the collection of the Institut du Monde Arabe, a frequent stopping place for me in Paris, I had seen a North African ceremonial sink-like object made of stone, a stepped form where water could run from chamber to chamber."

Space on the Page: Work and Words: Standing and Running

The body of work Britton developed for her show 'Standing and Running' in 2012 exhibits the recent developments in Britton's thinking and practice discussed above relative to her interest in and exploration of physical and conceptual flow as a connector of parts. Painting with brushes as a considered way of building up surfaces became visibly less predominant as her strokes lessened to more minimal gestural marks, which responded to, and were affected by, the line of the form, or were added after the fact to the trace of poured slip, while her tendency to carefully craft and nurture found expression in other generative ways. For the first time Britton made pots which she then re-made, or loosely copied in another coloured clay. Ideas that found form and expression initially in her buff clay were allowed to move from pot to pot as they were re-worked, refined and translated into a red body. Generally preferring the second version to the first,[96] the translation to the original, this practice of following an existing form, shadowing it, letting it echo in another version, was a cerebral, conceptual exercise in re-creation, or *trans-creation*, and an unusual and radical step for an artist who had typically professed a preference for working without a plan, for consciously improvising.

This departure was, I think, indicative of two ongoing and interconnected concerns that became more of a focus for Britton around this time. The first concern is I think symptomatic of a progressive narrowing – crossing, even – of the gap between her parallel practices of writing and making and an acknowledgement of their growing influence upon each other. The second, touched on earlier, relates to her ongoing interest in the demotic and domestic, stemming from a long-held understanding of the importance of the home in life and the appreciation of it as a place of practice.

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[96] "A red version loosely followed the making of a buff one, for 5 of them. In each case I preferred the red one that was made afterwards", letter from Britton to Alun Graves, 9 May 2013

Writing and Making: Flux and Flow

In relation to language and work, while the reference to chess – a rule-bound game of strategy and logic – made in the press release to her 2012 exhibition: "all tendencies to end up looking like a chess set will be overcome",[97] acknowledges the difficulties inherent in the narrowing between her two practices. It also belies an awareness that in some respects her decision to work faster, to embrace risk and relinquish control of aspects of her work had possibly and paradoxically allowed her to venture closer to logos, to more formal systems of symbol and structure than it had before.

Throughout her career, Britton, the child of an artist and a linguist, has crafted objects and words. She has written that she was "brought up to write comfortably in different ways for different reasons and to play with words."[98] This commingling of the purposeful and playful, which is a characteristic of Britton's practice, is applied to her writing. Britton's parents' big, old, square yellow *Chambers Dictionary*, an essential tool for a wordsmith, is in constant use. Different dictionaries appeal to different writers, since each has an attitude and an identity. The *Chambers* she was brought up with is typically cited as a favourite for its accessibility, playfulness and wide range of arcane words by crossworders and Scrabble players. It is the familiar tool that she uses for reference when she's writing, but she also reads it for pleasure. *Seeing Things*, Britton's recent book of collected writing on art, craft and design, charts her ongoing engagement with the word, object and artistic practice. Her writings display an approach to words that has been as considered, rigorous and informed as her approach to objects, but more overtly purposeful and functional than her work in clay. From what I can discern,

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[97] ". . . the forms may be echoes of each other in sort of pairs.' But, she points out, 'all tendencies for that to end up looking like a chess set will be overcome' (Marsden Woo, press release, 2011). see also Borges poem on Chess and discussion of rule bound games.

[98] Britton, *Seeing Things,* p.9. "In the process of making things I have always put words in sketch books as much as drawings of ideas and shapes and diagrams of the kiln packing."

for a long time Britton maintained a discreet categorical distance between her visual, material practice and her writing, considering that

> In my real pottery work, the goals are unknown. I am not responding to any known thing, loosely adhering to a pot category, but trying to make something out of nothing, to put an object into the world that looks sensible and wasn't there before. And finishing a pot is not very much of an ending, it is another stage in the continuing struggle to keep on track of what is vivid and worth making, and to take another step.[99]

Her descriptions of pottery as her *real work*, or *metier* – as that in which she is especially skilled – suggest, as do other comments she has made, that she considered her writing to be a secondary, less 'real' activity relative to her pottery work, which she has described as a vital, unending and primary. As the quotation above shows, it seems that for Britton there was something about writing and the word that suggested given-ness and finitude that she managed to elude in her visual, or 'real' pottery work, which was more concerned with the unreal or fictional than her writing was.

