Translation and the materialities of communication

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This essay provides the theoretical coordinates for a set of concerns
recently emergent in the humanities that place materiality, and its
cognates, mediality and technicity at the centre of intellectual enquiry.
The fields of media theory and media philosophy on the one hand, and
book history and textual bibliography on the other, despite tenuous
links between their intellectual traditions, have each in their own way
highlighted the importance that objects, things, media, and machines
play in the very stakes of civilization. This paper works through the
implications of this thinking for translation and the study of translation.

Keywords: translation and technology; media and translation history;
materiality and mediality; book history; filmic translation; comparative
media.

Immateriality

The material serves as counterpoint to the spiritual, the phenomenal, and the metaphysical—concepts that have been core to the human-centered humanities or *Geisteswissenschaften*. All that seems to matter is what is deep inside: that which the Germans call *Geist*—spirit, mind, soul. What does not matter is matter. This is because it is on the outside, *extra rem*, and therefore separate from *Geist;* hence also mind over matter. The problem is that the *Geisteswissenschaftler* [humanities scholar] presupposes that "communication is predominantly about meaning, about something spiritual that is carried by and needs to be identified 'beneath the purely material' surfaces of the material" (Gumbrecht 2004, 15). Translation studies is no exception here, for it too has staged its fair share of debates about meaning and the *spirit* of the letter. And yet, is it desirable or even possible to separate culture from technology, medium from art, or matter from spirit? Would indifference to materiality not be akin to something like this: "language without material inscription, speech without phonation, text without book, film without camera or film-strip. In a word, the playing of cards without the cards – summarized by only the *rules* of the game (poker, bridge, or belote)" (Debray 1996, 72)?

Yet intellectual history is unthinkable without technological innovation and without the media bodies that make the recording, storage, dissemination, and transmission of the fruits and labours of thought possible, just as intellectual history is unthinkable without translation that makes these same fruits and labours available in the hope of cross-cultural reciprocity and exchange. If we take seriously the entanglement of the material and the ideational, it is just as untenable to prioritize

spirit over matter or subject over object as it is to downgrade media technologies to empty shells, the sole function of which it is to carry the fruits of the mind's labours. Media are not merely instruments with which writers or translators produce meanings; rather, they *set the framework within which something like meaning becomes possible at all.*[1]

If we accept that the production and distribution of the labours of human imagination are unthinkable without these material carriers and culture unthinkable without media, then perhaps the time has come to take stock of "the cultural turn". Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere famously proposed that "neither the word, nor the text" but culture should be the unit of translation (1990, 8). This constructivist paradigm has been groundbreaking for translation studies, as for the humanities more generally, because it alerted us to the agency of previously marginalized figures, such as the translator, whose manipulations, rewritings, and cross-cultural negotiations are never entirely "innocent" (ibid., 11). Given the fast changing technological landscape, however, and the pivotal role that non-human agents such as machines and media play in the very stakes of civilization, would it not be appropriate to pay them their due?[2] Why do we assume that things and objects are inert and unproductive? What if it were the case that "media determine our situation", as Kittler (1999, xxxix) cheekily puts it in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*?

Mediality

While language, meaning, and interpretation—in other words, all that which we associate with human communication—have dominated the humanities, translation studies included, I want to challenge this paradigm with insights from media

philosophy, technology studies, and book history, each of which has in different ways placed a renewed emphasis on what Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer called the "materialities of communication" (1994). With this concept they sought to include "all those phenomena and conditions that contribute to the production of meaning, without being meaning themselves" (Gumbrecht 2004, 8), namely all those materialities—or medialities[3]—from the human body to exosomatic medial carriers, from human memory to the memory chip, that house and give shape to the products of spirit, mind, consciousness. Of course, there is nothing wrong with focusing on meaning, interpretation, and language when it comes to literature, or indeed translation. After all, translation engages in the minutiae of meaning production. Nor is there anything wrong with making culture a key aspect of our intellectual inquiry into translation, since translation has been, and continues to be, "a major shaping force in the development of world culture" (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990, 12). There is, however, something wrong with an overly anthropocentric emphasis on mind, consciousness, language, meaning, discourse, critique, etc., if it makes us blind to the very things that arguably are the conditions of possibility for humanization: the material technologies and techniques that underpin cultural practices such as reading, writing, translating, painting, counting, etc. And there is something deeply skewed about the discursivization of culture, if it leads to the abandonment of asking questions about its material, physical, or physiological substrata.[4]

