Writing performance : on relations between texts and performances

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3 Chapter Three: Translation from and into Performances

This chapter is dedicated to the issue of “Translation from and into Performances.” The aim is to find out whether or not translation can be used as a term to designate a non-hierarchical relation between text and performance.

The chapter is divided into seven subchapters. “3.1 Translation” is dedicated to the notion of translation approached from the point of view of the German philosopher, translator and literary critic Walter Benjamin. In order to apply his theory of translation to the research subject of translation from and into performances, the theory of musical reproduction from the German philosopher, sociologist and music theoretician Theodor Adorno will additionally be consulted. Benjamin and Adorno, despite philosophical disagreements, were connected in a lifelong relationship.

In “3.2 Possibilities of an Impossible Status” I will briefly address the hierarchy between text and performance regarding chronology.

In “3.3 Fragments of Translation as Collaboration” I will very briefly take Benjamin’s theory of translation in the context of collaboration into account. Even though fragmentary, I believe that this section on translation and collaboration is important for the articulation of my position.

In “3.4 Reading, Understanding and Interpreting Scores” I turn to the role of understanding and interpreting texts for performances and the role this understanding plays in the performance of the text.

In “3.5 Translation Revisited” I address Adorno’s ideas on translation in relation to musical reproduction and I will compare Adorno’s notion of “objectivity” to Benjamin’s “pure language.”

In “3.6 Afterwardsness” and in “3.7 The Force of Law” I will consider the terms “afterwardsness” and “force of law” by Derrida.

I am aware that Derrida and Benjamin take different perspectives on the meaning of language, text, and translation. I consult both of them, because they teach me varying aspects of an understanding of these notions. I will refer to Benjamin’s “sphere of pure language” and apply it in a speculative way for my own purpose. I approach Benjamin in a poetical sense. In reading his texts, my thoughts are carried

to the places and things he talks about. This poetical approach enters this chapter from time to time.

3.1 Translation

In semiotics, translation is a mode of interpretation that modifies and rewrites a text. A distinction is made between “inner language translation” (*innersprachliche Übersetzung*), “translation between languages” (*zwischensprachliche Übersetzung*) and “inter-semiotic transfer” (*intersemiotische Übertragung*).[112] In the first case, inner language translation, one stays within the same language, but translates a text into other words; an example for this kind of translation is a paraphrase. In the second case, translation between languages, one translates from one language to another language. In the third case, inter semiotic transfer, one translates from one semiotic system to another. Examples are translation from a text of written language into musical or visual language. When one applies semiotic categories, the translation from text into performance and the other way round belongs to the third category.[113]

The essay “The Task of the Translator” by Benjamin was written in 1921 and published two years later as a self-reflective preface to poems by Charles Baudelaire, which Benjamin translated from French to German. In this essay, Benjamin establishes a structure based on three terms: the original text, the translation, the sphere of pure language. According to Benjamin, both the original (which I will refer to as the first text) and the translation (the second text) are connected to the sphere of pure language. “Pure language” is an abstract concept which in Benjamin’s understanding embraces and reconciles all languages.

Regarding the first text, Benjamin differentiates between the “intended object” (the message) and the “mode of intention” (how things are meant). The mode of intention is specific to a certain language, so it cannot be translated. In Benjamin’s view, the message is “inessential.” In his opinion, a translation should not be similar to the original because then only the message, the content, would be translated. And a

[112] Cf. Volli, Ugo, “Die Übersetzungsprozesse,” in: id., *Semiotik. Eine Einführung in die Grundbegriffe.* Tübingen/Basel: A. Franke Verlag, 2002. pp. 239-246, here: p. 239.

[113] From the perspective of semiotics, all media including text and performance are considered texts. Although text can be thought of as performance and performance can be thought of as text, from the perspective of an artist, I differentiate between text and performance.

translation should not be poetical itself, which means that it should not try to be a work of art since this would make the message "inaccurate." From there, Benjamin characterizes an inferior translation as an inaccurate transmission of inessential content.

For Benjamin, a translation is a text in its own right. He liberates it from its likeness to the first text, stating that:

> "… 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."[114]

The German word that Benjamin uses for "afterlife" is *Fortleben.* It literally means "continuation of life." It does not suggest that something is over, rather it implies a transformation of life. Translations are part of the afterlife of a literary text, meaning that a transformation takes place, which, among other things, is owed to the historical changes of language. Benjamin writes,

> "And even if one tried to turn an author's last stroke of the pen into the *coup de grâce* of his work, this still would not save that dead theory of translation. For just as the tenor and the significance of the great works of literature undergo a complete transformation over the centuries, the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well."[115]

So a translation not only transfers a text into another language, it also actualizes the text in terms of the historical changes in language as well as the maturing of meaning. A translation adds the differences of languages to the first text, because it makes visible the foreignness of languages, which has to do with their incompleteness. Translation makes perceptible what is *in between* languages and therefore untranslatable.

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[114] Benjamin, Walter, "The Task of the Translator," in: *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings. Vol. 1 1913-1926*. Edited by Marcus Bullock, Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge/Massachusetts/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1996. pp. 253-263, here: p. 256.

[115] Ibid.