Writing about the artist in 1990, the historian Tanya Harrod also discerned and described two different personae that she distinguished between in

> . . . . her finished, polished and sophisticated pieces of writing and my transcriptions of our tape-recorded discussions. The two voices complement each other: one is cool, logical and confident - the writer; the other is less sure, more searching and reflective (and very difficult to capture and to put into cold print) - the artist.[100]

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[99] Alison Britton,'The Manipulation of Skill: on the Outer Limits of Function', in: *Beyond the Dovetail: Craft, Skill and Imagination* [exh. cat.] (London: Crafts Council, 1991), pp. 4-9 , reprinted in *Seeing Things*, pp. 91-94.

[100] "The Chronology juxtaposes extracts from her finished, polished and sophisticated pieces of writing and my transcriptions of our tape-recorded discussions. The two voices complement each other: one is cool, logical and confident - the writer; the other is less sure, more searching and reflective (and very difficult to capture and to put into cold print) - the artist. The pictures tell a rather simpler story: that of a progress, a

While both of these 'voices' were made manifest to Harrod through language, the means of delivery – one spoken, one written, one more immediate, practical and spontaneous, the other more abstract, delivered with the luxury of time to consider, reflect and edit thoughts expressed – would affect this perception. These observed differences between them also stem from the gap between differing attitudes and perceptions of writer and artist to language and to matter/material. The writer deals with the abstraction that is language and is more comfortable manipulating words, articulating her responses to visual stimuli in sophisticated language, with sentences that are clear and to the point and words never unnecessarily florid or obfuscating. The artist that articulates the practice in a context that is speaking and making – more used to expressing herself through the visual, tactile, formal medium of clay – seems less at ease in language and brings an approach to words which, like her complex and difficult pots, is more hesitant, unsure and open-ended. In part I suspect the writer's approach was fostered by her education and by the function that her writing had been required to fulfil. She wrote primarily in response to prompts: to commissions and requests to review, to reflect, comment on, analyse and appraise her own and other people's completed, exhibited work. She often wrote ephemeral pieces for gallery essays, reviews and articles for magazines and journals and chapters for catalogues and books from the perspective of an artist as intermediary-interpreter with a knowledge and experience of thinking through materials and processes that might evade others: "Many critics don't make things and many artists don't write; aesthetic response to new things is hard to put into words, and a different reading of art objects may come from a person who makes them."[101]

Implicit in Britton's statement is her perception of, and adherence to, an idea of difference and division between the way things are perceived and

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development into an abstract art of engaging complexity." Harrod, *Alison Britton: Ceramics in Studio*, p. 10.

[101] *Seeing Things*, p.9

find expression through verbal and visual media. In 1991[102] Britton described writing as her only form of representational work, since her purpose in writing was to capture something, 'hopefully the portrayal of a fellow artist, the expression in sharply approximate language of a sequence of ideas.'[103] Thus her writing in response to objects fulfilled a primarily interpretative, educational and functional purpose. There are notable earlier exceptions to this, and she cites her essay written in 1982 for the catalogue for 'The Maker's Eye' as the first piece of writing in which she articulated something new to herself and for others and made something intelligible that had not yet been fully formulated or expressed.[104] Language became a medium she used effectively to communicate aspects of work and objects that were implicit and intuited by "insiders" – by fellow artists and makers working in non-verbal media – to a wider public:

> With a blend of subjective and objective, physical experience and opinion, writing as an insider involves thinking through the workings of something, to see where senses of material and process, for instance, have played a part in the form and presence of an object. Being an insider involves understanding things with head and hands, for their ideas, their specifics and for their feel. It involves the capacity to look in detail, to examine and preferably to touch what is in front of you and compare it with the memory of dozens of other objects, built up from the habit of looking analytically at stuff.[105]

Britton's suggestion is that she brings the embodied, lived experience of a maker's tactile sensibility to material to her writing about art, and draws

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[102] Britton, 'The Manipulation of Skill, On the Outer Limits of Function'.

[103] Ibid.

[104] "It was the beginning of writing. That essay is the first thing I felt proud of having written. It was terribly clear to me that the act of writing brought out and clarified ideas which I didn't know I had." Alison Britton, quoted in Harrod, *Alison Britton: Ceramics in Studio,* p. 36.

