

Translating transmission: text and reception in the age of digital reproduction

Jonathan Evans



- Questions of transmission in the digital age
- Disruptions
 - Fragmentary transmission in McKenzie Wark's *Molecular Red*
 - Retranslation and abundance
 - Remakes and/as filmic afterlives

Aims

- To question some ideas about transmission
 - Transmission and the wholeness of texts
 - Transmission in conditions of abundance (rather than scarcity)
 - Transmission in AV media
 - Translation not being transmission

Fragmentary transmission

Molecular Red

- Develops new critical tools for Anthropocene
- Uses work of
 - Aleksander Bogdanov
 - Andrey Platonov
 - Donna Haraway
 - Kim Stanley Robinson

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 - Andrey Platonov  Russian novelist
 - Donna Haraway  Professor Emerita of History of Consciousness, UC Santa Cruz
 - Kim Stanley Robinson  American science fiction writer

Interdiscursivity/intertextuality

- Uses other discourses than (humanistic) critical theory
- Haraway trained as a biologist
- Bogdanov works in multiple fields
- Platonov and Robinson novelists
- Intertextuality in Kristeva's sense; materials from multiple 'sign-systems'/discourses
- Intertextuality in a more general sense

Détournement

- Situationist practice:
revising/rewriting previous
works
- See Wark's *The Beach
Beneath the Street* (2011;
esp. 33-45)
- Fabulous example is René
Vienet's *La dialectique peut-
elle casser les briques?* (1973)
- (detourns Tu Quangji's
Crush/Tang shou tai quan dao
1972)

Translation?

- Science as critical theory?
- Fiction as critical theory?
- Humanities approaches to climate change?

- Meeting of different discourses and systems
- Marais (2014) puts translation at all interactions between systems

Molecular Red

- Uses, cites, detourns these theorists
- Revisits and recovers older theories
 - Though Haraway still around and publishing
 - But passé?
- Encourages searching for sources?

Fragmentary transmission

- ‘Special thanks to David Rowley for making his translation of Bogdanov’s *Philosophy of Living Experience* available, and to Donna Haraway for sharing some unpublished work’
- Wark 2015, xxiii

Reading footnotes

- Page 233
- 36. Alexander Bogdanov, *The Philosophy of Living Experience*, trans. David G. Rowley, forthcoming, ms., p. 6.
- Page 241
- 1. Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur*, trans. Anthony Olcott, Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis 1978. [...] I am grateful to all those who have labored so hard to translate Platonov

Meanwhile, in Classics

- Transmission of some classical writers through critical work
- Sappho
- Heraclitus
 - Only available in fragments

Meanwhile, in media

Merchandising

Transmedia

Fragmentary experience of texts

Paratexts (Gray 2010)

Fragmentary transmission

- Does appear to exist in book history
- But translation?
- Should we be looking at translations in other texts?
- Relationship intertextuality/translation?
- What room is there for détournement and parody?
- Lefevere (1992) discusses anthologies and other fragmentary forms

Retranslation and abundance

Lydia Davis's *Madame Bovary*

- 19th translation since 1881?
- Exactly contemporary with Adam Thorpe's 2011 British translation
- Many of these translations are still in circulation
- Easy enough to get the French language version
- Various movies (inc. Chabrol's 1991 film, also from 1934, 1937, 1947, 1949, and TV versions from 1953, 1975 and 2000)

- Not an introduction of a text into a new language
- Straight from source, use of drafts to check (Davis 2011a)

Abundance

- Already transmitted
- Already circulating
- So: why a new edition?

Paratexts

- Davis's introduction
- Davis's essay 'Some notes on Translation and on *Madame Bovary*', *The Paris Review*, 198 (2011), 65-96.



- ‘There is a great trust in translations, on the part of many people who don’t know any better and even many who do. Now that I’m aware of how many previous translations of *Madame Bovary* there are, and of the fact that none of them reproduces Flaubert’s style, whichever one I may have read [when I was younger] (and it was probably Steegmuller’s), I was not reading the novel in the style in which Flaubert wrote it.’
- Davis 2011b, 72

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- ‘Curiously, in the case of a writer as famously fixated on style as Flaubert was, many of the translations do not try to reproduce that style, but simply tell this engrossing story in their own preferred manner.’
- Davis 2011a, xxiii

- ‘The great variety among the translations results, of course, from two factors: how each translator handles expressive English and how liberally or narrowly each defines the task of the translator.’
- Davis 2011a, xxiii

- ‘I did not study the other translations during my first draft because I had to establish my own approach, my own style, and my own understanding of what I was reading before I could risk the rhythms and eccentricities of the others striking my ear and possibly creeping into my prose’
- Davis 2011b, 75

- Highlighting the aspect that's important -- style
- Gently arguing the other translations aren't as good
- Somewhat partisan account

Dealing with abundance

- Filtering
 - Style
 - Dismissal of other texts / translators
 - Use of highly acclaimed translator
- Other editions continue to circulate
 - Different cultural capital?

Dealing with abundance

- Blockbusters get bigger
- Myth of the long tail
- Most visible will often be used (rather than best)
- Keen 2015

- Panic and stress for users
- Berardi (2012, 100)

Retranslation and abundance

- *Madame Bovary* still a print example
- Different from manuscript and early print
- More similar to digital issues
- Global distribution networks
- Easier access to earlier work
- Necessity to position new work

Film remakes and film afterlives

Assumptions

- Post DVD/Blu-Ray/Bit Torrent/Netflix
- ‘Box set’ culture/bingewatching
- Watching on a variety of screens
- Availability of older films for home viewing
 - Previously through TV and repertory cinemas

But what does all this mean?

- Shift of materiality: film no longer film
- Viewer control over narration (pause, skip)
- Experience of cinema is more diffused
- Individuation
- Ability to easily quote/fragment films (Mulvey 2006, 29)
- Scattered attention of Netflix and chill

Remake in the digital context

- Abundance: more films than you could ever watch!
- Interlingual remake does not function as replacement for ST
 - Complement, supplement

So?

- Where's transmission?
 - Film available, with subs or dubs
 - No longer reliant on individual prints (though such still exist)
- Availability of remake does not mean non-availability of original (contra Mazdon 2000)

But

- Remake is still **bringing into now** of the source film
- May stimulate availability of earlier film
 - Witness increased invisibility of *Ghostbusters* 1 and 2 over the summer
 - Re-release of *Real Ghostbusters* TV show on DVD
 - Stimulates interest in earlier film
- Room for archival research to see if this was always the case
 - E.g. *Zéro de conduite / If...*

Afterlives

- Continuation
- But with variation
- Like a ghost?
- ‘In the same figure, like the King that's dead.’
Hamlet 1, 1, 53.
- Different from original circulation but still retaining some features
- Hauntology in music (and theory)

Who ya gonna call?

- Ghostbusters 2016 references previous films
- Exists in dialogue with them
- But watchable without knowledge of canon
- Also intersects with other variations of franchise
- Media text
as palimpsest

Some conclusions

- Digital means:
 - Abundance
 - Fragmentation of audiences (interpretive communities; Fish 1980)
 - Continuing availability of older texts
 - Reduction of materiality (to the visual?)
 - Circulation of fragmentary texts (spreadable media; Jenkins et al 2013)
- Some of these features present in print, but different

Transmission

- Can be fragmentary
- May be in other media / as citation
- May not be the point of the translation
- May lead to seeking out ST
- Inseparable from reception

Ways forward

- Rereading Lefevere's *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (especially the bits not about translation)
- Looking at intersections with medieval studies, classics, media studies
- Questioning the relationship between translation and other modes of transmission
- Questioning the translation of materiality

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