In order to examine the central characteristics of translation from and into performance, I would like to review Adorno's considerations in *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction*. The book with this title was published posthumously, and so the theory as such was a group of fragments. In one of them Adorno proposes to:

> "… begin with the question: what is a musical text. No set of performance instructions, no fixing of the imagined, but rather the notation of something objective, a notation that is necessarily fragmentary, incomplete, *in need* of interpretation to the point of ultimate convergence."[116]

Two assumptions here by Adorno are especially relevant for the translation from and into performance: firstly, that those texts which aim to make a staging (in German: *Aufführung*) reproducible necessarily remain fragmentary and in need of interpretation; and secondly, that it is not the function of these texts to fix the imagined. To fix the imagined would mean that an author writing a text can already anticipate the performance – or, in other words, that the text has the ability to fully capture or record, and in turn communicate a preconceived performance.

Authors that intend their texts to be performed take responsibility for their texts, but can they also take responsibility for a performance? That will differ. If the author/artist who writes a text hires performers and works with them together on the performance can directly influence its becoming, then the answer is yes. If the author/artist does not work with the performers, but a performance artist decides for her- or himself to work with a text, or a musician performs a score by a(nother) composer, the performing person assumes responsibility for the performance. Another case is when part of the artistic concept is that the performance is only to be based on decisions made by the performers, and the author/artist does not influence their work even though he/she has selected and hires the performers.

Since a musical text is not a fixing of the imagined, as Adorno states, authors who write texts to be performed (by people other than themselves) cannot fix the text's meaning and determine the outcome even when these authors are involved in the working process. The reason is that the texts themselves must be interpreted (in the

[116] Adorno, Theodor, *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction. Notes, a Draft and Two Schemata*. Malden: Polity Press, 2006. p. 3.

sense of read) before they can be translated or otherwise worked with by the performers.

The moment of interpretation precedes the staging of a text and belongs to the sphere of understanding and reflecting on a text or notation before the actual performance. For example, a musician can read the notation and consider different interpretations of it before playing it. Or, another option is that the text is interpreted in situ: the musician receives the score and plays it without having read it and reflected on it beforehand. In this case the interpretation and the translation fall into one action, and the interpretation is also closely related to improvisation, the act of performing itself. In both cases, the subjectivity of the translator comes into play with/in the interpretation.

Following my own experience of working with performers (including dancers, actors, musicians and audience members), the factor of time also has a decisive impact on the interpretation (reading) of a score. In practice one can deliberately employ this factor and experiment with it, because the same score given to a performer five minutes or two weeks before the performance leads to totally different outcomes. An in situ interpretation is not better or worse than a well-reflected interpretation; improvisation bears its own qualities. Which deployment of time leads to an envisaged outcome depends on the work as well as on the skills of the performer.

The fact that there is always more than one possibility of interpreting and translating a text has a subjective and an objective aspect. The subjective aspect comes into play with the decisions made by the translator (performer), or likewise when improvising in his/her individual style. The objective aspect is owed to culturally and historically shifting meanings, which alter modes of reading and translating a text. One can say that within the act of translation, these different meanings are produced and exhibited at the same time.

In performance practice when both text and performance are present at the same time, or the text is known to the audience, the position of the translator (director, artist or performer) towards the text becomes apparent. For instance, if one knows the text and/or its stagings (*Inszenierungen*) by other directors of a classical theater play one can “read” the position of the director towards the text. A similar phenomenon occurs

in music, when a musician listens to the concert of a score he/she knows well and has played him or herself.

3.2 Possibilities of an Impossible Status

Text and performance can be, and are usually thought of as being hierarchically related to each other, as in the sense of being a means-to-an-end relationship. A means-to-an-end relationship is hierarchical, because the means is not equal to the end. The end is a self-sufficient outcome, which does not need the means in order to be read and understood. In this sense it is autonomous. In art, this implies that the end is considered to be an artwork and the means is merely considered as the working process needed in order to arrive at the work. This is the case when a text leads to a performance, and is a helping device for it, but not an artwork in itself.

In this section, the question is: How is it possible to think of the relation between text and performance in a non-hierarchical way, and what would this require? In a non-hierarchical relation each would stand alone, complete in itself and thus independently readable from the other one. This implies that a text as well as a performance (related to each other) fully expresses its meaning.

The German media and communications theoretician Norbert Bolz and the German-Dutch philosopher Willem van Reijen write about Benjamin's concept, "The talk about the original and the translation suggests that what is called the original is the primary work from which the translation is derived. Were this true at the level of the presentation, then on the other hand it is true that the original itself is a translation."[117]

The reason is that the first text and the translation are both translations (secondary texts) in relation to the sphere of pure language. With regard to this sphere, both are derived, which at the same time means that "in the intention of pure language, original and translation are equally original."[118] Applied to translation from and into performance, Benjamin's argument means that a performance is as primary as the

[117] Bolz, Norbert; Van Reijen, Willem, "Die Magie der Sprache," in: id., *Walter Benjamin*. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 1991. pp. 41-54, here p. 50. Translated by LN.

[118] Ibid., p. 51. Translated by LN.

text preceding it, and the other way round. So, using his notion of translation, one can think of the first and second texts without any hierarchy concerning their status.