[105] *Seeing Things,* p.9

on her extensive and habitual practice of seeing, touching and reading objects. Few art historians or critics have rolled slabs, manipulated planes of leather-hard clay, cut to size, trimmed and joined the seams between to create new three-dimensional forms. They have often not experienced how materials interact with others, or to differing processes, mixed slip and felt it slide over and seep into surfaces. And as Peter Dormer famously pointed out, as a result they can be less tangibly aware of the of thought processes involved in the making of work. The importance of *techne* and the effect that this has on the conceptual development of an artwork can consequently be overlooked. Thus Britton writes from the perspective that asserts subjectivity through a tacit form of knowing. That is the result of processes by which knowledge is acquired through practice over time, which assumes the uniqueness of humanity through sense, in the bodily, experiential interaction with materiality and context and of being in the world.

There is a sense that Britton feels able, as a 'bi-lingual', to translate, to shuttle between her two practices: the subjective, tacit, material making one more overtly physical and somatic than the other, objective, linguistic one, which is more code bound and distanced, more consciously conceptual and communicable.[106] Sensitive to what she feels are points of congruence between both activities, she considers that the stages in the writing process share similarities with those of pot-making. She cites the initial procrastination and sense of emptiness that is galvanised into action by the time pressure of a deadline. She also experiences the same exhilaration from absorbed engagement with the text, which in turn fosters commitment and dedication to producing worthwhile work. Similarly she relishes risks involved, worries about over-working or

[106] This would be in keeping with Polanyi's theory of different forms of knowledge and the tacit dimension. Thus: "Art which cannot be specified in detail cannot be transferred by prescription, since no prescription for it exists. It can be passed on only by example from master to apprentice. This restricts the range of diffusion to that of personal contacts." (Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), quoted in Kenneth A. Grant, 'Tacit Knowledge Revisited: We Can Still Learn from Polanyi', *Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management*, 5 (2) (2007), 173-80.(p. 175), available at: www.ejkm-volume5 issue2-article101.)

labouring the writing and at the end is disinclined to change to another mode of work, but wants to persist.[107]

These reflections on the stages involved in her writing work are indicative of a general attitude and approach common to a creative and artistic practice that is more easily transferable between the two disciplines. However, as the following comment shows, I think she was also aware that she is able to communicate some things in one language that are inhibited by or evade her in the other. That the rules and conventions of particular registers and forms of discourse in one language might hold more sway over the way she manipulates it than in the other. That she may not always express herself in one language as one would in the other, or 'mother' tongue.

> Being verbal as well as visual is complicated - at times the sensibilities feed into each other, and at times there is the sense of an awkward transition, like moving from one side of the brain to the other, in manipulating these different modes of practice. [...] The challenge of being involved in writing about art as well as doing it, is that you are attempting to be the *translator* from one world to another. To put previously undefined visual material, things felt and seen, but not articulated, into words.[108]

As we have seen, for Britton the difference between these two activities lies essentially in the concrete specifics arising from the experience of working with and responding to the particular demands of a material as compared to those of an alien verbal code or symbolic system. This assumes a difference that emerges through experience of the way that

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[107] *Seeing Things,* p.93.
[108] Britton, 'Pairing Practices', See also notes to Britton's Peter Dormer Memorial Speech, 1997 (Reprinted in *Seeing Things,* p,135-141): "Part of Peter's chosen job (and mine) was the attempt to share his ideas about objects, by showing them and relating them, creating the thread of an argument out of them, to a broadening audience. Translation from the visual world to the verbal one is necessarily imperfect but worth the effort. Some people have a stronger response with the eyes and others get more from the text, but the building of bridges between the two is some endeavour."

material has to be felt and handled, a difference that for her would place matter before the conscious idea. It suggests that in working with material we reconnect with a tacit process of knowing, which takes place outside or in another material language. As such this work is able to develop, to come into being and express sense from within an as yet undefined pre- or non-verbal domain. This is distinct from her more explicit, premeditated work in language that is conceived in the mind according to the symbols and structures of a codified system. Within this purview, words, as invisible, conceptual material made manifest through script occupy a place closer to painting, or to a surface application of finishing touches, than to the creation of the new and hitherto unimagined forms of expression that Britton experiences in her pot-making.