It takes a whole planet to support, prepare, and make possible speech, language, text, meaning, and culture. *Homo loquax* [articulate human] is just as impossible without a physics as is technology, because both must abide by laws of nature, otherwise neither speech nor machines could work. In this sense it is clear that

technology is, and must be, physically determined. This is just one reason why materiality needs to be thought together with physiology and technicity. But technology also determines the human, if we accept that machines have made us what we are, just as we have made machines in the same physical environment in which machines could alone have been made. The anthropocene is impossible without its material infrastructure: humanity cannot sequester itself from the ecology, as "natural" as it is technological, nor stand apart from, or without it, as if it was simply a matter of pulling a plug. Thus, so immersed are we within it that it is hardly a question of how we make use of technology, or how we might master it, but that it has already affected us, including the interiority of our mental spaces. And this is the case not just for highly technologized societies.

Ong's idea that "mind interacts with the material world around it" and that technologies are internalized by the mind, "incorporated into mental processes themselves" (1982, 172), and in consequence shape thinking, how thinking itself thinks of thinking, and how thinking thinks about the human brain, presents a serious challenge to humanism and its tendency to put the human at the centre of all things. I therefore disagree with Cronin's assessment that "technology need not [...] become the model for our thinking" (2003, 102). Rather, I would want to argue that technology is a rechannelling, or mediation, of laws of nature. It is therefore a primary model in two senses: one, insofar as it mediates physical states towards specific outcomes, just as thinking does; and two, insofar as it does so precisely because it is not independent of, or autonomous with respect to, the ecology of physical possibilities in which it acts. What "modelling" therefore amounts to is not merely creating an abstract pattern but precisely a physically instantiated programme of

actions. In a nutshell, modelling is technology. This is what thought taking technology as a model means.

This is perhaps best explained with reference to Nietzsche's famous comment from 1882 about his typewriter, which has become something of a *Leitmotif* in my own thinking about technology: "our writing tools also work on our thoughts" (1981, 172). The logic is this: if tools work on our thoughts, it follows that the thought of the separability of tool from thought is itself the work of those tools. We cannot think without tools or outside of them; they *environ* thought and mediate it accordingly. This is why we need to be attentive to materiality and its cognates, mediality and technicity. This is undoubtedly also why an English professor such as Matthew Kirschenbaum would want to research the effects of word-processing on literary practice and authorship,[5] and why so many translation scholars are in the midst of looking into the long-term effects of computer-assisted technologies for translation (O'Hagan 2013). If Nietzsche is right then, neither writing nor translation can be the product of "pure consciousness", or be "strictly immaterial", as Donald Philippi (1989, 680) maintains about his craft:

> Whatever happens after a translator sits down at the computer, it isn't anything material. […] The translator's consciousness is not focused on any object, but is rather liberated from the world of material objects. […] Abstracted from reality, the translator operates outside the spatio-temporal system in the world of pure consciousness. (Ibid.)

Rather, the translator is part of a material, medial, and technologized ecology that shapes every aspect of mind. It is the dominance of the "anti-physical" paradigm that has increasingly come under scrutiny in both the humanities and the social sciences. This is because that paradigm cannot countenance the extent to which the material, the medial, and the technological act in the ideational.