The American artist John Cage offers another perspective on the problem of how texts before performances, such as scores, are thought of prior to their performances. In an interview in 1966, he responded to Richard Kostelanetz's question whether someone else performs his role in the concerts or if he has to go on all the tours himself:

> "CAGE: I'm not always present.
>
> KOSTELANETZ: Who is the author of *Variations V* [1965]?
>
> CAGE: It is published under my name.
>
> KOSTELANETZ: Did you conceive all the parts or were they written independently?
>
> CAGE: You haven't seen the score?
>
> KOSTELANETZ: No.
>
> CAGE: Well, the score is *a posteriori* – written after the piece. Do you see the implications of this?
>
> KOSTELANETZ: But then that's not the score.
>
> CAGE: Nonsense, that changes our idea of what a score is. We always thought that it was *a priori* and that the performance was the performance of a score. I switched it completely around so that the score is a report on a performance."[119]

With the term "a posteriori score," Cage questions whether a score necessarily has to be written before a performance. This fundamentally changes the understanding and extends the functions of a score in relation to the performance(s). Cage's term a posteriori score creates an inversion of the relation, previously thought to be stable, between a score and the interpretations derived from it.

[119] Kostelanetz, Richard. "Conversation with John Cage (1968)," in: id., *The Theatre of Mixed-Means*. London: Pitman, 1970. pp. 50-63, here: p. 62.

Applying Cage's thought means that a text written to be performed must not necessarily temporally precede the performance. This also means that the reader (and possibly translator) of a written performance does not necessarily have to know whether the performance already took place, or was only imagined by its author; thus its written form was/is purely projective.

This thought inspired me when I produced the artistic publication *TRANSLATE YOURSELF! A Performance Reader for Staging*[120] in 2009. This publication contains a collection of thirty written performances by visual artists, choreographers and activists. I invited each artist to write a performance using one page. There were no further formal criteria given. The only condition was that the text can be translated into a performance. The published performances can simply be read and imagined, or performed by everyone who wishes to do so.

My idea was that the written performances presented in the publication are at the same time documents of past and scores for future performances to take place. In the book it was not defined, whether or not the performance has already taken place. The very general idea that a text written after a performance can potentially become a textual basis for a(nother) performance again was put into practice. Furthermore, the project gives expression to the ideas that text and performance can enter into a reciprocal relationship with one another without a hierarchy between them, and that the one can be translated into the other. These are ideas to which I return in this dissertation.

I think, even in the case of a text preceding a performance in a specific chronological alignment, one could still argue that there were previous stagings (*Aufführungen*), performances, cultural and historic events, pictures and texts that shaped this text, its meaning and possible performances in an intertextual way. This is certainly true on a theoretical and very general level, and it provides a way of showing that an artistic work is not rooted in itself; it has its origin in other works preceding it, with which it is connected and related. But still this does not say anything specific about the relation one text has to another one.

[120] Lilo, Nein (Ed.), *TRANSLATE YOURSELF! A Performance Reader for Staging,* Vienna: Self-published, 2009.

So if a (first) text does something to a second one, how can a second text be considered valuable for the first one? In other words: if the first text has an impact on a second one (or on a performance), how is it possible to think this the other way round? Adorno states, “The musical work undergoes similar change through being heard, renowned, exhausted, to the image under the scrutiny of the countless people who have pored over it.”[121]

The scrutiny, which in German is *Blick* (“*unter den Blicken der Unzähligen die darüber gegangen*”[122]), can be understood as the reception. This means that an artistic work undergoes a change because of its reception, because of being viewed, heard and read. Reception is more general than interpretation; interpretation is a specific form. Adorno’s statement is reminiscent of Benjamin’s comments on the transformation of language and the maturing process of literary works over time which shapes the translation. The only difference here is that Adorno does not refer to another medium in which these changes become visible.

If one regards artworks, here, performances, as not independent of their reception, and more specifically even of their interpretation, it is possible to understand a text that was written after a staging (*Aufführung*) for the purpose of restaging (*Wiederaufführung, Wiederaufnahme*) as an update of the performance via a score, as being analogous to Benjamin’s transformation and maturing process of words.

Production and interpretation of art appear in a reciprocal light here; this provides a good basis for a non-hierarchical way of thinking about text and performance relations. So, the interpretation can, under certain circumstances, be the actualization of a thought that precedes the artistic work. In other words, each translation retrospectively inscribes itself as a possible interpretation of the first text into its history which is a history of interpretation.

I conclude from this that in the context of translation from and into performance, not only the one who writes a score bears responsibility for the possible outcomes, but also the one who receives and performs it. As Adorno writes, the reason is that these (musical) texts are *in need* of being interpreted, and with this interpretation, the

[121] Adorno, op. cit., p. 5.

[122] Adorno, Theodor, *Zu einer Theorie der musikalischen Reproduktion. Aufzeichnungen, ein Entwurf und zwei Schemata.* Fragment gebliebene Schriften, Vol. 2. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001. p. 14.

translator/performer takes responsibility of his/her interpretation and becomes its author.

So if one thinks of writing and performing not as mutually exclusive positions, but as structurally exchangeable positions, one can think of production and interpretation, and of writing and translating in non-hierarchical terms. (Even though this stays on a theoretical level which not necessarily meets the social and institutional realities in which art is produced and shown.) In the words of the contemporary philosopher Jacques Rancière: "It requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the 'story' and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators."[123]

How though do performance and text see this problem themselves? Is the community of spectators the answer to their equal relationship, or are there still other points open to debate?