> I think of words as an invisible material; manipulating punctuation is like focussing attention on certain points in the painted surface of a pot. However in potmaking a more manual and visual set of skills are in play: my experience of clay, the background expectations of what it will and won't tolerate, a sense of the right thickness, feeling when a joint is solid; my double vision for looking at a raw painted line (. . .) sensibilities *(that)* are a personal kit of skills, useful to me but not in the same form useful to anyone else. That is the break with tradition.[109]

For Britton her pot-making, the fluency and ease with which she is able to express herself through it, has the ability to break with tradition and to make it new, whereas it would seem that words and the structures of language that hold thought within its finite symbolic systems, while they are able to direct attention and influence points of view, belong to a

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[109]" . . . that is sickly mauve and knowing it will be deepest blue after firing, and composing a balance of colours that is fictitious; spraying off-white glaze onto an off-white bumpy slip-covered surface, and seeing when it is just enough by the state of saturation, (too much glaze leads to a fatal sheen and even bubbling). Most of these sensibilities are a personal kit of skills, useful to me but not in the same form useful to anyone else. That is the break with tradition."(Britton, 'The Manipulation of Skill: On the Outer Limits of Function'.

secondary order that depends on and perpetuates tradition. As she reflects on the two practices, she moves between them, seeming to hold onto, to be anchored by, an idea of difference that both creates and facilitates flux and interaction between primary and secondary, subjective and objective, material and conceptual, presentational and representational.

From a translational perspective the question that suggests itself in relation to her perception of the difference between her two practices is: do these perceptions stem from objectively perceived qualities inherent to the two types of 'material or media' that she manipulates, or is her perception and appreciation of them the result of subjective and partial responses to the differing media? My sense is that Britton would characteristically locate it somewhere in between.[110] She would hold, like Winnicott and subsequent theorists,[111] that as subjects formed through our relation to symbolic systems, we are subject to an ongoing process of formation through representation. That in some ways the interaction she experiences between the two media bears a relation to the dynamic we experience between the symbolic and the pre-symbolic in transitional objects and art objects. That in the process and practice of working at the meeting point between two different systems (subject-object, visual/material - verbal), in the experience of to-ing and fro-ing from one to the other and subjecting or exposing one medium to the differing structures and systems of the other, equilibrium and emphasis between influences alter as the space between the different forms shifts and over time hitherto unseen or overlooked aspects of both come into focus and become apparent.

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[110] "A 'modern' novel is both made of, and about language. Some of the objects I have chosen are similarly self-referential, that is, they perform a function and at the same time are drawing attention to what their own rules are about. In some ways such objects stand back and describe, or represent, themselves as well as being. IN the analogy with the novel 'function' stands for 'story' as the central context.
"However, I am not only concerned with this rather elusive category in my selection. I have chosen vessels or containers that are ordinary too, and to me supremely and powerfully so. I would like to make a comparison evident between 'prose' objects and 'poetic' objects; those that are mainly active and those that are mainly contemplative. To me the most moving things are the ones where I experience in looking at them a *frisson* from both aspects at once, from both prose and poetry, purpose and commentary. These have what I call a 'double presence' (Britton, *The Maker's Eye*)
[111] See Drucker, Bhabha, Spivak, discussed above.

Titles: Focal, Vocal Point

Britton's changing relationship to language has manifested itself more recently in her use of titles, or her way of labelling work. From the 1980s into the 2000s Britton's titles were primarily basic and descriptive. As the list below shows, the earlier titles seem to reproduce the memory prompts that accompany the outline sketches or images she keeps in the inventory of her forms:

> Jug, 1978, Yellow triangle, 1981, Green Vessels Set, 1983, Big White Jug, 1987, Turquoise Pot with Black Lines, 1993, Pot with Handles, 1994, Pale Double Pot, 1995, Jar with Handles, 1998, Fluted Grey Jar, 2000, Pleated Yellow Pot, 2000.

Sometimes her titles were qualified by adjectives denoting colour or form, or used a functional descriptor. Invariably the citation of a date established a unique place for the pot in the chronological sequence of Britton's practice. The titles make sparse, terse assertions that her pots should be appreciated as pot, painting and sculpture. On one level they seem to adapt an Abstract Expressionist approach, which, in its refusal to title, or its use of perfunctory, functional titles, confers a significant ellipsis – a title-in-absentia – that refuses to communicate artistic intention in the work or influence the way it can be read. Their refusal to pinpoint or pin down the work is redolent with a negative capability that insists on the importance of uncertainty and of not knowing that is so important to Britton's professed working method.