Technicity

Steiner's seminal *After Babel* (1975) is a "philosophic enquiry into consciousness and into the meaning of meaning".[6] It is also a thesis about language and the multiplicity of languages. Implicit throughout is the notion that language is a central pillar of what makes humans human. Steiner not only makes the study of translation key to the study of language (1998, 48-49), he also makes translation central to human communication *per se*. Every time a human communicates, s/he "performs an act of translation, in the full sense of the word", a point which Steiner famously sums up with this dictum: "*inside or between languages, human communication equals translation*" (1998, 49, emphasis in the original). As Reynolds points out, this makes it sound as if "*water equals H_2O*" and as if there was no distinction between the translation of the dots and dashes of Morse code into letters and translation between natural languages (2011, 9; emphasis in the original). But this is only half the story. In Steiner's model of communication, it is language (be this Morse or English) that is the medium of communication. While language is clearly vitally important to translation, there is nevertheless a failure here to recognize that language, just like communication, is technologically mediated. Communication relies on a body or an apparatus for transmission; language in its graphic representation makes use of the technologies of pictograms, alphabets, ideograms, etc.; and the spoken word involves

the evolved physiology of the larynx and the physical affordances of moveable air. Although Steiner addresses the "neurophysiological" dimensions of what he calls "the engineering of vocal signs" (ibid., 130) and makes some reference to machine translation, technology is never overtly addressed in *After Babel*. But it is there, if only tacitly. By constructing a model of translation that involves "senders", "receivers", "word-signals", a "source-language", a "receptor-language" and "encoding-decoding" (ibid., 48-49)—the terminology of which is derived from Roman Jakobson's (1958) linguistic model of communication, which in turn is indebted to Claude Shannon's (1948) mathematical theory of communication— Steiner's thesis reveals an underlying, if unacknowledged, concern with the communications technologies of his day, or at least those of Jakobson and Shannon.

Two very different paradigms come to the fore here: one takes language as constitutive of human communication and makes it, as Steiner does, the irreducible ground for the mediation of experience and understanding; the other makes media technologies the substrate of human communication. This is foregrounded most clearly in this statement by Aleida and Jan Assmann:

> Everything that can be known, thought and said about the world is only knowable, thinkable, and sayable dependently upon the media that communicate this knowing. [...] It is not the language in which we think, but the media in which we communicate that model our world. (1990, 2; my translation)

This displacement of the centrality of language to the modelling of the world is nothing other than a displacement of one medium by another. It is a displacement of the medium of language as a primary modelling system by other, technological media and a displacement of the claim, from Schleiermacher to Wittgenstein to Sapir and Whorf to Derrida, that a human being's "whole thinking" is a product of language (Schleiermacher 1992, 38), that languages constitute distinct realities (Whorf 1956, 214), and that we are spoken by language (Derrida 1982, 15). The linguistic paradigm once suggested a radical rethinking of the limits of our mental world, but it is a view that has been undermined from a variety of quarters. As Peters puts it: "The limits of my world are the limits of my language, said Wittgenstein; today, we might want to revise that to my *media* or *instruments*" (2003, 409; emphasis in the original).

Wittgenstein's dictum ([1921] 2001, 68 [5.6] falters, if one accepts that there is a world out there and that it is out there regardless of what I say or think about it; that is, the conditions of my language lie not in language, deep inside my head, but in the world. The same is true of culture, since it could not exist were it not for the technological artefacts that give it a body. Culture is therefore not an outward manifestation of spirit (that had lain hitherto dormant in our minds); rather, spirit and its fruits are the outward manifestations of the media bodies and machines that make these manifestations possible at all. Without media there would be no culture. And "without tools", as Cronin says, "translation […] simply does not exist" (2003, 24).

The present media- and technology-saturated environment has made it impossible for us to ignore technological change, and impossible to disregard media. Therefore, it has brought about a crisis point where the questions asked under the old

regimes of the "linguistic" and "cultural turn"—which in salient respects are linked because language is seen as the "heart" of the "body" of culture [7]—are out of tune with the questions that need to be posed now. In Kuhn's (1962) assessment it is at such crisis points in the history of science that a paradigm shift occurs. Namely, it is only in the context of crisis technology and rarely in the context of naturalized technology (i.e. technology that is so integrated into our life world that it has become transparent to us and goes unnoticed by us) that machines become visible as "alien power, as the power of the machine itself" (Marx 1993, 693). It is only at such points that technology becomes a subject of critical investigation (Grant, 2003, 365) and that arguments are made about the material and infrastructural effects of technology. It is precisely at such points of crisis that a blind spot such as Steiner's, namely, having unwittingly conceptualized language by reference to technologically mediated communication, becomes noticeable. Something similar occurs in Whorf's "Science and Linguistics" (1940), when he describes how reality is accessed:

> We dissect nature along lines laid down by native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a *kaleidoscopic flux of impressions* which has to be organized in our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. (1956, 213)

What *stares* us in the face here is that the world is perceived in proto-cinematic terms through the shifting patterns and optical trickeries of the pre-cinematic technology of

the kaleidoscope. The world here is accessed, strictly speaking, not through language, but by way of optical media.

Materiality

Clearly, translation has played a central role historically in disseminating information, knowledge, and forms of cultural expression across linguistic boundaries, as *After Babel* demonstrates so expertly. It is media technologies, however, which have enabled and decisively changed these processes of dissemination. When McLuhan addressed the role of technological media in shaping culture, society, and our sense of ourselves, it became clear that the medium in which a message is sent is at least as important as its contents, and for McLuhan (1964, 15-16) even more so. It also became clear that the materiality of given media, despite the immateriality falsely imputed to telecommunications and computational media, matters in terms of the ways in which each technology changes our relations to one another and to ourselves (ibid., 27). Media *actively* shape our perceptions and consequently also our mindsets, not through the content they carry, but through their material and technical properties.

The resurgence of McLuhan in literary and cultural studies, and in philosophy, is testament to a renewed interest in the materiality of media and as such indexes a crisis in the self-understanding of the human sciences. Instead of producing textual, ideological, social, or institutional analyses in the mould of the Frankfurt School or in the tradition of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, media theorists now are more likely to scrutinize inscription surfaces (from human memory, stone, papyrus, parchment, vellum, paper, wax, or celluloid to silicon), inscription instruments (from pens or moveable type to typewriters), and recording machines (from phono*graphs* or

cinemato*graphs* to computers) as physical-technical conditions of possibility for art, culture, and society. This approach belongs to a much "more elusive tradition of media studies", according to Peters, one that takes its cues from McLuhan, but also from Lewis Mumford, Harold Innis, etc. and "ponders the civilizational stakes of media as a cultural complex" (2009, I). It is not just the kinds of media that are studied that have expanded, but the claim on behalf of media has become expansionist. In much of German media theory that is influenced by Kittler, media are not merely tools with which humans record history; rather, historical record is revealed as a "media artefact" (Peters 2009, III). In consequence, "media history is not only a supplement to other kinds of historical inquiry; it is a challenge to how we understand history altogether" (ibid.). Media make history, transmission, culture, communication, and translation possible.

It is not surprising, therefore, that media have become central to research in the humanities in the last few decades, as Mitchell and Hansen's (2010) field-defining anthology has shown. They present a new object of study for disciplines that have previously ignored them, such as literary studies, as well as a new and often provocative approach to old objects of study (Winthrop-Young, 2013, 13). If, twenty years ago, cultural studies was in vogue, now it tends to be cultural history, material anthropology, material culture, and media history, evident even in nomenclatures such as print culture, screen culture, digital culture, etc. The shift from the abstract to the concrete, from textuality to bookishness, is part and parcel of the slide from mediation to medium to mediality. It is invariably accompanied by a turn to history: the archive of dead media, archaeology of media, even the forensics of the computer hard drive.

This change in direction is already evident in the project of the "materialities of communication". As Gumbrecht explains:

> Our main fascination came from the question of how different media—different "materialities"—of communication would affect meaning that they carried. We no longer believed that a meaning complex could be separated from its mediality, that is, from the difference appearing on a printed page, on a computer screen, or in a voice mail message. (2004, 11-12)

As if prompted by the supposed immateriality of computing and the supposed death of the book as a physical object, materialists of communication—among whom we might include book historians and textual bibliographers at one end of the spectrum, and self-professed mediologists and advocators of a "machinic turn" such as Régis Debray (1996, 51) and hardware theorists like Kittler at the other—make a point of acknowledging that all forms of written communication bring into play *content, form and matter*; that is, engage not only a "linguistic" but also a "bibliographical" code (McGann, 1991, 56-57) as well as a mediological code.