I eavesdropped on a conversation between text and performance, in which they negotiated their status and discussed the questions that came along with it. I will try to reproduce it as well as I can remember.

Text sees a Performance of himself and is pleased. He sees himself reflected in her, and almost feels a bit flattered. He likes her and wants to meet her. Performance doesn't even know he exists, let alone that he is here this evening. After the show, he approaches her. When she sees him, she is irritated and doesn't really know what to make of him.
TEXT: Hello, Performance! Delighted to meet you. Let me introduce myself: I am the Text.

PERFORMANCE: Um, hello, Text. Yes, well, as you obviously already know: I am the Performance. Or, to be more precise, I am *a* performance.

TEXT: No need to be so humble! You were fabulous. I really recognized myself in you.

PERFORMANCE: What do you mean you recognized yourself? I didn't even know you, I don't recognize you, and you can't possibly recognize me.

[123] Rancière, Jacques, "The Emancipated Spectator," in: id., *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by Gregory Elliott. London: Verso, 2009. pp. 1-23, here: p. 22.

TEXT: I didn't mean to question your independence. I would never do that. You are absolutely unique.

PERFORMANCE: Yes, that's what I think, too. But I don't need you to remind me of that. And you? Who are you? You saw me and immediately thought you knew me.

TEXT: I just wanted to show my appreciation for the wonderful performance.

PERFORMANCE: Good. But I also want to learn something about you.

TEXT: Yes, well, I am a performance.

PERFORMANCE: Hmm, you too, then? With all due respect, I see a text here before me.

TEXT: That's right. Well observed. But in principle, I'm actually a performance.

PERFORMANCE: Just now you implied that I was derived from you. And now you admit not existing without me. Very funny! By the way, I am also a text. So we no longer need to talk about mistaken identities … We could actually get along with each other.

3.3 Fragments of Translation as Collaboration

In this section translation will be interpreted as collaboration. For this purpose one more passage from Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," will be consulted. Benjamin writes:

> "Whereas content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds. For it signifies a more exalted language than its own and thus remains unsuited to its content, overpowering and alien. ... For any translation of a work originating in a specific stage of linguistic history represents, in regard to a specific aspect of its content, translation into all other languages. Thus translation, ironically, transplants the original into a

more definitive linguistic realm, since it can no longer be displaced by a secondary rendering."[124]

It is remarkable that is not poetry or art (in its original form), but the translation that inhabits the more definite linguistic realm. Concerning artistic practice, I think that the state of a translation in which content and language do not form a unity has a potential that directly points to collaboration. The translator here is someone who collaborates either with the text of another author or with the author/artist directly. The third option is that the collaboration involves the meta-position of a choreographer, director or conductor who is in charge of giving their interpretation of the text in order to be performed by actors, dancers, or musicians. In this case, the author of the text is often not involved in the collaboration.

The German literary scholar Uwe Steiner writes about Benjamin: "Like the philosophy of language in a narrower sense dating back to the middle of the 18th century, Benjamin considers language not as a means of communication, but as a constitutive condition of thinking."[125]

In the context of collaboration-based performance practice, language has both functions: it is a condition of thinking as well as a means for communicating tasks or ideas to performers. As a condition of thinking, artistic language, including an individual's personal vocabulary used to describe it, is the condition of developing artistic work.

Whereas in individual art practice a concept can be directly performed by the author/artist, in collaborative work communication plays a major part: each working step must be communicated beforehand; it may be executed by someone else or implemented together. In both cases, there has to be a shared language, which is not merely to say there is communication. In interdisciplinary collaborative work, which performances often are, and in which, for example, musicians, dancers and visual artists communicate with each other in order to realize a work together, each discipline has its own (technical) language and terminology. In such working

[124] Benjamin, op. cit. p. 258.

[125] Steiner, Uwe, "Die Magie der Sprache," in: id., *Walter Benjamin*. Stuttgart Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2004. pp. 43-50, here: p. 46. Translated by LN.

processes, one has to translate the tasks and ideas between the languages or create one shared language among the collaborators.

From an overall societal standpoint, the Italian philosopher Paolo Virno argues that work has recently become more and more collaboration-based in general. In his view, language has become a more and more important means of production and is at the same time one of the common places that serve to give the multitude a shelter in times of precarity. Virno writes:

> "… that the communication industry (or rather, the spectacle, or even yet, the culture industry) is an industry among others, with its specific techniques, its particular procedures, its peculiar profits, etc.; on the other hand, it also plays the role of industry of the means of production … However, in a situation in which the means of production are not reducible to machines but consist of linguistic-cognitive competencies inseparable from living labor, it is legitimate to assume that a conspicuous part of the so-called 'means of production' consists of techniques and communicative procedures."[126]

The fact that contemporary labor invests linguistic-cognitive competencies is highly relevant and true for performers understood as laborers in the art field.

3.4 Reading, Understanding and Interpreting Scores

The following section is dedicated to the question: Can one interpret a score in any way one likes or are there right ways of reading it? I do not want to open the whole field of hermeneutics here, but I feel the urge to quickly jump into the question of understanding and then out of it again.