Her titles – basic nouns naming basic forms or types of vessels – also significantly lack a definite or indefinite article. As such they describe some thing that is neither a particular nor an indeterminate object, but locates itself somewhere in-between, in an inter-subjective, transitional space that, depending upon the form and degree of engagement or investment it solicits, retains the possibility to be either a subjective object or an object objectively perceived: the particular, significant one or an

indiscriminate, insignificant one-of-many. This impulse is indicative of the artist's sensitivity to the complexities of the everyday, to objects of use that are lived with, and to the paradoxical process that wears down surface and builds up content over time as praxis, acts of association, interaction and cohabitation create significance. It understands meaning as more than an abstract, conceptual relationship of a signifier to a signified, but also as sociologically determined and context dependent. Their functional use of language seems symptomatic of the way her work negotiated the relationship of art to utility. Paradoxically, siting her work linguistically in the symbolic sphere of function while locating the asignifying, poetic and evocative (as in Kristeva's semiotic) aspect in the non-verbal, open-ended expression encountered through her practice making functional objects in clay also advocated an impure poetry for applied art.

> The confused impurity of human beings is perceived in [objects], the grouping together, use and misuse of materials, footprints and fingerprints, the constancy of a human atmosphere inundating things from within and without. Thus should be the poetry we strive for, worn as though by acid from manual duties, penetrated by sweat and smoke, redolent of urine and lilies, and seasoned by the various professions that operate both within and without the law. [112]

From 2000 the boundaries contingent on her earlier, habitual relationship between language and work began to shift. Writing in 2009, Britton acknowledged that more recently she has " . . . . tried to be less boring with titles, to use words more suggestively without going over the top poetically - *Borderland Pot, Hybrid, Overlap, Shelter and Prospect, Side Issue, Bearer, Dry Space, Tank, Undergrowth.*"[113]

Boring is an interesting adjective to describe what I think had been a significant practice and is probably characteristic of Britton's tendency to make light of serious issues to which she has often given a great deal of

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[112] Pablo Neruda, 'On an Impure Poetry' (*Sobre una poesia sin pureza*). My parenthesis
[113] Britton, 'The Fiction of Form'.(2009)

thought. In relation to this, it is telling that some of her new, 'more suggestive', titles – words that she says had been prompted by, and that responded to, objects – materially crossed a boundary between pot-object and language. These words – word-images that hovered in an indeterminate space between visual and verbal – appeared as stencilled script underwritten and layered, semi-obscured into the surface painting of her pots. The decision to stencil, to imprint an image of a word-symbol, albeit one originally drawn in her own hand, onto her painted surfaces is a significant departure for an artist who had chosen to explore the open-ended otherness of abstraction over figuration, representation and signification inherent to a symbolic order. This new development in her practice – one that is not without complication or contradiction – was concurrent with her research and investigation through practice into the use of the acanthus leaf, a classical motif used as relief and as painted image in her work.[114] It grew out of an unexpected interest in Classicism and the ability of images and symbols to develop, evolve and adapt, like language, as they travel between cultures and times. There is a sense in which this could be seen as indicative of an ongoing interest in the role of tradition and its relation to creation – as foundational bedrock relative to a creative process in which the new is laid down – which brings to the fore similarities shared by processes of making and of crafting and coining words: 'The use of titles tends to have a dual effect in relation to the work of art. As names attached to things the etymology and derivation of words permeate work, become integral to its identity and influence its interpretation by the spectator.'[115] As words enmeshed in an invisible

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[114] This culminated around 2003 in Britton's show at the Barratt Marsden gallery in which she the explored "the **acanthus leaf** as both a relief and a painted image, used so diversely in successive overlaying cultures and is still to be found everywhere in architectural ornament. I made a group of single forms which were of two kinds, tall fluted cylindrical pots like the column, as in **Sprite**; and square open pieces like the capital, as in the piece called **Scrawl -** bodies and heads, females and males, tree-trunks and houses. Britton,'The Fiction of Form'.[lecture] (2014)

[115] See: "A title in any case is more than a name or a label; it is a direction for interpretation. [....] Giving works neutral titles or calling them 'Untitled" does not precisely destroy, only distorts the sort of connection here. [...] "Untitled at least implies it is an artwork, which it leaves us to find our way about in. As a final implication of the practice, since the title itself was given by a painter, it presumably implies what he intends by way of structuring the work" (Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (London; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 119.

network of other words and their meanings, they allude to and create connections with other more distant words whose connotations refer us in turn to things external to the work.