This thinking has had a profound effect on the recent disciplinary landscape. In literary studies, which in the 1970s and 1980s had chiefly been concerned with the signification processes of texts, with reading for signs and with interpreting meanings between the lines, book history now provides the raw material for new kinds of analyses and has come to stand for a "materialist resistance" (Price 2006, 10) to lofty, abstract theory and a reminder to critics that they not only engage with verbal content when they read, but encounter that book as a material object. The swerve away from

the textual to the material is also evident in film studies.[8] Similarly, in translation studies Mitchell (2010, 25) has addressed translation as a "material practice", Olohan (2014, 18) has drawn attention to the role of "material agency" in translation, and Cronin has urged us to pay attention to *translation and things*" (2003, 10) rather than continue to dwell exclusively on *"translation and text"* or *"translation and translators*" (9-10), two of the tendencies he sees as having dominated translation studies. In consequence, he proposes an "integrated approach to translation" that would

> consider not only the general symbolic system (human language), the specific code (the language(s) translated), the physical support (stone, papyrus, CD-ROM), the means of transmission (manuscript, printing, digital communication) but also how translations are carried through societies over time by particular groups. (29)

In what follows I identify a number of book-historical trajectories that have sought, each in their own way, to integrate the material into translation studies.

Book History

Book history and textual bibliography reject the idea that "in reading a printed text the individual letters and verbal signs do not have individual qualities for us; they simply do not matter" (Ingarden 1974, 20n) and ask us to pay attention to a text's oral incarnation (its embodiment by a speaker), its anatomy (its physical inscription on the page), and morphology (the changing forms as part of its history of transmission). This is to say, we should never ignore a "book's total form" (McKenzie 2002, 215),

whether it boasts this or that typography, appears in this or that edition, or is the product of a handwritten artefact, a printed copy, or an electronic version, because all these factors have an effect on how we interpret and how we consume, and relate to, a given work. The concerns of textual bibliography and book history overlap, however, with the former tending to focus on *mise-en-page* and *a* book's transformations through (re)editing and (re)printing, the latter on *the* book's transformations, that is, its evolution as medium. In any case, what matters to both are the material processes that underpin the production, distribution and reception of, in the main, the written word.

Such insights are pertinent to translation for a host of reasons, as Hosington has demonstrated so persuasively (2015). Material forms "effect" meaning, wrote the bibliographer D.F. McKenzie (1986, 13, 18, 68), from which he concluded, in a similar vein to Lefevere (1992), that each new physical edition is a rewriting (25). Insofar as a translation always appears in a new edition, the target reader encounters the work in a different language and a different material format. The difference that a new edition of a work can make to its meaning is amply exemplified in the reordering of Christa Wolf's novel *Cassandra*, not just in the West German edition by Luchterhand (1983), but also in the translated edition in English by Virago (1986; Littau 2006, 27-29, 33). Book-historical and textual-bibliographical insights have played an increasingly important role in translation studies, undermining Jakobson's notion of "interlingual translation" as "translation proper" (1966, 233). Translation brings into focus the instability of language as much as it does that of the physical text. This is a reminder that "translation is not in some ethereal state" (Reid 2014) but

is embedded, just like the source text, in a material object, which itself is subject to translation or we might say transmediation.