In general one can say that the more open a score is, the stronger the question arises as to what degree a text has the potential to determine a performance. In other words, how much leeway for interpretation does the text offer?

Although Adorno believes in a polyvalence of musical texts, he would clearly say, no, one cannot interpret a score in any way one likes. The interesting point concerning

[126] Virno, Paolo, *A Grammar of the Multitude. For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004. https://libcom.org/library/4-labor-action-intellect-day-two, no page reference: "4.6. Language on the stage."

Adorno's position here is the explanation he gives for it: Adorno thinks that polyvalence is not produced through the interpretation, but is found in the texts themselves. That is to say, the interpreter reads it out of the texts, not into them. Adorno states, "There is such a thing as *genuine* textual polyvalence, i.e. several objectively immanent interpretations, but even the polyvalence is *determinate*,"[127] and further he explains, "The subjective component of objectivity is interpretation."[128]

Here Adorno's perspective starts to become even more interesting, and questions such as, "What role does the understanding of a score play in this context?," and "Does one have to be able to recognize, name and list the various possibilities of interpretation, in order to subjectively choose one?," become even more burning.

Let us first quickly look into what "understanding" means. (In the next section under the heading "Translation Revisited" this thought of Adorno will be returned to in detail.) Gadamer for whom hermeneutics is the universal phenomenon of understanding writes: "The nature of the hermeneutical experience is not that something is outside and desires admission. Rather, we are possessed by something and precisely by means of it we are opened up for the new, the different, the true."[129] Following Gadamer, the hermeneutical experience does not mean that something outside aims to enter "our" inside. The aim of understanding is not for something external, or other, to become internal and one's own.

This also means that reading does not necessarily lead to understanding, unlike repeated reading which at some point leads to knowing a text, at least a word or sentence, by heart. The second happens automatically. One cannot do much for or against it. But one cannot actively bring about understanding. In this regard understanding differs from knowledge, which can be collected and actively appropriated. Knowledge is a form of ***technē.*** This ***technē*** provides the condition for artistic work and understanding, and in the research context, specifically for reading and interpreting a script or a score. A musician, for example, must be able to read

[127] Adorno, op. cit., p. 65.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem (1966)," in: id., *Philosophical Hermeneutic*. Edited and translated by David A. Linge. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1976. pp. 3-17, here: p. 9.

sheet music, be familiar with certain styles, have technical knowledge about the instrument which she or he plays, and so on.

However, understanding comprises other dimensions as well. It takes place on various levels simultaneously: conscious, unconscious, intuitive, rational, subjective and personal (or individual). In contrast to knowledge, understanding is something that can be actively searched for, but not actively found. Rather, it finds us: it gets us when we are brushing our teeth, in our dreams or while joking, and suddenly we understand what the artist or the philosopher meant.

Since understanding always also takes place unconsciously and intuitively, it will never be utterly alienable. At least a part remains unnamable. That is to say, one can explain the facts, the historical context, the content of a text or an image, but understanding something while reading or watching is an experience everyone must make for themselves. So, understanding is thus necessarily more than its namable parts or aspects of communicable knowledge. What I would like to describe as understanding is something that can neither be displayed nor proven, neither controlled nor measured. For reading and interpreting scores, understanding in this sense as well as aspects of knowledge and *technē* are needed.

3.5 Translation Revisited

Adorno, in his theory of musical reproduction, also refers to Benjamin's theory of translation. At one point, he writes: "One can apply what Benjamin remarks concerning the relationship between literature and translation, where he develops the idea of the 'original', to music: '… in living on, which would be a meaningless phrase if it were not the transformation and renewal of something alive, the original changes'".[130]

Adorno quotes Benjamin in order to explain that changes in musical works signify more than the fact that the same symbols are interpreted differently at different times. Analogous to Benjamin's considerations concerning the "living on" of literary works, Adorno suggests, in regard to musical works and their notation that not only the use of symbols changes over time: "In truth, the change undergone by the works goes far

[130] Adorno, op. cit., p. 191.

beyond this. It affects the music itself through the character of the score's appearance and dissolves the notion of something absolute and timeless that is meant by the written notes."[131]

But at another point, Adorno introduces a difference between translation and musical reproduction:

> "The fundamental difference between musical reproduction and translation from a foreign language, however, lies in the fact that music requires interpretation to this day, whereas literature has no need of a translator. An untranslated poem loses nothing of its beauty, and it should sooner fear – to follow the pun – the *traduttore* as a *traditore* than make use of him. A score, however, which is radically removed from the possibility of its performance at once seems senseless in itself."[132]

Adorno means that music requires interpretation in order to be received, whereas literary texts can be received through reading (in the original language).

The Italian word *traduttore* means translator, while *traditore* is traitor. So translation thus also implies a danger. However, this danger as an intentional act of the translator is not of relevance here. Rather, the following will be dedicated to investigating the difference that Adorno introduces between the Benjaminian conceptualization of translation and his own theory of musical reproduction. To do so, I will first go back to Benjamin, and thereafter work out what these theories have in common.