> [....] an allusive title assimilates its allusion throughout the *entire* work of art – it is not just an allusive element. A title is also a label, unifying all aspects of its referent under a name. [116]

As the list of Britton's titles for individual pieces in her 2012 show illustrates, the words chosen play on and exploit the ambiguity and connotations of nouns that describe things, ideas and images linked to fluid and flow. The vessels comprising the exhibition shared in her investigation of the thematic concern that she communicated and made explicit through language. If we think of these words as another layer of meaning on the surface of her forms then we need to see them not as descriptors that define or fix the objects but as an invisible material manipulated by the artist that takes part in the ongoing and interactive conversation between the two media, and is played out in the tensions between form and surface, visual and verbal, function and fiction. Thus viewed the work answers back, it asks us to interrogate the words, to unpack them in context, in relation to the work.

1) **Outflow**   (red one you had early)
2) **Cave**   (small blue one you had early)
3) **Overspill**   (large buff clay double one with underwriting)
4) **Runnell** (buff clay upright, black painting and brown glaze runs)
5) **Influx**   (buff clay rectangular form with arms)
6) **Standpipe**   (shorter buff clay cylinder with pipe)
7) **Watershed**   (red clay double one, blue glaze)
8) **Chute**   (red clay, rectangular form with arms)
9) **Outpour**   (red clay, cylinder with pipe)

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[116] Sean Hudson, 'The Title: The Aesthetic Significance of the Unique Position of Titles in Fine Art', *Constellations*, 1, Warwick University, p. 2. Available at:
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/constellations/the_title/2

10) **Spurt**   (buff clay plate, has some grey glaze)

11) **Weir**   (red clay plate, green dashes)

12) **Float**   (buff clay, biggest plate)

And not-in-show other piece with AB13 label on base = **Straggler**[117]

The title Britton chose for her exhibition presented conjoined and played upon two words: 'Standing and Running'. An excavation of these two words, whose qualities I think Britton explored, juxtaposed and re-created through the pieces that she made, brings to the fore the common ground shared by her visual and verbal practices. The impulse, not to en-close, but rather to dis-close through words, or open the word out toward the object, is also, I think, in keeping with her interest in the prosaic and the poetic, and the ability of the ceramic object and the word to contain, both physically and psychically.

Standing and running are common, functional, day-to-day words, which adapt to diverse contexts. People, politicians, armies, water, lamps, and posts all stand, just as rivers, fluid, thoughts, tights, nations, heavenly bodies, pipes, pigment and presidents, all run, or are run in some sense of the word. And yet their roots are deep. The origins of 'stand' and 'run' are Old English and – like a source of inspiration for this body of work – as indigenous as it is possible to be.

Like much in post-Leach studio pottery,[118] the new red clay, which was introduced to and interacted with her usual buff clay and slips, came by a circuitous route to Britton, who rediscovered working with it in Japan. Her decision to use it was also and in large part inspired by an encounter with the limited palette of a collection of traditional, everyday slipware

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[117] "Britton's Titles for 'Standing and Running', Feb 15 – Mar 17, 2012. The numbers correspond to AB numbers labelled on bases, except 1 and 2, which came over for photography. Have described in brackets for clarity.

[118] "As Michael Cardew wrote (and he had North Devon traditions and Fremington clay at the root of his desire to become a potter) "We do not want to make Chinese or Korean, or primitive pots. But we have seen clearly what they have which our own so badly lack and having seen it we are not likely to lose sight of it again." Britton, 'Laying the Table: Synthesis, Continuity, and the Everyday',

produced around Fremington in North Devon from the 16th century.[119] For Britton the key to the aesthetic of this crockery – made from local red clay and white slip with a clear lead or honey glaze and touches of copper green or cobalt blue – lay in the contrast of dark and light that used a basic decorative vocabulary of "[p]ainted and trailed slip, where light covers dark, and sgrafitto or scratched marks where dark lines reappear through the white slip."[120] The slipware appealed to Britton's need to work within constraints, to explore the indefinite within the limits of a given definite. The rigour imposed by her use of this restricted palette and the reduced formal vocabulary of the domestic slipware interacted with the artist's ongoing concerns: bodies, buildings, physical and psychological spaces, "ordinary domestic stuff, inner worlds."[121] It also injected energy, as time and motion, into the work, which played itself out in the trace of tensions made manifest in the relationship of surface to form.