To study editing, printing, and translation gives crucial insights into how meanings are produced, manipulated, and spread. As Coldiron demonstrates with reference to how Renaissance printers and translators englished French-language works:

> Printers, like translators, control the distance between the reader and the prior foreign text. Just as the translator may elide or enhance cultural distance with each lexical and syntactical choice and with register, tone, and style, so too the printer may elide or enhance the work's foreign elements with choices of *mise-en-page,* ornaments, initials, and typography. (2015, 173)

This shows that englishing is played out both at the "verbal-linguistic and material-textual" level (7). Similarly, Armstrong deploys "newer material-textual critical approaches" (2015, 78) to translation in her work. While book-historical attention has been given to "the place of translations in early modern print culture, and the ways in which they are made and remade in different language and reading contexts", she identifies her own project more closely with textual bibliography when she says "there has been very much less analysis to date of the *forms* of translation as expressed on the page", namely how "interlingual transfer [is] encoded in the information design of the translated book" (ibid.). Armstrong examines, like Coldiron, "the visible marks of the foreign" (Coldiron 2012, 190) on the pages of multilingual text editions. In scrutinizing the printerly or handwritten page

(Armstrong 2013) and visual designs of books, such studies discern larger meaningful patterns that challenge traditional national literary and book histories.[9]

Media History

Recent studies, such as Barker and Hosington's (2013) on translation and print in the Renaissance in Britain have begun to explore, Coldiron observes, "the capacities of media to intersect with and catalyse translation effects" (2015, 17). In suggesting that media catalyse effects, Coldiron seems to be shifting the ground from human agency to non-human agency. Under the cultural paradigm, much of translation studies has been concerned with the translator as an agent of cultural change;[10] similarly, much of book history and textual bibliography, even though it is about material objects, is centred around the human agent: the printer, typesetter, bookbinder, editor, etc. And yet, what is a printer without a printing press; or a translator without a medium? The point is this: medial forms—handwritten, printed, electronic—bring about changes in the ways in which we write, read, *and* translate.

The idea that media affect not only the ways in which we write, or translate, but also the matter, form and content of this writing, and that media transitions might therefore have had an impact historically not just on this or that translation, but on translation activity per se, was a crucial concern of my essay "First Steps towards a Media History of Translation", published in *Translation Studies* in 2011 and the trigger for the invitation by the current journal's editors to write a Forum Position Paper that would develop the theoretical coordinates for the kind of material history of translation I had proposed. My aim was to address the constitutive role that technologies have played in the history of Western translation in the media contexts

of oral, scribal, print, screen, and digital cultures. To this end, I drew on insights from historians of reading and the book, whose work has shown how practices of writing and reading varied historically in accordance with the material carriers (human body, tablet, roll, codex, book, computer) and their hardware (voice, clay, wax, papyrus, parchment, paper, screen) available for the storage and retrieval of information; and I asked whether these insights are also applicable in the context of translation. In particular, I examined the extent to which translations bear the traces of their particular technological environment, be this performance-based, artisanal, industrial, or electronic, and the ways in which successive media technologies have arguably shaped practices of translation.

My basic premise was that mediality is an underlying condition of all cultural output and cultural transfer, including translation, and that if it could be demonstrated that translation changed over the course of history in accordance with the material and technical resources at its disposal, this would throw new light on age-old debates about word-for-word and sense-for-sense translation. Thus, with reference to textual cultures that were still deeply steeped in the oral tradition, such as Ancient Rome, I asked: was translation during this period modelled on the styles of oral delivery and the art of rhetoric? And, if so, is sense-for-sense translation in this context, as opposed to word-for-word translation, a product of the tool of mnenotechnics? Did translators translate differently after the codex was introduced as the main vehicle for preserving and transmitting writing? If so, is there a correlation between translational practice and codicilogical practice? That is to say, is literalism or word-for-word translation a practice that is congruent with scribal culture, insofar as textual transcription entails copying, quite literally, letter by letter and word by word? Did the invention of print

alter practices of translation and, if so, how? Can the translational strategy of fluency, which according to Venuti (2000, 55) first emerged in the late seventeenth century be explained at least in part with reference to typographical changes made possible by print innovations, insofar as inter-word spacing now combined with new typefaces, page layouts, punctuation, chapter breaks, etc. introduced greater legibility, smoother readability, and by extension favoured more immediate intelligibility? Finally, I asked in what ways the computer is challenging our print-minded conception of translation both as process and product.