Undoubtedly, there are an endless amount of differences between music and poetry, but still I would like to argue that there is an *equal necessity* for *living on*.[133] When Adorno writes that what Benjamin says about translation is valid for music, he cites Benjamin at precisely the point at which Benjamin speaks about the "living on":

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[131] Ibid., p. 191.

[132] Ibid., p. 166f.

[133] The German word *Fortleben* is translated as "living on" in the English translation used by Wieland Hoban who translated Adorno's theory. He used: Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations.* Translated by Harry Zohn, 1942, in: *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Vol. 1 1913-1926.* 1996. pp. 253-263. In this version *Fortleben* is translated as "afterlife" as previously used. In the following, the words "living on" will be used.

Poetry needs translation for the sake of remaining vital. Just as music lives on through its performances, literary work survives and is spread through translation.

According to Benjamin, translation is a form, a proper form. “If translation is a form, translatability must be an essential feature of certain works.”[134] This, however, does not mean that a translation has an effect on an original text once it takes place: “It is evident that no translation … can have any significance as regards the original.”[135] According to Benjamin the translation means nothing for the original. So, from the perspective of the first text, it is true that translations are not needed, as Adorno points out.

Yet the situation is different when looking from the perspective of the second text. Through translations literary works are updated – in Benjamin’s words “actualized.” Translation actualizes the original text from the perspective of the other language, and in this regard the translation means something for the living on of texts.

Furthermore, Benjamin sees a functionality of translation that is not found in the relation to the first text, but is found in the inner relation between the languages. He writes about translations: “In them the life of the original attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding.”[136] Even if this unfolding does not mean anything for the first text, because it does not affect it, the translation “ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the innermost relationship of languages to our answer.”[137] Translations cannot “reveal” or “establish” this inner relationship between languages, “but it can represent it by realizing it,”[138] which means that “languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express.”[139] Kinship among languages does not consist of the similarity of poems or words, for Benjamin: this interrelatedness is a kinship which is supra-historical and based on the fact that “in every one of them as a whole, one and the same thing is meant. Yet this one thing is

[134] Benjamin, op. cit., p. 254.

[135] Ibid., p. 254.

[136] Ibid., p. 255.

[137] Ibid., p. 255.

[138] Ibid., p. 255.

[139] Ibid., p. 255.

achievable not by any single language, but only by the totality of their intentions supplementing one another: the pure language."[140] So whereas individual elements, such as words and sentences, are mutually exclusive in different languages, the intentions complement one another, according to Benjamin.

This also concerns the task of the translator: "Just as translation is a form of its own, so, too, may the task of the translator be regarded as distinct and clearly differentiated from the task of the poet."[141] Following Benjamin, this consists "in finding the particular intention toward the target language which produces in that language the echo of the original."[142] The intention of the poet is "spontaneous, primary, manifest; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational,"[143] he writes. The task of the translator is one in which "the languages themselves, supplemented and reconciled in their way of meaning, draw together."[144]

In Benjamin's theory, besides the first text and the translation there is a third element, the sphere of pure language, which is located at a superior place. To this place the other two, the first text and the translation, are both equally related.

Hereafter, I will show that this superior place, which builds the sphere of pure language in Benjamin's theory, also exists in Adorno's considerations on musical reproduction. Based on this, I will argue that "Benjamin's" literary texts need translation in regard to their living on just as much as "Adorno's" musical texts need their performances – that is to say, their translation to music.

I cite Adorno in order to go to this superior place (again): "There is such a thing as *genuine* textual polyvalence, i.e. several objectively immanent interpretations, but even the polyvalence is *determinate* … The subjective component of objectivity is interpretation."[145] So, the subjective component, the interpretation, is the manner in which the (polyvalent) musical texts are performed, translated to performances. But why is this objective?

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[140] Ibid., p. 257.

[141] Ibid., p. 258.

[142] Ibid., p. 258.

[143] Ibid., p. 259.

[144] Ibid., p. 259.

[145] Adorno, op. cit., p. 65.

I interpret Adorno's perspective as follows: interpretation is objective insofar as the subjective is included in the objective. This is to say, insofar as the subjective is a part of the objective. This is, however, not to be understood in the sense of quantity, but rather in the sense of a relationship to the objective that arises in the act of interpretation. The interpretation is subjective, but only in relation to the objective; it is the subjective part *of* the objective.

In other words, the objective, which is contained in musical texts as polyvalence, is not tangible in this form, and thus needs the subjective act of interpretation. This is crucial for Adorno's considerations. Musical performances are necessary for the objectivity (of musical texts) to appear, and which can only appear as the subjective of the objective, i.e. as a part of itself, which at once means the whole; the subjective is a part and not a characteristic of the objective.

The same is true for poems and translations in regard to pure language. Translations are necessary forms of the appearance of this "language of languages." This is the place that seems familiar with Benjamin. What Adorno means by "objectivity" Benjamin calls the sphere of "pure language." This is the place to which the first text and the translation, and the musical text and the performance are equally related.

Pure language comprises all possible languages in the same manner as the objective comprises the subjective. The subjective is thus dependent on the objective. Earlier, it was said that the objective is dependent on the subjective as well. The objective does not just exist somewhere, but it needs interpretation to emerge.