'Stand' is a strong verb: it has held a recognisable form – an identity of sense and sound – that has remained intelligible since the 8th century. Etymologically it derives from an Indo-European root shared with Latin and Greek that has passed through families of northern European languages: Teutonic, Old Germanic, Norse, Frisian, Saxon, English. Like its sense it has stood firm and persisted, and the graceful, imposing lines of Britton's vertical jars and horizontal plates reflected this presence. They embodied a sense of stasis, of stability and control from which appendages – collars, rims, spouts, pipes and handles – were explored and played out, mirroring mutations arising out of interaction. 'Run', however, is less steadfast. Its modern form is the result of the coming together of two related Old English words: *rinnan* – to run – and *rannjan* – to cause to run. The former of these, the intransitive, which limits the initial purposeful intent to the grammatical subject, is stronger. For me it echoes the impulse initiating the run, the intention contained within the action or moment of beginning to pour. In relation to the object it has the tragic potential of the inevitable unleashed – once set in motion it runs its

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[119] "ibid..
[120] Ibid.
[121] Britton, 'The Fiction of Form'.(2009)

inexorable course. But in its weak transitive form as a verb expressing an action, which it shares with its object, this latter 'run' has proved less predictable. Like the runs on the vessels, it has slithered, slipped, morphed, dribbled and deviated over the object.

Tradition and history, and the ability to draw on the past in order to develop and create something new, are important to Britton, who feels that as "an artist it is important to know what precedes you, to store up a sense of background, and be as well informed as possible in your own territory", that history is necessary because it "feeds development and change; you can't move forward if you ignore tradition."[122] Britton's use of a present continuous aspect of the verbs standing and running denotes a sustained action maintained in the present, which, like her new work, holds a past and the potentiality of a future aspect within it. Forms, processes, material and ideas that she has been working with over many years resurface, developing in response to new stimuli and moving forward.

The verb form alludes to an idea of being and doing, of function through use and of pots that perform purposes. Verbs relative to structure and material are not new to sculpture and these call to mind Richard Serra's list of verbs "to relate to oneself, material, place, and process", and his linguistic laying out of potential artistic options "as a way of applying activities to unspecified materials." Linguistically, Serra's muscular infinitives function as propositions that comprise a manifesto of actions to be performed upon material using sculptural processes to produce pieces that exhibit the effect of these past perfected acts. Britton's use of verbs differs in that her choice of a gerund, or present participle, and its progressive active aspect, introduces a pause which creates a sense of continuity through time that also embodies and holds.

Verbs as carriers of tense, are inseparable from time and make it possible to move within the present on a continuum between the past and future.

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[122] Britton, 'Laying the Table: Synthesis, Continuity, and the Everyday'.

The location of the subject in the present relativises tense in that their conscious awareness of being in the present divides time, making it possible to recall a past and anticipate a future. As verbal nouns or attributive verbs these non-finite verb forms – present participles – are able to multi-task. As adjectives deriving from verbs their function has altered to describe rather than do. They refer to meta-pots, to pots about pots that evoke and analyse the quality and nature of containment in relation to flow, and here they allude also to fluid states: contained, still, stagnant or connective, flowing, pouring and moving through. In this sense, then, these objects embody a material manifestation in their form and surface decoration of these two aspects of the words: a holding-in-motion created by the tension between the two actions; the creation of a thing by a subject within time, a sliver of space in time that has become the site of art. [123]

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[123] Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities* (Cambridge,, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 66 "This is the enigmatic mystery and resource of the present participle: it is present only in departing, present only partially, never fully, never completely present. It is present to the quick, right now, but in an ongoing recurrence that is always on the verge of taking leave, of departing. This strange movement is then named in a noun that Benjamin puts into quotes as "afterlife" Not simply as that which comes "after" life has gone, but a life that is "after" itself - that is constantly in pursuit of what it will never be."

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