I concluded the essay with a nod to film studies, suggesting that how we think about translation is itself medially constituted, insofar as to conceive of translation as a form of *rewriting* belongs to a chirographic and typographic culture while the *in/visibility* descriptor of translation arguably only emerged, became visible, in a media culture dominated by images, projection screens, and monitors. This is also borne out by recent research on translation and book history. Coldiron's work, for instance, re-contextualizes Venuti's invisibility concept for medieval and early modern translation by showing that "its sibling, visibility" and the presence of the foreign "meant very different things" (2012, 190) during that period than in the post-seventeenth-century context in which Venuti first developed the concept. This is how she describes her approach in *Printers without Borders*:

> To look at patterns helps to aggregate and conceptualize the vast, seemingly chaotic field of early printed translations—hundreds of thousands of pages in every genre and on every topic imaginable—as clusters of dynamic events, indeed events dynamic in certain recognizable ways, rather than as static

objects. As in physics and medicine, change of place and change of pace matter, and *tracing the paths of moving objects as they change*, rather than only looking at the objects in one state or another, allows us to *visualize more than one thing happening across more than one event-process*. (2015, 29; emphasis added)

It is tempting to suggest that Coldiron, in evoking the wide-angle-shot and the tracking shot, conceives of her project in proto-cinematic terms so as to avoid the "straight-line literary histories" (ibid., 30) that have since McLuhan (1962) been associated with the kind of linear thinking that print arguably promotes. Thus, adopting "an even *wider view*" helps us, she argues, not only to study patterns more effectively but also "to *track* complex literary changes, in several aspects or dimensions at once, assuming *motion rather than stasis* and yet without assuming any overall telos" (Coldiron, 2015, 30; my emphasis). Clearly then, stasis and fixedness give way to motion or movement, the very characteristics which have distinguished the medium of film from its predecessors, print and photography.[11] A similar movie-minded perspective is also evident in Armstrong's *The English Boccaccio: A History in Books* the "presiding focus" of which is "on the book as object, rather than merely as the text in translation" (2013, 5). She deliberately draws on the language of cinema to state the book's rationale: "If each translation is a snapshot in time, the narrative arc of this book moves from a zoomed-in close-up for the earliest works to a wide-angle survey of the broader field for the mass-produced editions of the nineteenth century and beyond" (14). As these examples indicate, media technologies shape our thinking, including our thinking about translation.

This raises two related questions, both of which I addressed recently in an article for a Special Issue on "Intermediality" for *SubStance* (forthcoming). Firstly, is thinking only ever shaped by the latest technologies? Does a brain suddenly stop being "bookish-minded" with the birth of the motion pictures and has mind now irrevocably transformed from a "motion picture" into a "computer"? In other words, why do we assume that the inner workings of the mind are medium-specific or mono-medial? Secondly, does it make sense to study the book in isolation from other media?

Book historians are finely attuned to the changes that computing has made to the object of the book, to writing and to reading. But can book history be studied in isolation from film, or film in isolation from the magic lantern, or the computer, etc.? In the 1910s and 1920s film was felt to be rivalling reading culture: "The public has put the dry book on the shelf; the newspaper gets skimmed fleetingly, and in the evening the hunger for images is satisfied in the cinema" ("Neuland" [1910] 1978, 41). During the same period, and since, film has given rise to a host of new literary forms of expression, frequently referred to as cinematic or filmic literature. If film has productively transformed, even invigorated, literary practice, might this not also be the case with regard to literary translation? In what ways has film shaped the material and aesthetic practices of translation? For instance, what kinds of filmic techniques have been absorbed into poetry translations in book-form or for online e-translations? How are we to understand the allusions to film and film culture in translations based on originals that were composed before film was even invented? In raising these questions in the context of a discussion on intermediality I wanted to draw attention to what might be called filmic translation. By filmic translation I do not mean

adaptation, that is, the transposition from literature into film, or vice versa. Rather, what I have in mind is the way in which translation has adapted to film culture.