When Adorno writes: "A score, however, which is radically removed from the possibility of its performance at once seems senseless in itself,"[146] he does not neglect the fact that one can read scores as well. He, himself, proposes to introduce "the mere *reading* of music as a conceptual extreme."[147] Provided one is knowledgeable about notation, one can imagine the music and hear it in one's inner ear without physically playing the notes. But while he considers reading "enough" for poems, this does not count for music. This is because Adorno locates the nature of music in musical reproduction, that is to say, between the musical text and the

[146] Ibid., p. 166f.

[147] Ibid., p. 5.

performance of the music. A score that is not performed is senseless in regard to its nature, which is not found merely in playing, nor in writing/composing music. It unfolds itself in the relations between musical texts and performances.

This also means that neither playing nor writing music stand for themselves, which leads to the paradoxical structure of the previously analyzed equality of text and performance, of the first and the second text. The paradox exists in the simultaneous autonomy (independence) and dependence of both sides on one another.

Adorno's need of musical texts – "The necessity of interpretation [which] manifests itself as the neediness of musical texts"[148] – can be understood as the need of being received. Although interpretation is a specific form of reception, one can say that each form of art needs to be received. This reception has to "materialize" itself, it has to take shape in a form or medium in order to participate in the living on of an artistic work. Be it in the form of a translation, a poem or a critique which enters into dialogue with the first text – there is no living on without a manifestation of itself.

From this perspective, the difference is not that musical texts have to be played and poems read. Rather, reception is a part of both, and reading is the precondition for musical interpretation as well.

I will summarize what has been said. From my perspective, the general equality of translation towards its first text and of the musical performance towards its score derives from their connectedness to an undefined place, which both sides equally share. Benjamin calls this undefined space "pure language" and Adorno "objectivity."

This general equality has a paradoxical structure in itself, which is based on autonomy and dependency. Musical texts and performances, as well as poems and translations, are autonomous in the sense of being proper forms, as Benjamin calls them. This autonomy is owed to the fact that the first, as well as the second text/performance, are independently receivable as such: one does not need to know the original poem or score in order to read the translation or listen to the concert, although reading and listening are different forms of reception.

The dependency among the two sides emerges in regard to the nature of music, which takes place in the relation between musical text and the interpretation of it, as

[148] Ibid., p. 180.

Adorno writes. In my opinion, the same is true for texts and their relation to translations, because the nature of language also unfolds in the relationships between languages, according to Benjamin.

Considering this paradoxical structure, texts and performances can be seen as equal, and texts after performances can be thought of as potential texts before performances.

Based on this equality, one can think of an equal relationship between texts and performances in visual art. This certainly do not hold up for all texts connected to performances. The announcement text of a performances is not equal to the artwork and independent of the performance itself. But I think this theoretical possibility can be considered for texts whose relationship to performances is intrinsic, in other words which have the potential t become performances and at the same time can be read independently from them.

In the context of visual art, this living on of performances is given in the form of exhibitions, performance documentation, videos circulating on the Internet, and through restagings and reenactments. Likewise, the living on of texts to be performed is given by performances.

I would like to come back to the initial question concerning the role of the need to understand a text to be performed for the interpretation/translation. Adorno would probably say that this understanding is connected to objectivity and Benjamin would say it is connected to the sphere of pure language. From my perspective, understanding is connected to an undetermined place. This, however, does not mean that it is not relevant; on the contrary, since understanding takes place at this undetermined place it cannot be pointed out – it can only be pointed to.

3.6 Afterwardsness

Under chapter three's heading "Translation from and into Performances," use was made of Benjamin's theory of translation and Adorno's theory of musical reproduction. Benjamin speaks about translation from one language into another; both have the form of text. Adorno speaks about the reproduction of music on the basis of musical texts and their performances.

In order to understand my own concerns and to write the first part of this chapter, I brought together these two theories. Since Adorno's writing remained in fragments and partly repeated itself in the German edition, I worked with the fragments that I was intrigued by and did not read the whole book at once. When I went back to Adorno's writings after a while, I read his considerations in regard to the context that I had established for myself, namely in connection to Benjamin's theory of translation. Bearing this in mind, I had the feeling they were speaking about similar things at some points, which brought me to the idea of searching for a key word that registered in all of the passages in which the name "Walter Benjamin" is mentioned. In this way, I discovered that Adorno had made the connection to Benjamin's theory of translation himself,[149] and my intuition had been correct.

At that point, I could have gone back to the already written section about translation and placed the quote at the spot where Adorno states that one can think of musical reproduction as being parallel to Benjamin's theory of translation. This would have had the effect that my own act of (violently) reading them together would be legitimized for the reader from the beginning. Not doing this has had another effect, one that could be described by the term "afterwardsness."[150]

Afterwardsness means that one event changes (the meaning of) another event that happened in the past. It is a logic of time that does not follow chronology. In chronology, a first event is the *cause* of a second event, and has certain effects on it. This cause-effect logic of chronology implies a hierarchy of first and second: the first can exist without the second, but not the other way round, a point that has already been spoken about.

Afterwardsness enables one to dissolve this hierarchy and is therefore especially interesting for performance and all the issues involved in writing it which are haunted by the logic of chronology. The term afterwardsness provides a logic of time with which to think about the relation of text and performance without the hierarchization that "the first" and "the second" implies. It explains the fact that a second event can change the meaning of the first one which explains that the performance (of a text) can change the meaning of the text itself.

[149] Adorno makes other parallels to Benjamin's theory and philosophy of language, which will not be discussed here.

[150] Afterwardsness is a temporal logic discovered by Sigmund Freud in the case of Emma Eckstein. It was used and radicalized by Jacques Lacan, among others.

For this text here, afterwardsness means that finding the connection between Adorno's considerations and Benjamin's theory of translation changes the meaning of what is written above in section "3.1 Translation." It also sheds light on the previously quoted passage from Adorno: "The musical work undergoes similar change through being heard, renowned, exhausted, to the image under the scrutiny of the countless people who have pored over it."[151]

3.7 The Force of Law

In the following, Derrida's notion of "the force of law" will be introduced and applied to the research topic. In order to explain some terms around and key points crucial to the Derridean force of law I will return again to Benjamin.

Benjamin's text "The Task of the Translator" was written in 1921. That same year, he wrote the essay "Critique of Violence."[152] The main issue of the latter text is defining a critique of violence (*Gewalt*) in relation to law (*Recht*) and justice (*Gerechtigkeit*). The German word *Gewalt* not only means violence and force, but also has the connotation of ruling (*walten*). In German, law is *Gesetz*, and it is used in the sense of law as well as in the sense of right (*Recht*). The German word for justice *Gerechtigkeit* includes the word *Recht*. It literally means something like "the realized right/law."

For Benjamin, *Gewalt* (violence, force) executed by individuals or by the state in order to implement the constitution and enforce the law is unjust. For Benjamin, only the messianic force which removes violence itself from history can be just.

Derrida suggests a quite different analysis of the relationships between law, justice and *Gewalt*. In his essay "Force of Law,"[153] he critiques (and deconstructs) Benjamin's view. Derrida interprets justice as a law to be realized, but can never be fully realized. It has an aporetic structure. But the aim here is not to analyze the differences between Benjamin's and Derrida's approach; rather, my interest is in

[151] Adorno, op. cit., 2006. p. 5.

[152] Benjamin, Walter, "Zur Kritik der Gewalt," in: id., *Zur Kritik der Gewalt und andere Aufsätze*. First Edition, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965. pp. 29-65.

[153] Derrida, Jacques, "Force of Law. The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in: id., *Acts of Religion*. Edited by Gil Anidjar. New York/London: Routlege, 2002. pp. 228-298.

what the law and its force (*Kraft*) mean for the relation of text and performance in general and for translation specifically.

Derrida considers not only the constitution, but also, in the broadest sense the law "of which it is hard to say whether it is a rule of decorum, politeness, the law of the strongest [*la loi du plus fort*], or the equitable law [*loi*] of democracy."[154] According to him, enforcing the law is a necessary *Gewalt*, and force is necessarily inherent to law: it must be enforceable. Derrida writes, "The word 'enforceability' … reminds us that there is no law that does not imply *in itself, a priori, in the analytical structure of its concept*, the possibility of being enforced, applied by a force."[155]

This force can be "direct or indirect, physical or symbolic, exterior or interior, brutal or subtly discursive – even hermeneutic."[156] To apply the law by force means to interpret the general rule and apply it to a specific case. This application to a specific case necessarily implies the deviation from this general aspect. In turn, to abstract from specific cases in order to make it a general law includes a force too. Through its application the law itself necessarily gets trespassed. It represents itself in the deviation from itself, which is to say in the application.

Benjamin writes, in order to comprehend the form of translation, "one must go back to the original, for the laws governing the translation lie within the original, contained in the issue of its translatability."[157] Translatability is the precondition of translation, and the law of translatability is the precondition of translatability. The law of translatability is in the first text, it does not lie behind or before it (for example, in Benjamin's sphere of pure language). It can be understood as the structure that provides the possibility of understanding a text, and is thus the precondition of translation. Through the translation this structure can be made visible, likewise through writing in the sense of the Derridean game, or in the artistic context through the performance of a text.

In the context of translation from and into performances, the application of translatability as well as the application of the force of law is in the translation itself. However, the law of translatability and the force of law is not the same. Whereas the

[154] Ibid., p. 232.

[155] Ibid., p. 233.

[156] Ibid., p. 233.

[157] Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," op. cit., p. 254.

law of translatability is the structure of a text (which Derrida and Plato speak of as “game”), the force of law is something more general. It is what is made out of this structure. The force of law is the precondition of language in general and of text specifically.

So, the law governing translatability is, to a certain degree, connected to the authorship of the writer of the text and to the intention. The force of law in a text (to be translated or performed) is not connected to the intention of the writer nor to the activity of writing. It is a general characteristic of text that enables it to be read, translated and performed and brings with it the authorship of the interpreters.

According to Derrida, the law gains its force through its application and the interpretation trespassing it. In other words, a text as law gains its force through the action of being applied. In my field of interest, text gains its force from a performance that realizes it, which is its enforcement, application, interpretation and specific case.

Furthermore, one could say that the force of law is specific to texts that must be enforced, applied, performed or otherwise translated to actions, and thus can be understood as the movement between text and performance. The force of law is the eventful aspect of the relation between text and performance in general, which can be found in translation specifically.