Comparative media

The case I am making is this. In a multimedia world where it increasingly makes little sense to treat media, art forms, and disciplines in isolation from each other, a reassessment is needed of the traditional disciplinary boundaries, including those of translation studies and comparative literature. This reassessment requires a comparative understanding of translation's relations to the media landscapes of the past, present, and future, and therefore a comparative understanding of translation's relations to a host of different media and media cultures. Culture is normally indifferent to technology; but when technology is manifestly an agent in culture our comfortable ignorance evaporates, revealing our history as a sequence of technological change. We do not discover the traces of technology in the meaning of our texts but in their material organization. Therefore, a media history of translation is required to make plain the repeated translations between media that constitute the shaping force of cultural production.

As a discipline translation studies has explained the complex mediations and negotiations between texts and cultural contexts in a multilingual landscape. It is also, however, ideally suited to explain the translations and "remediations" (Bolter and Grusin 1999) between different media and between the specific value systems of different media cultures. Translation has been the cornerstone of comparative literature. What I am proposing is that translation become the glue for comparative media studies.[12] Media are vital for understanding the changing faces of translation

and a study of comparative media brings this into focus. Equally, translation is crucial for understanding the changes and transitions between media on a local and global playing field. We live in an age of translation, Cronin has said (2013, 1-8; see also Bassnett 2014, 1), but we also live in an age of media transition where our print-minded assumptions cannot adequately address the plethora of media and their new regimes of the spoken, the written, the visual. This is a case that has been made most elegantly by Hayles and Pressman (2013) in their book *Comparative Textual Media*. We need, therefore, an expanded notion of comparative literature just as we need an expanded notion of translation studies. Once we think in terms of the medium, or mediality, it necessarily unsettles our assumptions about the relations between matter and spirit, the material and the ideational, and especially the relations between the non-human and the human, for neither belongs exclusively either to matter or spirit, to the technological or the natural.

Note on contributor

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Notes

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[1] I have adapted this point from Wellbery (1990, xii) who makes it with reference to Kittler's media theory.

[2] See my essay "Translation's Histories and Digital Futures" (2015), which drawing on Latour's actor-network-theory and De Landa's robot historian asks what a machine history of translation would look like.

[3] Pfeiffer has since said that he prefers the term "mediality" to "materiality" (n.d., 9).

[4] Even Derrida, whose work remains the blueprint for discursivity and textuality, promising but not quite delivering a mediology of writing beyond the book, turned in his later career to the matter of matter with *Paper Machine* (2005).

[5] See http://metalab.harvard.edu/2013/10/track-changes-the-literary-history-of-word-processing-with-matthew-kirschenbaum/

[6] "Preface to the Second Edition" (1998, x).

[7] See Bassnett (2002, 23). We also should remember that the linguistic and the cultural paradigms are linked insofar as language served as a model for understanding other sign systems and insofar as culture itself was understood as language-like and textual.

[8] Twenty or so years ago analyses of the film-text as a site of contested meanings or cinema as an ideological apparatus dominated debate; increasingly, though, film studies has turned towards an exploration of film as a medium with its own rich history of precursor media.

[9] Others in the field have focused on the internationalism of the book trade (Pérez Fernández and Wilson-Lee 2014; Freedman 2012; Howsam and Raven 2011) and what it reveals about the larger movements of books and peoples across borders,

including what was translated and when (Boutcher 2015). Hosington's project *The Renaissance Cultural Crossroads Catalogue* enables precisely such a task. It is a searchable database "of all translations out of and into all languages printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland before 1641" and "also includes all translations out of all languages into English printed abroad before 1641" (see http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/rcc/) and the first resource of its kind to allow for a statistical analysis of the translation market in this period.

[10] This is evident in Cronin (2003, 66, 68), and in Milton and Bandia's (2009) introduction to *Agents of Translation*.

[11] Coldiron (2015, 3) makes an overt connection between printers and translators in the early modern period and early twentieth-century film producers.

[12] Charles Bernheimer makes a similar point in his ACLA Report, as does Rey Chow in her essay for this report. For both essays, see Bernheimer (1995, 44; 116).

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